



The Role of Chinese Ethnic in Grebeg Sudiro: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The dynamics of ethnic Chinese life in Indonesia have been a part of historical civilization since ancient times. The involvement of ethnic Chinese is sometimes rarely highlighted by the public, even though there are various roles of ethnic Chinese in the traditions that exist in Indonesia. This research aims to examine the role of ethnic Chinese in Grebeg Sudiro from a historical perspective. This research is based on a literature study with data obtained from various books, journals, and theses to find out the role of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia in the Grebeg Sudiro tradition. The results show this tradition exists in the Central Java region, especially in Surakarta. The ethnic Chinese in this tradition present their cultural heritage and foster a sense of unity and tolerance within the Javanese community. This tradition represents the beauty of diversity and wealth from different backgrounds. It not only shows the role of ethnic Chinese but also shows the symbolism between Javanese and Chinese culture. The awareness of the Javanese community itself can produce a form of diversity in the form of the Grebeg Sudiro tradition.

Keywords: Chinese Ethnic; Grebeg Sudiro; Culture; Acculturation

Introduction

Surakarta is a region in Indonesia with a diverse society. The diversity of Surakarta society can be seen in terms of the composition of the community, ethnicity, religion, and class. The relationship between Javanese and Chinese ethnicities in Surakarta has been established since long ago; they have lived side by side and produced many social interactions in the community. The exchange makes the two ethnicities live in harmony and tolerance to each other. Although historically, there have been various types of inter-ethnic conflicts in the past that resulted in riots, with the main target of ethnic Chinese in the 1998 reformation. However, the two ethnicities work together and have a good relationship to this day. The excellent relationship between the two ethnicities resulted in a tradition known as Grebeg Sudiro. The word "green" comes from the Javanese "grebe", which means crowded or moving together.

In contrast, the word "studio" comes from Sudiroprajan or the name of the specimen area in the heart of Surakarta. The tradition was created because of the mixture of local Javanese culture and ethnic Chinese culture in Surakarta. Grebeg Sudiro was also initiated by the ethnic Chinese who live in Sudiroprajan village.

The Grebeg Sudiro tradition is a development or innovation of the Buk Teko tradition that used to exist. This assimilation manifests in the Grebeg Sudiro tradition, which is full of cultural acculturation. This is also because Grebeg Sudiro is held a week before the lunar new year, the main events of which are celebrations and

Kuningan. The celebration of Grebeg Sudiro emphasizes diversity and diversity. This is because Grebeg Sudiro represents a very diverse group of Sudiroprajan residents. This paper aims to explore the role of ethnic Chinese in Grebeg Sudiro from a historical perspective. Through this approach, the paper focuses on understanding how the interactions and roles of Chinese and Javanese ethnicities in the celebration shape the social, cultural, and economic dynamics in Sudiroprajan. Therefore, revealing the part of ethnic Chinese in Grebeg Sudiro can add insight and knowledge about the importance of cultural inclusion and pluralism in celebrating diverse cultures in Indonesia. In addition, this is to see the role of ethnic Chinese who strive to maintain and enrich Indonesia's cultural traditions.

Research Methods

The method used in this research is a literature study, which collects data and information through reviewing literature sources. The data came from books, journals, and theses about social interactions between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in Surakarta. After that, the data is processed, analyzed, and summarized using theoretical studies that can produce a complete article.

Results and Discussion

Ethnic Chinese Migration to Surakarta

Chinese immigrants who arrived in Indonesia mainly were grouped according to the tribal similarities of their place of origin in China. This can be seen from the existence of the largest group of Chinese living in Java, the Hokkien tribe. Ethnic Chinese migrated to Java primarily for trade. They brought porcelain and silk in exchange for rice and other agricultural products (Z.M. Hidajat, 1993). Over time, there were many conflicts between Indonesians and Chinese. As a result, many Chinese from Batavia moved to several areas in Central Java. According to historian Beny Juwono in *Ethnic Chinese in Surakarta (1890-1927)*, migrants from mainland China came to Surakarta in 1745.

At first, the Chinese settlement in Surakarta was in Balong Village, north of the Pepe River around Pasar Gede. It lay east from Ketandan to Limalasan, north to Balong, and again to Warungpelem (R.M. Sajid, 2001). In the Salatiga Agreement of 1757, the Kingdom of Surakarta was divided into two parts. Part of Surakarta City entered the Kasunanan area, and the other part entered the Mangkunegaran area (George D. Larson, 1990). During the reign of Paku Buwono IV (1780-1820), the Dutch colonial government appointed Chinese with the rank of central as village leaders or *wijk*. The Chinese major was directly responsible to the colonial government, while the captain was responsible to the Chinese major.

