

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND THE ROLE OF CHINESE TEMPLE IN ELIMINATING CHINESE ETHNIC PREJUDICE

(Study of Local Wisdom in Semarang Chinatown)

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ABSTRACT--The harmonious relationship of indigenous people and Chinese people was somewhat disturbed in the political year. It was marked by the emergence of the issue of ethnic prejudice which was used in campaign activities. Meanwhile, Chinese Temple as the symbol of Chinese identity has never been disturbed and it has almost never been a source of conflict between indigenous people and Chinese people. This uniqueness encourages the writer to conduct a study of how social construction of Chinese temple and the role of Chinese Temple in eliminating Chinese ethnic prejudice. The method used in this study was qualitative method with phenomenological approach. The result of the study showed that the social construction of Chinese Temple can be grouped into three. The first group constructs the Chinese Temple as the religious building. The second group constructs the Chinese Temple as the unique building to be developed as a tourist attraction. The third group constructs the Chinese Temple as a historic building that must be recognized as part of Indonesian culture. The role of Chinese Temple can be a medium of inter-ethnic communication which not only unite the various interests of different social strata but also eliminate the ethnic prejudice. This study recommends that it is necessary to socialize the cultural perspective rather than political perspectives for the people towards the Chinese. Because cultural perspectives will lead to similarity whereas political perspectives will lead to diversity.

Keywords-- Social Construction, Chinese Temple, Chinese and Chinatown

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinatown has been a symbol of harmonious relationship between ethnic Chinese and indigenous people. Even though the relationship between them had experienced bitter times, especially in the New Order era (Suryadinata, 2002). Political approaches used in building relationship between Chinese people and indigenous people creates discriminative treatment toward Chinese people (Benny, 2000). Some incidents harming Chinese people, for example Chinese people are forbidden to do pray in temple (Donald, 1960). Discriminative treatments in these accidents caused prejudiced back from the Chinese people. They assumed that the government did not admit them as citizens, but only second-class people.

Attempts to execute cultural genocide were also carried out by the New Order. In 1967 the government issued PP No. 14/1967 which explained restrictions of any religious activities, beliefs, and customs of Chinese people in

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Indonesia. They also issued circular letter No.14/1967 stated that Chinese people must change their name to a name of Indonesian. This policy was an attempt of the New Order to eradicate Chinese culture, not only openly forbidding the practice of traditions and culture, the government also forbidding the celebration of Chinese New Year and *Cap Go Meh*, they were not allowed to play *barongsai*, all temples must be changed into pagoda, *Khong Hu Cu* religion was not recognized, Chinese newspapers and publications were not permitted.

Meanwhile in the historical journey, the relationship between Chinese people and indigenous people experienced ebb and flow that led to conflicts. In 1946, was known as anti-Chinese racial riots in Tangerang, then called as “Tangerang Incident”. In 1963, racial riots broke out in some places such as Cirebon and Bandung. In 1966, anti-Chinese sentiment burst out in Aceh and West Sumatra. It burst out again in 1967 in Jakarta and again on August 5, 1973 in Bandung. In 1981, anti-Chinese riot blew up in Solo and spread up to Semarang. The last, on May 13, 1998, blew up May-riots in Jakarta and Solo, some people were slain and rape happened against Chinese women ((Habib, 2004; Johannes, 2008; Prabowo, 2010).

Peculiarly, in the incidents of mass rage against Chinese people, shopping centre always being their target. It indicates that dissatisfactions against Chinese people is focused on the economic gap between Chinese people and Indigenous people (Liem, 2000). Meanwhile the cultural centre of Chinese such as Chinese temples have never been their object. Some temples scattered in Chinatown in historical records have never been damaged by the anarchic actions of anarchists. Modifications of Chinese temples building are usually for renovations or maintenance. It shows that the existence of those temples have never been an issue for indigenous people. This phenomenon is interesting to be studied, why indigenous people can accept the existence of the Chinese temples from time to time?

