

# Chinese in the Development of Social Harmonization at Lasem

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**Abstract**---The Chinese in Lasem is a unique entity, they merge in the social life of people who are dominated by ethnic Javanese. This study aims to analyze the contribution of the Chinese in Lasem in the development of social harmony. This research was conducted using qualitative methods with a phenomenological design. The data source of this research came from Chinese figures. Data were collected using in-depth interview techniques. Data analysis uses an interactive model. The results study are: 1) the Chinese community has an open mind and a strong national outlook so that they can view differences as social capital to cooperate in development; 2) collaboration between ethnic Chinese in Lasem and Javanese can be seen in aspects of work, religious activities, and social service; and 3) nationalism, history and Pancasila became the dominant factor in shaping the Lasem Chinese mindset about the importance of building social harmony. The conclusion of this study is that Chinese are very important elements of society and play a role in the development of social and economic life in Lasem.

**Keywords:** Chinese, Development, Harmonization, Lasem

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese in Lasem are a unique entity. Unlike the life of the Chinese in big cities in Indonesia which are exclusive and occupy Chinatowns which are socially separate from indigenous settlements [1], In fact, the Chinese in Lasem have long been integrated into the life of Javanese and a few Arabs [2], [3]. They unite themselves with society because they believe that social harmony and solidarity must be fostered in national affairs. Even so, the negative perception towards Chinese groups in Indonesia in general remains negative [4]. They are given the stigma of being an exclusive, anti-social, and lowly caring group [5]. This is of course very unfortunate, especially when looking at the Lasem context. The

stigma attached to Chinese society cannot be separated from the New Order policy (1966-1998) which discriminated against and separated them from the wider social life [6], [7]. Chinese groups were ostracized and their culture was prohibited, even their religion and beliefs were not recognized by the state [8]. The acts of discrimination carried out did not stop there, but at the grassroots level hatred against Chinese was continuously spread through anti-communist propaganda. Since the reign of President Sukarno (1945-1966), Chinese groups have sympathized with communism, but this does not mean that all Chinese are communists [9]. After the communist movement collapsed in 1965-1966 and the ideology was banned, Chinese groups were also affected. They are considered as people who believe in communism, this is reinforced by the existence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) which also makes communism the state ideology [10]. All these prejudices continue to persist in society, even until the reform period (1998-2020).

Lasem is an exception in the context of exclusion and discrimination against Chinese. Various ethnic groups in Lasem live side by side and cooperate with each other, almost all of whom take part in social life. This kind of thing shows a positive relationship and mutual trust between groups, even some Chinese in Lasem are able to occupy strategic positions in the government [11], [12]. Not only that, they also have a place in religious, cultural, and social groups. The position of the Chinese that has earned a place of respect in Lasem society is not achieved through political means, but rather the fruit of long-established social harmonization. In addition, most Chinese in Lasem are Muslims who have strong beliefs about: brotherhood and humanity. This is what makes other ethnic communities easy to accept Chinese as their part. In addition, Chinese are also very active in social activities such as: social service, disaster management, zakat, and cooperation in the cultural field. They do not hesitate to go directly to society for social and cultural activities, on the other hand,

the Javanese people also collaborate in the cultural and religious fields with Chinese [13], [14]. As a case in point, Chinese and Javanese were able to work together to build places of worship for Confucian religious groups. This is not only due to economic matters, but there is a sense of humanity and idealism that is owned by the community to cooperate in all fields. Many Chinese philanthropists have contributed to the education of the pesantren, namely traditional Islamic educational institutions, and some Chinese Muslim figures have even taken charge of the pesantren. This form of cooperation is empirically a positive narrative to be disseminated in society, especially in an effort to fight against narratives of hatred against Chinese which so far can still be easily found through social media.

The research was triggered by a study conducted by Widodo [15] who conducted a study on anti-communism violence in Indonesia after the authoritarian New Order regime under General Suharto. In his writings, Widodo managed to detect that violence against Chinese organized through the state had fatal consequences for the Chinese position in society. In addition, so far there have been no formal steps to foster relations between Chinese and other ethnicities at the grassroots level. At least until 2015, various cases that dragged Chinese as victims were still prone to occur, such as: rape, robbery, looting, murder and disappearances. This case shows that the narrative of hatred produced to exclude Chinese has resulted in acts of violence and racism that undermine the human rights of Chinese citizens. Another study that underlies this research is Dawis [16] which examines the Chinese struggle for identity after the New Order. The search for identity is always at a dead end, because the stigma against Chinese is so inherent and regenerating in society. This hampered the process of improving Chinese identity, which actually has a sense of concern for Indonesia. The prejudice against Chinese resulted in Chinese relations with other ethnicities becoming cold and stiff. This is maintained through socialization in society with the same hateful narrative as when the New Order prohibited Chinese culture and religion from being adhered to in Indonesia. These two studies have triggered the birth of a more constructive study of Chinese, especially those that highlight the role of Chinese in the process of building social harmony in society.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze the role of Chinese in Lasem in building social harmony in society. The focus of this research is the social, economic, and cultural roles of the Chinese community for the creation of a harmonious social life in Lasem and the factors that motivate Chinese to take a role in society. An important contribution of this research is the dissemination of peace texts, especially for Chinese, who have so far received discriminatory treatment in