The Chinese adapted to the indigenous population through several intermediaries: the social and kinship systems adopted, religion, organization, and education. The Chinese people in Surakarta in the 20th century have experienced a lot of acculturation of customs, culture, and religion, although some still maintain their belief in the ancestral land. In the mid-20th century, many Chinese intermarried, which resulted in the fusion of Chinese culture into Javanese. The reform program also supported this with the idea of assimilation during the Orde Baru (Dewi, 2013). The arrival of Chinese to Surakarta added to the diversity between Javanese and other ethnicities. Surakarta is also known as a city that has a highly tolerant attitude in the community. The arrival of ethnic Chinese also positively impacts the people who live in Surakarta. This is because their appearance in Surakarta makes them work together and have a good relationship even though they come from different ethnicities.

Acculturation of Javanese and Chinese Culture

The massive migration of ethnic Chinese to settle in Indonesia brought several influences. One of them is the acculturation process of Chinese culture with local culture. Acculturation is the union of two or more cultures to form a new culture without eliminating elements of the original culture. Acculturation occurs when the foreign culture is gradually accepted and processed into its own culture without causing the loss of aspects of the group's culture. Loss of the group's cultural elements (Hartati, 2013).

Centuries of interaction between Javanese and Chinese have led to their acculturation into a mixed culture. The acculturation and harmonization of Chinese and Javanese cultures can be seen in the Chinese New Year celebrations tradition in Surakarta City. The Chinese New Year celebration is celebrated together with the Grebeg Sudiro event. The festival is filled with various activities that illustrate the harmonization of Javanese-Chinese culture, such as earth alms, lion dance performances, cultural carnival of Chinese New Year trinkets, and fireworks (Alam, 2023). They also make Chinese New Year specialities, such as tumpeng rice with side dishes, opor ayam, sticky rice, rice with sea fish, red porridge, and white porridge (P. Hariyono, 1994). These celebrations create a social environment of harmony between ethnic and cultural groups. Beyond that, acculturation between Chinese and Javanese ethnicities can also reduce the potential for intercultural conflict and encourage community cooperation.

The Role of Chinese Ethnic in Grebeg Sudiro

Ethnic Chinese who settled in Surakarta had much influence on Javanese culture. This is evidenced by the birth of the Grebeg Sudiro tradition, which results from a mixture of two Javanese and Chinese cultures. Grebeg Sudiro is not only a celebration to welcome the arrival of the Sincia New Year but also a celebration of the beauty of diversity and tolerance. Although Sincia, or Chinese New Year, is synonymous with ethnic Chinese, in this celebration, everyone comes together regardless of their racial background and descent. Behind the yearly festive Grebeg Sudiro celebration, Grebeg Sudiro was initially initiated by Oei Beng Kie, Sarjono Lelono Putro, and Kamajaya (Yasmin, 2017). They are ethnic Chinese-Javanese who live in Sudiroprajan and indirectly play an essential role in creating acculturation between these two local Chinese-Javanese cultures.



Figure 1. Tradisi Grebeg Sudiro, 2023

Source: <https://jatengprov.go.id/beritadaerah/ribuan-warga-antusias-saksikan-grebeg-sudiro-2023/>

Oei Beng Kie is a famous lion dance craftsman in Balong Village. The concept of cultural acculturation is the basis for making the lion dance. The shape of the lion dance imitates that of China, its country of origin. However, the lion dance costume is made of batik, which depicts Javanese culture. Therefore, the people of Balong Village are cultivating their own culture by displaying the lion dance at the Grebeg Sudiro celebration. They are also developing the symbols connecting Chinese-ness and Javanese-ness (Dwi et al., 2011). As for a figure who has a vital role in the tradition of Grebe studio, one of them is Sie Jin Kwie, a great general from the Tang dynasty of China hundreds of years ago. Then, he was given a Javanese name, Sudiro. Sie Jin Kwie's struggle is immortalized in Surakarta, so in his memory, the name Sudiro is used for green studio celebrations. In addition, to commemorate the greatness of the general, the name Sudiro was also embedded as the name of the Chinese area. This can be seen in naming Sudiroprajan village, predominantly inhabited by ethnic Chinese-Javanese, to honour Sudiro's struggle.

