

# Acculturation of Java and Chinese Culture in Historical Perspective

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explain historically the acculturation process of Javanese-Chinese culture which its existence is still being felt today. The research question is how was the process of acculturation of Javanese and Chinese culture and what form. The method used in this study is the historical method which has four operational steps: Heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. A search for library research is needed to find out initial information on the problems being studied. Anthropological and sociological approaches are needed to sharpen data analysis. The results of this study explain that the acculturation of Javanese and Chinese culture was formed through a long historical process since the 5th century AD. The initial interaction of ethnic Chinese with Javanese people took place intensively through trade relations. The arrival of ethnic Chinese to Java took place gradually by sea. The interaction of ethnic Chinese culture with the local community runs naturally and without any cultural conflict between the two. This long-standing cultural interaction has resulted in the acculturation of Javanese and Chinese cultures merging into one local culture of the Javanese people. Almost all elements of Javanese life are more or less influenced by Chinese culture. As in architecture, food, literature, batik, sports, musical instruments, religion, performing arts and traditions. The conclusion of this study shows that the process of acculturation of Javanese and Chinese cultures has given birth to a mixed culture that has become part of the cultural wealth of Javanese society.

## Keywords

cultural acculturation; javanese people; chinese ethnicity; architecture; culinary.

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## INTRODUCTION

The interaction between Javanese and Chinese has been going for a long time through trade contacts. Denys Lombard in his book entitled *Nusa Jawa* said that Cross Culture in trade relations between China and Java have been going on since the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The earliest relationship between

the two is known from Chinese records that mention the Java Island (She-po/He-ling) became a stopover for Chinese Buddhist monks who sailed on merchant ships from China to India, and vice versa. The same information is also found in the Annual Gazette of the North-South Dynasties and in the records of the Tangshu, Xin Tangshu, and Songshi. In its development, the interaction of the Chinese with the Java Island was followed by the arrival of a group of traveling Buddhist monk Hui Neng from the Tang Dynasty in the 7th century AD. While living in Java, they taught various knowledges to the local population (Lombard, 2000).

The next arrival of the Chinese to Java came in waves. They visited important ports along the Java northern coast. One of them was a famous benevolent voyage by Admiral Cheng Ho in 1405 AD which brought 62 large ships and 200 more small ships along with 27 thousand crew members. The biggest voyage of the Chinese people happened 7 times. From 1407 AD, 1412 AD, 1416 AD, 1421 AD, 1424 AD and 1430 AD Admiral Cheng Ho's arrival along the Java north coast was in order to strengthen political, economic, religious and cultural diplomacy. Cheng Ho's voyage mission in Java had an impact on the widespread acculturation of Chinese culture with local culture. Moreover, many of them during their stay in Java married indigenous women and mingled with the local community. This is a picture of the initial process of acculturating Chinese and Javanese cultures whose existence is still widely found and eventually becomes indigenous culture wealth (Yuanzhi, 2013).

Acculturation itself can be understood as a symptom that arises when human societies with different cultures interact directly for a long time. This interaction causes changes in cultural pattern of one or both (Kusumohamidjojo, 2010). According to Koentjaraningrat acculturation occurs because of the interaction of various different cultures that influence each other (Koentjaraningrat, 2015). The process of cultural acculturation in practice has two forms. First, peaceful acculturation. It takes place without coercion and is welcomed by the receiving community. Second, extreme acculturation. Occurs through violence and coercion which results in elements of foreign culture from the winning invaders being forced onto the losing native (Groeneveldt, 2009). From this perspective, it can be said that the acculturation process between Chinese and Javanese culture was natural and peaceful. Because, there are no facts that explain the practice of Chinese cultural hegemony over Javanese culture. The fact is that the acculturation process between Chinese culture and Javanese culture is peaceful and natural.

