



Sino-Javanese Alliance Under the Dutch Hegemony During the 18th Century

Daya Negri Wijaya¹, Hariyono Hariyono¹[0009-0007-5765-4434], Deny Yudo Wahyudi¹,
Gentur Isra'j Maulana¹

¹ Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia
Daya.negri.fis@um.ac.id

Abstract. This reseach examines the harmonization between the Chinese community and the Javanese society in their resistance against the Dutch hegemony. The Chinese community, which had been present in Java long before the arrival of the Dutch and had assimilated into the local culture, eventually united to fight against Dutch hegemony, as reflected in the resistance of the Lasem community known as the Yellow War. This harmonization of the communities is an intriguing subject for in-depth study This research using literature review method. Through this research, it can be explored how the Chinese ethnic community and the native Javanese society united to resist the Dutch East India Company (VOC). This research approaches the topic by analyzing the geopolitical aspects in Java in the 18th century and examining the process of mobilizing the Chinese community from Batavia to Lasem, forming a force to confront the VOC. The study focuses on: 1. to understand the geopolitics of Java during the 18th century, 2. to examine the yellow war in Lasem.

Keywords: Chinese, Dutch, geopolitics, Javanese, VOC

1 Introduction

Indonesia is known as a large and diverse nation. The term "large" encompasses various aspects such as ethnicity, religion, race, traditions, and more. While this diversity is seen as a positive and valuable asset that needs to be preserved and maintained, it can also pose a threat if not handled wisely, leading to social divisions and potential conflicts. It is crucial to understand and emphasize history, especially to the younger generations. Unfortunately, historical records often lack detailed information about the involvement of the Chinese community in the struggle for independence. The achievements of the Chinese community are also often overlooked. Only a few young people may be aware of the role played by the Chinese community in the national struggle.

The Chinese ethnicity, known for its trading abilities across the world, has been present since ancient times. Chinese communities have spread to various parts of the world, including Southeast Asia, and Indonesia is one of their preferred destinations for trade. The Chinese community has become a strong and rooted community in the regions where they reside, blending with the local cultures and preserving their own

traditions and architectural styles. The resurgence of China has led to a growing awareness among some Chinese communities about their cultural heritage. The first-generation Chinese community in Southeast Asia, who have not lost their Chinese cultural heritage, feels culturally connected to the rising China. However, for most Chinese people born and raised in the region, the appeal of China's resurgence is not significant. They may take pride in their cultural heritage and explore their ancestral origins, but their cultural identification with China diminishes due to the strong sense of native nationalism in the regions where they reside. They must continue to adapt to the regional environment. They are more oriented towards the country they inhabit, as long as the country does not enforce overt discrimination against the Chinese community. It is incorrect to assume that all Chinese people in Indonesia belong to the "commercial bourgeoisie" class, as many of them are not wealthy and have assimilated into the lower-class society [1].

The history of tolerance in Lasem began when a Ming dynasty envoy named Bi Nang Un first arrived on the island of Java in 1413. It continued with the introduction of Islam and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) by Sunan Bonang in 1588, the Yellow War in 1740, Indonesia's independence in 1945, the reform era in 1998, and up to the present day [2].

In 1740, a massive resistance against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was led by the Chinese community in Batavia, known as the Angke incident, which claimed thousands of lives. As a result, around 1,000 Chinese people from Batavia fled and sought refuge in the east, with some of them arriving in Lasem. The arrival of the Chinese was welcomed by Duke Lasem Oei Ing Kiat, who allowed them to establish new settlements in the Sambong and Narukan areas west of Lasem City. In Batavia, the Chinese community primarily worked as traders, port workers, and laborers known for their hard work. Consequently, many new laborers came to work in Lasem, including as port workers, agricultural laborers, and laborers for the local population. Oei Ing Kiat also employed them in river normalization projects. This was due to the dredging and embankment project of the Babagan River, which had silted up due to the Chinese-Batavia migration. Additionally, they also widened the Kanal or Kamandung River from Banjar Mlati, Karanggan, to the entrance of the Babagan River so that merchant ships could enter the heart of the city. Therefore, Dasun became a bustling port and a center of trade [3].

However, the changes in Lasem did not last long. Turmoil returned as the politically stronger VOC targeted Rembang. The region was strategically located in the middle of Western and Eastern Java and was a trade hub supported by abundant teakwood from the forests. Rembang was also considered essential territory for the VOC government. Subsequently, the VOC established a regency government and trading office in Rembang and Jepara. The actions of the VOC were seen as a serious threat and had eroded the territorial integrity of the Kadipaten Lasem. Furthermore, Pakubuwono II called for a war against the Dutch colonial rule in 1741. The Dutch fort in Kartosuro was burned and destroyed, and Sultan Pakubuwono II instructed all regents in the Mataram region to resist the Dutch. As a result, Oei Ing Kiat, along with Tan Ke Wie and Panji Margono, built a militia force with the people of Lasem with the aim of planning an attack on VOC barracks in Rembang, Juana, and Jepara [4].