When the Chinese lived there, the area was a plantation often used as a burial ground. The people there often found balung or human and animal remains discarded from Jagalan village, which became known as "kampung balong". In the end, however, the relationship between the Chinese and the palace officials in the Surakarta area, both Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran, went well. They both often gave gifts to each other. For example, Mangkunegaran 7 gave some land to be built as a Thiong Ting funeral home for the Chinese community. On the other hand, Surakarta Sunanate is also said to have received gamelan from the Chinese community. In the 18th-19th century, there are many records of when the sultan or king needed Chinese assistance to help fill the treasury, so they were given management rights, for example, managing markets or entertainment venues, where part of the proceeds would go to the Sunanate or Mangkunegaran treasury.

There is a well-documented relationship between the 7th Mangkunegaran, a very modernist Mangkunegaran, and the ethnic Chinese in Surakarta. The 7th Mangkunegaran sought to advance Mangkunegaraan through industrialization. Evidence of the 7th Mangkunegaran's closeness to Kapiten Bee Kwat Koen of Surakarta shows a close relationship. The similarity between the ethnic Chinese and the palace was also seen during the time of Pakubuwono 10 when the Sunan visited Balong village to conduct *milder projo* or closely monitor his people to determine their condition. However, when passing through the small bridge that is now Taman Kuncoro Sudiro, the lid of his *bok teko* fell, rolling into the *Kalen Mandan*. Still, when the soldiers and palace officials tried to find the *bok teko* lid, it could not be found. Then, in this event, the *bok teko* was used as a site. This illustrates the strong relationship between the two cultures, where the *bok teko* symbolizes the people and the lid represents the ruler (Dwi et al., 2011).

Chinese New Year celebrations in Surakarta also illustrate this closeness, with the "sedekah bok teko" held yearly, where residents pray that the two will always be united in peace and prosperity. By 1911, ethnic Chinese began to spread out in areas such as Pasar Gede, Warung Pelem, Ketandan, Limolasan, and Kepanjen, and assimilation between Javanese and Chinese communities was natural. One clear example of this assimilation is the Grebeg Sudiro tradition, which evolved from the Sedekah Bumi Bok Teko tradition of Pakubuwana 10. Grebeg Sudiro is an event of cultural acculturation and is held a week before Chinese New Year, which also coincides with the anniversary of Pasar Gede. The people of Surakarta, along with Chinese organizations, fully support this event, creating mounds that are paraded

around the city with various foods and fruits as a manifestation of the rich cultural assimilation in the area.

According to Pak Mi, the management of Tien Kok Sie Temple, the implementation of Grebeg Sudiro costs approximately 300 million annually. The temple spends 100 million for the Grebeg committee, installing thousands of lanterns, and other social activities. In addition, he also hopes that Chinese ethnic cultural arts can be enjoyed by all elements of society, not just ethnic Chinese. The existence of Chinese cultural symbols that are striking in Grebeg Sudiro are 4,000 Chinese red lanterns and 12 shio lanterns that are neatly hung along the front area of the Surakarta City Hall and centred on the Classic Clock Monument of Pasar Gedhe Hadjonagoro. The beauty can be enjoyed for one month on the eve of the Lunar New Year.

Another cultural symbol that attracts visitors' attention is the distribution of 4,000 kue keranjang at the peak of the Grebeg Sudiro event in front of Pasar Gedhe. Almost everyone present always remembers the moment of scrambling for the Keranjang cakes (Rahmatullah, 2021). In addition to the distribution of basket cakes, ethnic Chinese perform various art performances, including Liong Barongsai art and martial arts such as Wu Shu and Tai chi. The implementation of Grebeg Sudiro also involves the role of ethnic Chinese and cultural symbols of ethnic Chinese.

Conclusion

Ethnic Chinese initially came to Surakarta to trade and brought elements of Chinese culture to acculturate with local culture. The acculturation has even become a symbol of harmony between Javanese-Chinese ethnicities in the present. The creation of the Grebeg Sudiro tradition can unify the various ethnicities living in Surakarta and encourage unity among all ethnicities, regardless of racial background or descent. From a historical perspective, the closeness between Javanese-Chinese ethnicities has also been established ever since the colonial era, and unexpectedly, the Chinese race has also become an essential part of cultural development in Java. This can be seen from the creation of the Grebeg Sudiro tradition at the initiation of several Chinese-Javanese figures to create this celebration and maintain a close relationship between ethnic Chinese and the palace in Surakarta.

Grebeg Sudiro also reflects the cooperation between Chinese and Javanese communities in enlivening this celebration, supported by financial contributions and full support from Chinese temples and community organizations. Grebeg Sudiro can be a concrete example of how cultural assimilation between Chinese and Javanese communities can create substantial diversity and tolerance in Surakarta. It is also a tangible manifestation of the positive relationship between different ethnicities and cultures in the city, which has enriched and beautified the lives of its people.

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