The purpose of this paper is to historically explain the process of acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture whose existence could be seen today. Through library research methods, this paper answers the following problems: how did the acculturation of Javanese and Chinese culture take place in a historical context and in what form. The literature used to answer these questions includes the book *Nusa Java: Cross Culture* by Denys Lombard (2000), *Chinese Muslim Cheng Ho: The Mystery of the Journey of Goodwill in the Archipelago*, by Kong Yuanzhi (2013), *Chinese Malay Literature and Indonesian Nationality*, Marcus AS, Pax Benedanto (ed)(2001), *Indonesian Citizens of Chinese Descendants in Indonesian Economic and Political Stability*, by Justian Suhandinata (2009), *Being Javanese: Chinese People and Javanese Culture 1895-1998*, by Rustopo (2007). Scientific journal articles are also used to strengthen library research, such as: *Chinese Culture and the Dynamics of Javanese Tradition*, the writings of A. Maftuh Sujana and Nita Nirmalasari (2019).

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The method used in this study is the historical method which in its operation has four steps. First, heuristic, namely the process of finding and collecting data. In this case, the data used in this study are selected books and articles according to the research theme. Through literature search, a lot of information was obtained about the history of the entry of ethnic Chinese to Java. In addition, observation is needed to directly observe the object elements that are part of Chinese and Javanese acculturation. Like seeing various forms of buildings, household appliances, culinary arts, music and so on. The next step, source criticism both intrinsically and extrinsically. Source criticism is done to test the validity or legitimacy of data sources. This includes ensuring the selected books and journal articles match the research theme, testing the originality of objects, buildings, culinary arts and various kinds of equipment resulting from the acculturation of the culture. Source criticism was carried out in order to obtain the credibility and validity of the data.

The next step is data interpretation. In this stage data analysis work is carried out. The facts resulting from processing the selected literature and observational data are then analyzed in order to gain understanding, meaning and a chronological picture of the historical phenomena studied. Utilization of auxiliary sciences such as sociology and cultural anthropology is necessary to reconstruct facts. The last stage is historiography, namely the stage of writing facts that are constructed into a comprehensive

historical explanation (Gottchalk, 1986).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Chinese Ethnic Arrival History to the Land of Java**

Denys Lombard in his book *Nusa Java: Cross Culture* explains that the interaction of the Chinese with the island of Java has been going on for a long time, it is estimated that since the 5th century AD. Java has become a stopover for Chinese Buddhist monks who sailed from China to India and vice versa (Lombard, 2000). Likewise, the *Annual News* from the North-South Dynasty which mentions the relationship between China and Java. This information is also contained in the records of *Tangshu*, *Xin Tangshu*, and *Songshi* which explain that there was a relationship between China and Java in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. It was also mentioned that in the 13th century Yuan Dynasty had sent its envoys to Java to force local rulers (Singasari Kingdom) to acknowledge the power of the Mongols (Taniputra, 2008). The next wave of Chinese arrival was also important when Cheng Ho's benevolent voyage brought a large group of people that stopped along the northern coast of Java from 1405 AD-1430 AD. Their arrival had an impact on the strengthening of acculturation of Chinese culture with local culture (Yuanzhi, 2013).

Historian Peter Carey also gives the same statement that the interaction of the Chinese people with Java has been going on for centuries through trade contacts. During the Majapahit era, royal nobles used to shop for luxury goods imported from China. At that time, it was known that there were already many Chinese settlements in several ports on the north coast of Java. Some of the low-ranking port officials, boat people, and traders on the coast of the Berantas river were partly Chinese (Rustopo, 2007). According to de Graaf, the important port cities on the north coast of Java in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries were already inhabited by a middle-class Chinese merchant community of Peranakans. They are generally Muslim and partly played a role in the spread of Islam in Java (de Graaf, 1998). The dynasty that ruled over the first Islamic kingdom in Java (Kingdom of Demak) was of Chinese descent who still had close relations with the rulers of Palembang. Raden Patah (Jin Bun), the first ruler of the Kingdom of Demak, was the son of King Majapahit from a Chinese female concubine (de Graaf, 1998).