Some Chinese temples always exist from time to time in Semarang, such as *Sam Poo Kong* temple, *Tong Pek Bio* temple, *Siu HokBiu* temple, *Tay Kak Sie* temple, *Grajen* temple and *Tek Hay Bio* temple. Theoretically, Chinese temple is a holy building of Chinese people to do worship to God, prophets, and spirits of their ancestors related to Confusionism, Taoisme, and Buddhism (Marcella, 2012). Another definition stated that Chinese temples in Indonesia are place of worship of *Kong Hu Chu*’s people or Tri Dharma followers (Fox, 2002:56). Besides that, a temple is an identity that combines cultures and belief in God. While Lilananda (1988) said that the function of temples was distinguished from religious, social, and cultural aspects.

The existence and definition above shows that the Chinese temple is an identity of Chinese people both ideologically and culturally. Ideologically, the Chinese temple is a place for Chinese people to do worship and implement their belief, and culturally it is an implementation of all values and norms they believe in the form of behaviour. If it refers to the theory of identity by Huntington, cultural identity and religion of an individual will be the source of main conflict in the world post the cold war world (Huntington, 1996). The existence of Chinese temples should be the cause of conflict between Chinese people and indigenous people. But in reality, their existence becomes the glue between Chinese people and indigenous people, in the middle of sharp political rivalry by dragging the issue of Chinese people and indigenous people. The reality as mentioned above has broken the theory by Huntington, which stated that a Chinese temple is an identity symbol that distinguished Chinese people and indigenous people is not the source of conflict (Liliweri, 2005; Onghokham, 2008).

The gap between reality and theory encourages to do in-depth study. The first study aims to analyse the actual social construction both indigenous people and Chinese people towards the heritage of Chinese temples. The term

of social construction as stated by Peter L Berger (1990), is actually identical as a social interpretation. It means that this research, wants to deeply examine the social interpretation towards the existence of Chinese temples. Social interpretation about temple buildings will determine people's behaviour and attitude to accept and reject the existence of Chinese temples between them. The second study wants to deeply analyse how the existence of the Chinese temples omit ethnic prejudice. In order to analyse these problems, the theory used in this research is phenomenology theory about social construction by Peter L Berger.

II. METHOD

Research Design

The approaches used in this research is a qualitative phenomenological approach. Framework used in this qualitative research belongs to Husserl, a phenomenological researcher who tried to look for necessary things (essentials), invariant structures (essence) or meaning of experience that is fundamental and emphasizes the intensity of consciousness in which experience consists of things appear from outside and things that area in each awareness based on memories, images and meaning (Cresswell, 2016:109). The reason for using qualitative approaches is because it wants to reveal noumena world or hidden world. Through the noumena world, it is expected to be able exploring the real truth about the Chinese temples. Location of this research is Chinatown of Semarang. The writer takes this place as the location of the research since there are many of the monuments' heritage buildings stand with strong historical and cultural backgrounds. This location is also the centre of the growth of Chinese cultural civilization around Semarang.

Data Collection

Data collection in this research used interview and observation techniques. The interviews were done with all elements of Chinese culture and religion in Chinatown, for example *Kong Hu Chu* religious leaders, observers of Chinese culture, guards of temple, history educators who concerned with the history of Chinese, and people who live around Chinatown of Semarang. The informant selection technique used is purposive sampling. Through this technique, there are three groups of informants. The first group is Chinese people, *Kong Hu Chu*. The second group is Christian, and the third group is Muslims both adults and teenagers. Other informants come from non-religious groups related to the object of the research, the temple. Observations were made of activities at the temple, the writer observes with investigation about the shape and attributes of the temple, and the behaviour of people who visit the temple.

Data Analysis

Data analysis technique used in this research is interactive analysis technique based on the framework of Miles and Huberman (1992) that emphasizes data accuracy and strength sources in the process of preparations of research reports. This technique helps the writer in examining the data to see which data can be used in arranging the reports, so that the lack of data can be fulfilled through advanced data retrieval. This data analysis technique enables the writer to compile a complete research paper with good data quality. This technique also relates different pattern data, yet is still in the same framework.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chinese Temples in Semarang: Historical-Sociological Perspective

This section will explain some Chinese temples found in Chinatown of Semarang. They are: *Hok Sing Bio* temple, *Siu Hok Bio* temple, and *Tay Kek Sie* temple. The explanation about temple based on the historical and sociological assumption about the existence of temple itself.