several places. This research can serve as a counter discourse for the narrative of hatred against Chinese that has been defended for political purposes.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was carried out using qualitative methods with a phenomenological design [17]. The phenomenon of this research is the role of Chinese in efforts to develop social harmony in Lasem. The data source of this research came from Chinese figures. Data is collected using snow ball to get detailed information [18]. At least based on the results of data collection, this study involved 8 Chinese figures from various circles. Data were collected using in-depth interview techniques [19], [20], This technique allows the researcher to explore as deep information as possible about the object being studied. The validity of the data was checked through the source triangulation technique [21], namely comparing the information from each data provider, thus the data obtained will be maximized and the analysis process will be more in-depth. The data analysis of this study used an interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman [22] with the stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions / verification. This study produced 4 transcriptions to facilitate the process of finding analysis. The transcriptions were shown through the following coding: Research Data 1 = RD1; Research Data 2 = RD2; etc.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One of the things that distinguishes Chinese in Lasem and other areas is the issue of openness. This attitude makes everyone who meets Chinese feel like they are meeting Javanese people in general who are friendly and polite. This at the same time undermines the notion that Chinese are always exclusive [23], [24]. In Lasem, the Chinese do not hesitate to sit together in coffee shops to discuss national politics. This is a unique finding, because in general the Chinese are considered a society that does not have a strong sense of nationality, in fact they are considered a society that does not care about nationalism [25]. However, this negative assumption is not found in Lasem, the Chinese community is very interested in discussing national issues such as; history, problems of citizenship, politics, unity and diversity. These issues become an interesting discussion for Chinese circles, this is as conveyed by RD2: "We follow political issues not to behave politically practically, but to gain knowledge about the latest developments of the domestic political situation, as well as reading history. not to

bring up the wounds of the past, but to improve the situation in the future." In line with that RD3 argues: "We are trying to strengthen self-knowledge to avoid conflict situations, we do not want the violence that has occurred in Indonesian history to be repeated in the future." This statement shows a very open knowledge, even the Chinese who have been known exclusively to be able to speak the problem of diversity fluently and uniquely do not place it.n mereka pada posisi korban, melainkan mereka memiliki mindset sebagai aktor perubahan [26], [27]. Chinese make Indonesia a nationality that must be defended, they love Indonesia so much. This is evidenced by several things such as the activeness of Chinese in scouting, community organizations, religious organizations, and social organizations that are engaged in socializing national values. Historical knowledge and citizenship are so strong and underlie Chinese thinking to continue to maintain unity in Indonesia.

Lasem is a very inclusive environment for all groups. The Chinese and Javanese in Lasem have almost no conflict [2], [12]. RD2 argues: "At the time of the racial violence in 1998, we were protected by ethnic Javanese. They warned us not to attack us. To this day we reply with kindness in cooperation in various fields, history cannot be erased." This opinion represents all the general prejudice that the Chinese are a common enemy, in fact in Lasem because of the kindness they have done and the open social relationships that make the Javanese ethnic feel concerned about protecting. The Chinese-Javanese brotherhood was so strong. It is not uncommon for Javanese and Chinese businessmen to work together and form bigger companies. This is evidenced by the Lasem batik industry, which is mostly the result of cooperation between the two ethnic groups. After Presidential Instruction (Inpres) Number 14 of 1967 concerning the prohibition of Chinese religious activities, beliefs and customs was revoked in 1999 by President Abdurrahman Wahid, coinciding with the fall of the New Order military regime, the Chinese community regained freedom in carrying out cultural and religious practices. they. In addition, they are also more flexible socially [28]. In Lasem, after the regulation was repealed, the Chinese immediately prepared for their religious celebrations and rituals. Uniquely, this preparation was supported by Javanese ethnicity and it resulted in cultural acculturation, in the celebration of Chinese New Year there are elements of Javanese culture that are displayed, such as figures in Javanese mythology, namely Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong. Javanese specialties are also a complement to the celebration of the holidays.

The discussion above shows the progress in culture [29]–[31]. The Chinese generally feel Javanese influence in their lives, this is strengthened

through inter-ethnic marriages. RD4 argues: "I remember in 1998, after the Presidential Instruction on the prohibition of Chinese culture was lifted, we all cried and rushed to welcome the celebration of the first Chinese New Year after 32 years it was banned by the state, we are very grateful to Abdurrahman Wahid. Many Javanese people helped prepare for the first Chinese New Year celebration, I still remember." This memory becomes the capital for the formation of a harmonious society in Lasem [32]–[34]. The Chinese have great respect for other ethnicities in Lasem, from among the quite wealthy Chinese, they often perform social services for underprivileged families of other ethnicities. This social service is also commonly practiced by the well-off Javanese. This mutualism symbiosis has become a habit for the Lasem community. In addition, at the time of celebrating religious holidays, both Javanese and Chinese took turns guarding and enlivening the celebration. This collaboration also continued in the construction of places of worship, Chinese and Javanese people diligently contributed to the construction of houses of worship of their respective religions, at least in Lasem there were two dominant ones, namely Islam and Christianity, while the Confucian group was still relatively small. This collaborative practice shows positive social relationships [35], [36] and has had a broad impact on the establishment of peace in the Lasem community to date.