Until the 17th century, the interaction between the Javanese and the Chinese was getting closer. Wouter Schouten said that the Javanese feel proud to claim that they are of Chinese descent. This was also stated by

Abbe deRaynal, that the Javanese consider themselves of Chinese descent, even though their religion and customs are different from those of the Chinese (Lombard, 2000). In Peter Carey's notes, during the Islamic Mataram period, the Chinese in Java also played an important role in economic activity in the interior. Nevertheless, trade in the port cities of the north coast of Java remained the main source of income for the Islamic Mataram kingdom in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, the Chinese succeeded in becoming exporters of the rice and teak wood trade. Wiraguna, one of the royal elites during the reign of Sultan Agung, played an important role in empowering the Chinese as rice brokers and in regulating the export of goods to Batavia. In this case, it can be said that the economy of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom still relied on trading activities carried out by the Chinese (Rustopo, 1998).

Furthermore, during the Dutch colonial government and the rulers of the Javanese kings (Surakarta and Yogyakarta) the presence of Chinese people was still needed to carry out trading activities. Their important role is reflected in the administrative and legal privileges granted to the Chinese people. For example, in every port city and trading city a *syahbandar* (toll and customs guard) was appointed whose authority was entrusted from the Chinese merchants. In fact, not all full-blooded and *peranakan* Chinese who live in Java only work in the trade sector. Some of them became farmers, breeders, fishermen, took care of the agricultural business of Javanese nobles, land entrepreneurs, art workers, writers, and so on. The variety of professions engaged in by the Chinese *totok* and *peranakan* Chinese have moved the process of acculturation of Javanese and Chinese cultures to deepen (Rustopo, 2007).

One of the factors accelerating the acculturation process of Javanese and Chinese culture is through marriage. The Javanese marriages with ethnic Chinese is influenced by several considerations. First, the effort to avoid taxes for foreigners imposed by the Dutch colonial government. The strategy of marrying an native population became a rational choice for the Chinese in avoiding the foreigner's tax collection. Second, there are very few ethnic Chinese women in Java. Ethnic Chinese immigrants who came to Java did not take many of their women with them. As a result, there were only a few Chinese women in Java. This reason pushed them to marry Javanese women. Through marital interactions, knowledge of Javanese culture, language, art, and customs is attached to their descendants (Rustopo, 2007).

The development and continuity of the Chinese ethnicity in Java in re-

lation to social life in each period has its own dynamics. As in the Dutch colonial period, from the VOC to the Colonial Government, they had made strict rules to separate the ethnic Chinese from the indigenous native population. The structure and social class of the population in Java are divided into three groups: (1) European groups, (2) Foreign Eastern groups (Chinese, Arabs, etc.), and (3) indigenous native groups. Ethnic Chinese have to live in settlements that are reserved for them. Their community is easy to find in various corners of the city with the term Chinatown village/*Pecinan* (Suhandinata, 2009). For example in Surakarta, ethnic Chinese are concentrated in Kampung Balong. However, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the pressure of nationalist organizations and movements among the *peranakan* Chinese, the Dutch Colonial Government finally abolished the *wijkenstelsel* and *passenstelsel* rules. The settlements of the Chinese *totok* and *peranakan* Chinese communities are no longer concentrated in one place, but have begun to spread in various places (Rustopo, 2007).

In the Old Order era, policies towards ethnic Chinese still adopted the Dutch colonial heritage. The government allowed the ethnic Chinese to remain active in the economic sector while limiting them to being bureaucrats. In politics, ethnic Chinese are given space to become politicians. This regime also gave the Chinese ethnic freedom to express their culture and religion. During the New Order era, the regime wanted to create a common ideology, ideals, and culture. Political efforts to achieve this goal, then total assimilation is enforced. The New Order regime prohibited ethnic Chinese from expressing their identity and culture. Banning the Confucian religion, showing Chinese writing (*kanji*), Chinese arts and culture. In the era of reform (democratization), the law and human rights were re-enforced. Almost the rulers at this time showed efforts to realize multiculturalism. All ethnicities, including the Chinese, are encouraged to work together as children of the nation to rebuild the country and still respect the existing ethnic diversity. As a result, various kinds of Chinese culture have returned to life in society (Suhandinata, 2009).