One of the famous Chinese temples in Chinatown of Semarang is *Hok Sing Bio* Bugangan temple, located on Bugangan Street, Semarang, Central Java. It is one of the oldest Chinese temples that was built around 51 years ago. This worship place of Buddhist has architectural buildings like most temples in general. Although it is dominated by pale yellow instead of red, it does not reduce the solemnity of Buddhist worship. According the caretaker, he stated that the one who built the temple was a baker named Mbah Blek. He said that the generosity of Mbah Blek made the indigenous people stayed with him and also taught how to be an entrepreneur. The beginning of the establishment of this temple was due to an agreement among Mbah Blek's family which believed in different religion, before it handed to Chinese foundation.

Yes, at the first there was an agreement. There was possibility of his children converting into Christian, Catholic, then he was already old and couldn't taking care of it anymore. So, he handed it to the group or foundation. Well, if you hold the Foundation safely, it cannot be sold and bought, so it will last longer, because it will be maintained. Therefore, formed the Foundation, the agreement of Chinese people and the first owner. (Interview St, August 22, 2019).

Every Chinese temple has a host or main God who is more glorified by the Buddhist to do pray in this temple.

The host actually used to be the Earth God. As the time flows, there was a change. The God of Thian Siang Tewhose position was in the sky, be the ruler of the sky. Then he placed in the middle, so that he was more glorified. As the Earth God should be. Yet, doesn't mean we discriminate. (Interview St, August 22, 2019).

Political fluctuation in the New Order era turned out to have an impact on the development of this temple, especially for people who wanted to worship in this temple. There were many people had been prohibited to worship, therefore in the Soeharto's era Chinese people couldn't do anything. Based on the statement from one of those people, he said that: Actually, Kong Hu Chu is not a religion but teacher. A teacher who teaches humans are virtuous, upholding moral, and ethics. Kong Hu Cu teaches fellow creatures of God to respect each other. He doesn't distinguish religion, as long as they are human. Process of Chinese people's development with Kong Hu Chu's teaching actually took place before the New Order, in the period before the independence of Chinese people, many participated to join in the struggle to defend Indonesia (Interview, Th, 23 August 2019).

According to him, that religious teachings had been development in Tiongkok as Tao teaching or Taoism, although Tao teaching is older than Kong Hu Chu that was born in 2500 years ago. Taoist teachings appeared around 7417 years ago. He added that

Tao God is believed to have born into the world several times, he became a human named Lao Tse who works in the kingdom manages the library that contains histories (Interview St., August 22, 2019).

Siu Hok Bio temple is a Chinese temple located at Wotgandul Timur Street No.38, located in T-junction on the Wotgandul Timur road and Jalan Baru Baru. This temple was founded in 1753, it was the oldest temple in Semarang. In fengshui science, the location of this temple (in the centre of T-junction) has bad ch'i dumps, but the construction of this temple aims to absorb and neutralize the bad ch'i so that the lives of the surrounding community are not disrupted. Siu Hok Bio temple is facing north, which is actually not a good direction in fengshui view. But this temple was originally directed towards the sea which is located in the north because according to feng shui the good direction is the direction facing the sea, which in China is located in the south. Since the location of the sea in Semarang is to the north, the north direction is a good benchmark as the south (fengshui map).

Tay Kak Sie Temple is a Chinese temple located in Gang Lombok road, Semarang, Central Java. This temple was built in 1746 which was originally built only to worship the Goddess of Mercy, *Kwan Sie Im Po Sat*. At first, this temple was first established at the Kamba Hall under the name Kwa Kin Ting, as time went by the location of the temple was later moved because of its deficient location often used as a place for gambling and fights. Thus, in 1751 this temple was moved to Gang Lombok Street.

This temple then developed into the larger one that also worships the most complete deity of Taoist Gods, therefore this Chinese temple is the largest temple in Semarang. According to the interviewees why the Tay Kie Sie temple is said to be the biggest temple,

This temple has complete deity. Yes maybe in terms of other religion, Muslim religion, it is like the Great Mosque. In the matter of our gods we are the most complete compared to other temples. But yes procedurally, every emple must have a host, here the host is *Dewi Kuan In* (Interview Sr, 27 August 2019).