The Chinese in Lasem strongly believe that nationalism is the best way to create social harmony in society. RD1 argues: "After reformation we (Chinese) recognize new democracy and nationalism, for us the nationalism that must be fought for in Indonesia is an attitude of respect between groups, with that harmonization will be created automatically." In line with that RD2 argues: "we are practicing nationalism when we cooperate with other groups from religious and ethnic groups, at least that is what we must believe in trying to create peace." These two opinions are representative enough to describe the psychological situation of the Chinese in Lasem. Well-maintained and well-maintained social relations are based on the strong idealism of community members [37], [38]. Chinese Lasem also strongly believes that historical knowledge is very important in building collective memory in a peaceful society. RD3 argues: "We are lucky, the Lasem community in general is more diligent in remembering good than bad, we also make it a habit to tell positive stories to children as a form of socialization and internalization of values." This form of socialization is basic education for children to create caring, tolerant, and solidarity between groups. In the historical narrative that is conveyed, the Chinese also tell stories from Javanese history such as about Majapahit and Demak. They are very familiar with the character

Ceng Ho as a propagator of Islam from China who is an irreplaceable influential figure for Chinese in Indonesia. These histories live as oral traditions in society [39], they do not foster hatred at all and are very pro towards peace and diversity. Chinese believe that the unity of Indonesia is one of which is created because people practice Pancasila (the five principles of life of Indonesian society) as an ideology [40], [41]. RD4 argues: "without Pancasila, Indonesia would have divided and become small countries, but because Pancasila was maintained, Indonesia became a country that has remained intact until now." In line with that RD2 argues: "Pancasila is a guide for Indonesian peace and unity, we tell children to believe in Pancasila as an ideology that they must carry out until they grow old. We believe that Pancasila is knowledge that is important to be mastered by every citizen." This opinion represents nationalism and Chinese attitudes as part of Indonesian citizens who care about national unity and peace [42]–[44]. This is in line with the Pancasila genealogy which was created to accommodate all groups living in Indonesia from ethnicity, religion, ethnicity, and other groups.

Research supports Widodo's opinion [15] that relations between Chinese and other ethnicities need to be strengthened to achieve social harmony, strengthening these relations can be done in the cultural, social, economic, and religious fields. All the actions that are carried out lead to humanization, the process of forming a natural relationship between humans [45]. Thus, peaceful and tolerant conditions will be realized. This is what has been happening in Lasem, the community has a strong sense of brotherhood so that they voluntarily cooperate in several ways. Cooperation is maintained as a positive habit and is believed to be the capital for the formation of a peaceful society. This is in line with the results of Suryadinata's study [1] that in order to create a fair relationship between ethnic groups, understanding and basic knowledge are needed which will serve as guidelines for the community to solidarity. Chinese need an inclusive space to foster such cooperation, historical trauma can be a factor that shapes their psychological situation into antipathy to other ethnicities. However, positive memories of inter-ethnic relations make them more open to social cooperation [10]. This can be found in Lasem, where communities work together and in solidarity with each other to create an established social harmony. They underlie their thoughts on social harmonization through an understanding of nationalism, history, and Pancasila. This at the same time supports Dawis [16] about the search for Chinese identity in the reform era.

The Chinese community actually has a desire to be involved in social development efforts, but because of the negative stigma and prejudice against them, this productive social relationship does

not occur. In Lasem, productive social relations between ethnic Chinese and other ethnicities are built on the basis of mutual need. Humans cannot live alone, neither can ethnic groups work alone to carry out development without assistance from other ethnicities. This principle is rooted in the multicultural society of Lasem. This research also refutes Coppel and Prudey's arguments [23], [46] which stated that violence, stigma, and discrimination against Chinese occurred in all regions of Indonesia. It seems that they ignore the Lasem context in making important decisions that are read by the majority of Indonesians today. Lasem is concrete evidence that inter-ethnic peace is real and can be fostered for various reasons. From Lasem, people can learn about tolerance and brotherhood among humans.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The Chinese are generally considered to be an exclusive and anti-social group. The Chinese in Lasem are an exception, where people of various ethnicities live in harmony and a high spirit of tolerance. Tolerance in the life of the Lasem community is reflected in social cooperation between ethnic groups, this cooperation occurs in the social, economic, cultural and religious fields. Cooperation is more identical as a form of enculturation of multicultural values that occur naturally in society. The Chinese there tend to have a high and strong national spirit, they have an established world view of peace and brotherhood. The cooperation carried out received encouragement from factors of nationalism, history, and Pancasila as ideology. Chinese consider these three things very essential to build social harmony in society. Peace, brotherhood and cooperation in all fields characterize the Chinese community in Lasem, which is continuously cared for and maintained through socialization in the family and society. The life of the Chinese in Lasem undermines the notion that the Chinese are an exclusive and anti-social group, the fact is that for some reason and a strong sense of nationality they can unite with society and work together to build social harmony.

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