### **The Acculturation of Javanese and Chinese Cultures**

The interaction of the Javanese with the Chinese for centuries made their acculturation take root into a mixed culture. The following is an example of the results of the new culture as part of the acculturation process of Javanese and Chinese cultures. First, cultural acculturation at the celebration of the Chinese New Year. Acculturation and harmonization of Chi-

nese and Javanese culture can be seen in the tradition of celebrating Chinese New Year in Surakarta City. The Chinese New Year celebration is celebrated together with the Gerebeg Sudiro event. This holiday celebration is filled with various activities describing the harmonization of Javanese-Chinese culture. Such as the Earth Alms Carnival, lion dance performances, Chinese New Year knick-knacks cultural carnivals and fireworks parties. The acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture can also be seen from the snacks served which have become a joint icon called ampyang cake. This harmonization of acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture in Gerebeg Sudiro can be seen from the enthusiasm of the Surakarta community's participation in holding a slametan event by making alms of the earth consisting of market snacks. Meanwhile, ethnic Chinese also held similar events at pagodas. They also make Chinese specialties, such as tumpeng rice with side dishes, chicken opor, sticky rice, rice with sea fish, red porridge and white porridge (Hariyono, 1993).



**Figure 1.** The Gerebeg Sudiro Event in Surakarta City

Drinking tea served to guests initially developed from the tradition of the Chinese community which was later adopted into the tradition of the Javanese community. The tradition of visiting each other to give money, snacks or food and burning firecrackers during Eid and weddings is also a tradition adopted from Chinese culture. Burning firecrackers at weddings according to Chinese cultural tradition itself is believed to ward off evil elements during the celebration (Restiyati, 2021).

Second, the acculturation of Javanese and Chinese culture in the world of architecture. The acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture in architecture can be seen from the ornaments (decorative variety) and the shape of the roof which mostly adopts the roofs of Chinese houses. For example, at



the Kasepuhan Palace, Cirebon, many Chinese ceramics are used as wall decorations for the Kasepuhan Palace. Likewise, the gate of the Kasepuhan Palace is decorated with a typical Chinese mega cloud motif (Eddy Hadi W, 2013). The influence of Chinese architecture can also be found in the buildings of temples in Java, especially the meander decoration and the cloud decoration (mega overcast). This can be seen in the reliefs of Jalatunda Temple and Panataran Temple. In Bali, elements of Chinese architecture are also found in temples.

Javanese-Chinese architecture is also commonly found in ancient mosques scattered in various regions in Java. Such as the architecture of the Demak Mosque, the Kudus Mosque, the Mantingan Mosque and the Cheng Ho Mosque. The building of the Kudus Mosque, an acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture, is shown in the form of a mosque building that resembles a pagoda with Chinese-style carvings. Historically, Sunan Kudus when he built the mosque was assisted by a Chinese wood carver named The Liang Sin (Telingsing). He is also known as a figure who taught the art of carving to the local community, who later became known as Sun Ging or Sungging (Waluyo, 2013). It's different with the Cheng Ho Mosque in Surabaya which is dominated by typical Chinese colors. Such as yellow, green and red. The interesting thing is that the entrance of the Cheng Ho mosque is made to resemble a pagoda with a dragon relief at the top and a lion statue. The new Islamic touch can be seen from the Arabic calligraphy engraved on the walls of the mosque (Hartati, 2018).



**Figure 2.** The Cheng Ho Mosque in Surabaya and The Demak Mosque

Third, acculturation in the world of literature. Famous literary works from China were rewritten according to the Indonesian version, for example the story of Sam Pek Eng Tay, in Popular West Java by Lo Fen Koi. Silat stories, for example, are Eagle Archers (Pemanah Rajawali), Dragon



Slayer Goloks (Golok Pembunuh Naga), Princess Cheung Ping (Putri Cheung Ping), *Sakti* Monkeys (Kera Sakti), and the Ten Doors of Hell (Sepuluh Pintu Neraka). Poems created by ancient Chinese poets have been translated by Indonesian writer HB Jasin. Meanwhile, in the world of novels, we are already quite familiar with the works of Marga T, many of which take the background of China (Marcus and Pax Benedanto, 2001).