Chinese people pray and come to this temple to ask for amulets, or they usually called it as Hou. Actually do not call it as the amulets, but rather call it Hou. Hou is the point to reject reinforcements. The system is burned and continues to be drunk. Can be a drug, can be rejected reinforcements. But here there are also our own types for medicine because we have the God of Poo Seng Taitee, the God of Medicine. Indeed he is a specialist in medicine. We are here Konghucu or Chinese Tri Darma religion, some even from religion other than that usually come here. We ask God Po Seng Taitse to ask for herbal medicine, then the number will come out and packages for adults, adolescents, children, men and women. It is in the form of mandarin writing, then you just have to take it to a Chinese drugstore, he will read it and he will mix the medicine, as he said (Sr. Interview, 27 August 2019).

Social Construction on Chinese Temple as the Cultural Heritage

The findings in the field related to the social construction of the people on historical heritage in the form of Chinese temples, showed that most indigenous people or Javanese people who visited Chinese temple constructed the temple building as a Chinese sacred building used as a place for them to try their luck or predict their future. A trader who came to the Sampo Kong Temple entered a place that was considered sacred and they were praying there for good fortune and telling his fate. According to him they often come to Sampo Kong to pray asking for

their merchandise to sell, even though they actually claim to be Muslim. For him, praying here is not a problem, because by praying in the Chinese temple, he can see the results of predictions about his fate at the same time. Another informant who visited Chinese temple, said that they came here not only to see the fate or fortune, but when they were sick or had many problems, such as household problems, he also came to Chinese temple, to get a solution by praying or consulting with people considered as caretaker of the Temple (Interview with Ar, 12 August 2019).

The social construction as mentioned above is also supported by a Chinese Christian, according to him, although he is Christian, he often comes to Chinese temple, both the Sam Po Kong temple and other temples. His coming to Chinese temple, aside from praying, see his fortune, also to honour the ancestors. According to him in the Chinese tradition there is a habit of respecting their ancestors who are considered successful. For example, the Sampo Kong Temple. This temple is a success symbol of their ancestors, Admiral Cheng Ho. As a tribute to their ancestors, they often come to the Sampo Kong Temple (Interview with Fw, August 15, 2019). The tradition of respecting their ancestors separated their religious barriers. Hence, their presence to the temple not only as a place of recreation but also as a place to pray and ask for blessings. Otherwise, for those who are Khong Hu Cu, the existence of the temple for them is a place of worship.

Based on the data above, the existence of Chinese temple as a place of worship of Khong Hu Chu, became a meeting point of various communities with different religious beliefs. A Chinese temple was constructed as an exclusive place of worship of certain religions, but it became a place of worship owned not only by followers of Khong Hu Chu, but also owned by followers of other faiths. That is why they are not too concerned about the existence of the Chinese temple. In this context, the Chinese temple can be used as a medium of communication between various people who have different religious beliefs.

Another social construction of the Chinese temple was also built by ordinary people, who do not have any concerns. The findings in the field show that these temples are constructed as cultural buildings with unique architecture. Their visit to Chinese temple is not related to the religious beliefs they hold. It is meant as recreation or just a tour, so when they visit the Chinese temple, they are so free to take pictures with the statues around the temple. A Muslim visitor wearing a hijab said that Chinese temple is a unique building, which is fine to be used as a tourism. Even though I am Muslim, there is no problem visiting the Chinese temple (Interview with Ks, August 17, 2019). Other informants who are Christian also have same opinion, that the Chinese temple is very attractive as a tourist object. Besides the unique and interesting architecture of the building, the knick knacks and accessories that adorn the temple building beautify the existence of the temple (Interview with Hr, August 20, 2019).

Social construction as mentioned above, positioned the existence of the Chinese temple not as a source of conflict, but instead became the glue for various layers of society to come and visit the temple as an interesting historical tour. The Chinese temple is seen as a building that has tourism potential that can be developed both for domestic and foreign tourism. Thus, the temple can unite the same perspective from various groups of people, both from people of different faiths and millennial who make the Chinese temple as a building that has the potential for tourism. Icons attached to the temple, also the symbols in the temple that have a religious meaning, are not an obstacle for any group to come to the temple. This shows that the Chinese temple is not a building that divides and separates community groups, but instead it is a building that is able to invite people to come to enjoy its uniqueness.

The social construction of the Chinese temple was also built by informants from Chinese. They construct Chinese temple as a historical heritage that must be recognized as part of Indonesian culture. According to him it should be like other historical buildings as part of the heritage of Indonesian culture from the past. Despite the influence from China, the Chinese temple in Indonesia is built by Chinese people living in Indonesia, whose existence has been entrenched since the days before the independence (Interview with Ts, 22 August 2019). Chinese heritage must be introduced and must be socialized among the people. There is only a little information about the Chinese temple during this time, even it is not introduced in school, if it should be a historical legacy, it must be introduced in history learning.

Social construction as mentioned above is supported by an informant with background as historical educator. They construct the Chinese temple as a place of worship for Khong Hu Cu. However, the ancient temples which are legally included as cultural heritage will be protected automatically in accordance with the provisions of the cultural heritage law. He stated that there is no need to worry, all historical buildings that meet the criteria as historical buildings will automatically be preserved. Not only the Chinese temples but also all heritage buildings that meet the criteria as cultural heritage buildings will be protected and preserved in accordance with applicable law (Interview with St., August 24, 2019).

Based on all of the above data exposure, it can be concluded that the social construction of the people on the Chinese temple can be grouped into three groups. The first group, constructing the Chinese temple as a building that has religious authority. Those come from not only the Chinese Khong Hu Cu people, but also the indigenous people who are not Khong Hu Chu who make the Chinese temple as a place to see their fortune or predict their fortune. This social construction is also conveyed by Chinese people who are not Khong Hu Cu, but who have a tradition of respecting their ancestors who are considered successful. The second group constructs the Chinese temple as a unique building to be developed as tourist object. This construction was built by the people in general, both young people and parents, from various religious backgrounds. The third group constructs the Chinese temple as a historical building that must be recognized as part of Indonesian culture. This construction was built by Chinese people who felt that Chinese culture had not been fully accepted as Indonesian culture.

Chinese Temples and Ethnic Prejudices

The findings in the field shows that Chinese temple is a sacred building as a meeting place for various layers of society with different interests. Chinese Khong Hu Cu people come to the temple in order to worship. Muslims indigenous people visited the Chinese temple with the aim to predict fortune and fortune. While the Chinese Christian people visited the Chinese temple to respect the spirits of ancestors. Then the indigenous Muslim people both young and old, visited the Chinese temple for the purpose of traveling. Based on the data as mentioned above, shows the existence of the Chinese temple building becomes the glue for all levels of society from various religion and ethnics. It placed the Chinese temple as a building that is able to unite various community groups. Through the meeting of different interests in Chinese temple, the people are united in their perception that the inherent difference is not an issue to be conflict, but rather the difference is a diversity that must be respected together. This is shown by the behaviour of the people visiting the Chinese temple without having any ethnic prejudice, they have the same purpose of visiting the temple, even though they have different interests. Thus, it can be concluded that

the existence of the Chinese temple becomes a cultural communication between various layers of different ethnic communities and different layers of society with different beliefs.

In political competition in the elections, the elections and the presidential election were so sharp, where religious and ethnic issues were used as issues to bring down political opponents, it turned out that the existence of the Chinese temple was not used as a political issue. Even though the temple is not only a cultural symbol, it is also a symbol of ideology. An informant said that although the issue of China was brought into the political realm of the political election and the Presidential Election, the existence of the Chinese temple building was not strange. No matter how hard the political issues, the Chinese temple remains a common property. In his perspective, the Chinese temple is not only Chinese, but already owned by the people, both from the perspective of sacred buildings, cultural heritage buildings and attractive tourist buildings. This reality shows, that the Chinese temple is culturally able to unite various interests of the people, so that the position of the Chinese temple for the people is not "other" marginalized, but a building that is able to absorb the attractiveness of various groups of people. In this context, when talking about Chinese temple, there is no longer an ethnic prejudice, but instead the Chinese temple is able to omit the gap of the ethnic, other words is able to unite the Chinese and the Indigenous people.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ethnic prejudice can be omitted through a cultural approach. Two different groups can be united in a way that one group and the other group feel the same culture. The Chinese temple, which was originally a Chinese-owned building, was gradually owned by the indigenous people. The feeling of belonging to the temple makes them share one culture. So that the ethnic prejudice slowly eliminated and eventually lost. The process of cultural assimilation is a natural assimilation process, and more effective for uniting two different ethnicities compared with renewal culture in repressive ways as carried out by the New Order.

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