Fourth, acculturation of language use. According to Kong Yuanzhi, the use and absorption of words from Chinese which later enriched Javanese and Indonesian languages was no less than 1046 words. The following are some examples of Chinese loanwords that enrich Javanese and Indonesian languages, such as: brazier-*anglo* (洪爐), clogs-*bakiak* (木屐), noodle-*bakmi* (肉麵), meatball-*bakso*, *bakpia*, *cangklong*, cup-*cawan*(茶碗), *cukong*(主公), earring-*giwang* (耳環), herbs-*jamu* (草藥), vehicle seat-*jok*, soy sauce-*kecap* (茄汁, cockroach-*kecoa*, bribe-*kongkalikong* (串謀), sit back and relax-*kongko* (講座), cooperation-*kongsi* (公司), herbs tape-*koyo*, labor-*kuli* (苦力), man clothes-*koko*, soup-*kuah*, *langseng*, expert-*lihai* (厲害), flea-*loak*, attic-*loteng*, bell-*lonceng*, bowl-*mangkok* (碗鍋), rice noodle-*misoa* (碗鍋), knife-*pisau*(匕首), dustpan-*pengki*, canoe-*sampan* (舢舨), pure chinese-*singkek*, herbs medicine-*sinse* (醫師), temperature-*suhu*, chopsticks-*sumpit*, *sempoa*, typhoon-*taifun*, teapot-*teko* (茶壺), shop-*toko*, alcohol-*ciu*, artisan-*tukang*, lipstick-*gincu*, jade-*giok*, big knife-*golok* and so forth. In addition, Javanese people are used to buying and selling transactions using Chinese, such as ce-pek (one hundred), no-pek (two hundred), se-jeng (one thousand) and cem-ban (ten thousand) and others. This shows that cultural acculturation in the context of Javanese and Chinese languages has been institutionalized for a long time (Yuanzhi, 2013).

Fifth, acculturation in the world of music and performing arts. The exchange of arts, music and dances between Chinese and local people has been going on for a long time since the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). Acculturation in the arts can be seen in various forms. First, musical instruments, such as gongs, canangs, sinter (erhu), flutes and harps which were originally introduced by the Chinese have spread to become part of regional musical instruments in Indonesia. Second, wayang potehi. Potehi puppets are wooden puppets that are played with finger skills. Puppet potehi is played when welcoming Chinese religious holidays. This potehi puppet is similar to wayang golek only the story is taken from Chinese folk legend. Such as Sam Pek Eng Tay, Sih Djien Koei, Capsha Thaypoo,

Sun Gokong and others (Hartati, 2018).

It is interesting that the form of cultural acculturation has been shown by the community of descendants of Chinese artists in Surakarta City in developing Javanese arts. This community of descendants of Chinese artists has been long participated in developing the performing arts of wayang orang. They become art workers which in their development are divided into two groups. First, ethnic Chinese descent who choose to become entrepreneurs in the performing arts industry. Such as the art and culture industry of stage puppets, musical groups, Javanese dances and keroncong music which are members of the Surakarta Community Association Perkumpulan Masyarakat Surakarta (PMS) and Dharma Budaya organizations. Second, ethnic Chinese descent who work as art workers (actors and actresses). They include, Tjan Tjoe Siem, Kho Djien Tiong, Go Tik Swan, Tio Gwat Bwee, Tan Gwan Hien, Tan Siok Lien, Tio Djoen Ong, Bang A Gioe, Tjoo Sing Lam, Lie Tjwan Ing, Sie Khoen Ho and everyone else- a Chinese who was once a mainstay of the art work of the Dharma Budaya and PMS puppets. They study Javanese culture and develop it as part of Javanese identity (Rustopo, 2007).

Sixth batik. The acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture can be seen from the variety of *Pecinan* or *Peranakan* batik. The history of the emergence of *Peranakan* batik originated from the presence of ethnic Chinese on the north coast of Java, such as Indramayu, Cirebon, Pekalongan, Semarang, Lasem and Tuban mingling with the local population. They married and gave birth to Chinese descendants called *peranakans*. The *Peranakan* Chinese who live in Java adapt to harmonize their ancestral culture with the local culture. For example, they dress according to the way the locals dress. Women wear batik sarongs, then men wear batik pants. This background finally emerged the creation of cultural acculturation in the emergence of decorative motifs (motifs) of *Peranakan* batik. *Peranakan* batik motifs are more complicated and subtle by displaying patterns with decorative Chinese mythical animals, such as dragons, phoenixes (hong birds), turtles and kilin (lion-headed dogs) (Dwikurniarini, 2013).

In its development, *Peranakan* batik also has a variety of bouquets-*buketan* (flowers) which are influenced by Dutch batik motifs. Today, *Peranakan* batik motifs have more diverse patterns. For example, the pattern of decoration which is influenced by the decoration of the palace batik. The batik sarongs they use are similar in motifs to the decorations on Chinese ceramics. Like the banji which symbolizes happiness or the bat

which symbolizes good fortune. Apart from being used as clothing, the batik produced by Peranakan Chinese is also used as a complement to religious rituals, such as altar cloths (tok-wi) and table cloths (Hartati, 2018).



**Figure 3.** Peranakan batik motifs

Seventh, acculturation in the field of sports. Acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture in the field of exercise such as wei tan kung breathing, which is now known as the Indonesian Respiratory Sports Association-*Persatuan Olahraga Pernapasan Indonesia*. Breathing exercises adopted tai chi into Indonesian Tera Gymnastics – Senam Tera Indonesia. The martial arts of wushu and kung fu in Indonesia have their own community organizations.

Eighth, acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture in culinary. The acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture in culinary is numerous and varied. In this paper, we only take a small sample. For example, the soto dish which, according to Dennys Lombard, comes from China, called caudo. Initially, this caudo dish was first popularized in Semarang. Soto in Makassar is called coto and in Pekalongan it is tauto. Soto is an interesting example of cultural acculturation due to the mixture of various traditions. Inside it there are local influences and other cultures. Like noodles or ricenoodle-*soon* in soto, it comes from Chinese culture. Another example is spring rolls-*lumpia*. This food was originally from Chinese culture and then underwent a localization process. Lumpia Semarang, the main content is sliced bamboo skin, while spring rolls-*lumpia* from China are filled with noodles (Hartati, 2018).



**Figure 3.** The Coto Makasar and Soto Kudus

Bakpao which was originally in China filled with pork, then the Javanese replaced it with beef or green beans. Bolang-baling and Cakue are fried cakes with a sweet and salty taste and are also a form of acculturation. Capjay originally from China in the form of a mixture of vegetable meat, by the Javanese modified with vegetables and ingredients according to the tastes of the Javanese. Titee noodle dishes were originally in China in the form of noodle dishes mixed with spinach and pork. In Java it is modified into mie *kopyok*. Mie *kopyok* itself is a boiled noodle dish with bean sprouts and crackers crushed with garlic sauce. Other examples include tofu pong, bakpia, meatballs, bacang, moci cake, moho cake, cup-*mangkok* cakes and many more (Sutami, 2012).

### CONCLUSION

The acculturation of Javanese and Chinese culture today is not formed from short interaction process, but a long process of cultural interaction that lasts for centuries. In this acculturation, most part of Javanese culture get Chinese culture. From art, architecture, culinary, clothing, sports, literature, musical instruments, astronomy and carving, more or less the influence of Chinese culture. This historical fact shows that the cultural relationship between the Javanese and the Chinese is harmonious and without any cultural conflicts. This cultural fact is not considered important when it comes to political affairs. Such as the issue of ethnicity between natives and non-natives which was once a racial political issue to discriminate against ethnic Chinese during the fall of the New Order regime in 1998. This harmonious acculturation of Javanese-Chinese culture can be used as a reflection material to re-strengthen the sense of nationalism.

This research is limited by literature analysis and observations which were only carried out in Surakarta City. Consequently, the results of this study do not represent the phenomenon of acculturation of Javanese and

Chinese culture from various cities in Java. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be used as a comprehensive reference to explain the phenomenon of acculturation of Javanese and Chinese culture that occurs in Java. Literary data and observations are limited to the city of Surakarta and its surroundings, of course it does not provide an objective and comprehensive picture of various phenomena of acculturation of Javanese and Chinese culture in all cities in Java. Due to these limitations, it is necessary to carry out further research by paying attention to comparative studies in other cities based on more varied data. In this way, a comprehensive historical explanation is obtained for the acculturation phenomenon of Javanese and Chinese culture in all cities in Java.

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