In Indonesia, the Chinese community has spread to various cities and formed blended communities, integrating into the socio-economic fabric of society. Almost every city and district, especially in Java, is inhabited by Chinese communities who play a significant role in the local economy. However, their presence and establishment did not come without challenges. The history of the Chinese community in Java, specifically, has been marked by conflicts resulting from cultural differences, which have been exploited by various parties for their own interests. One notable conflict occurred in 1740 when a large-scale massacre of the Chinese community took place in Batavia (now Jakarta), instigated by the Dutch VOC government [5].

2 Research Method

This research used literature research, utilizing data sources such as reference books and scientific journal articles. The research collected data from literature selecting, reading and note-taking, and processing relevant information to answer the research questions. This procedure included: 1) exploring general ideas about the research, 2) searching for information that supports the research topic, 3) refining the research focus and organizing relevant materials, 4) seeking and finding data sources in the form of primary literature, such as books and scientific journal articles, 5) reorganizing materials and summarizing conclusions obtained from the data sources, 6) reviewing the analyzed information and selecting relevant findings to discuss and address the research questions, 7) enriching the data sources to strengthen the data analysis, and 8) compiling the research findings.. The following steps are taken in this process: selecting the general ideas of the research topic, searching for supporting information on the topic, refining the research focus, finding and obtaining the necessary reading materials, classifying the reading materials, reading and taking research notes, reading and enriching the reading materials, re-categorizing the reading materials, and finally, beginning to write the report.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Geopolitics in the 18th-Century Java

Geopolitics, theoretically, encompasses two concepts: space (geography) and power or the relations of power (politics). Geographically, space is essentially static. However, it becomes dynamic because it is not empty; it contains various natural resources and human resources that can determine the life, well-being, prosperity, and destiny of a nation. Geopolitics is one of the strategies to control and conquer space as an effort to fulfill the interests and needs of a nation. The desire to control and conquer space is what makes geopolitics important for a country. Economic, technological, social, and cultural changes resulting from the increasing need for the survival and existence of a nation give rise to various geopolitical strategies to control and conquer space [6].

In Java, this pattern underlies the process of restoring a hierarchical-concentric geopolitical order on the island of Java, in accordance with the primordialism of the paddy field tradition enriched by Indian and Islamic traditions. Geographically, Javanese cities can be divided into two parts: "Coastal" cities and "Inland" cities. Both coastal and inland cities initially had similar structures. However, in the course of historical development, coastal cities had a different structure from inland cities. This is because coastal cities had more interactions with foreigners from "across the sea" as a result of advancements in navigation. Consequently, the population of coastal cities became more heterogeneous compared to the relatively homogenous population of inland cities. In pre-colonial Java, cities did not have fixed administrative boundaries. Everything depended on the ruler. A ruler usually resided in the capital of the kingdom or district. That is why major cities in the past such as Demak, Kota Gede, Kartasura, Pajang, and others could easily collapse or disappear without a trace [6].

In pre-colonial Java, cities essentially followed the pattern of a Mandala city, continuing the tradition of cities during the era of Hindu Java. In practice, Javanese cities in the past had a central (core) city, consisting of the ruler's palace (Keraton or district) with a central square (alun-alun) and other important buildings around it. If enemies wanted to destroy or conquer the local ruler, symbols of physical power such as the palace or Keraton and its supporting structures had to be leveled to the ground. It is as if the light had to be extinguished first. Consequently, the city would become weak or even die.

Since the 18th century, the power of Javanese kings had to be shared with the colonial government of the Netherlands. Due to the aforementioned political circumstances, the royal capitals of Surakarta and Yogyakarta could not be designed according to the concepts that had existed since the era of Hindu Java. That is why there are forts and Dutch governor's offices in the central areas of Surakarta and Yogyakarta. However, from the 13th to the 15th century, there was significant trade growth in Southeast Asia in general and Java in particular. As a result of advancements in navigation, many foreign traders came to cities on the north coast of Java. These traders came from India (Jambudwipa), Cambodia, China, Vietnam (Yawana), Champa, South India, Bengal, and Siam [7]. Furthermore, the resistance led by Diponegoro, known as the Java War (1825-1830), was the largest resistance against colonial rule in Java in the early 19th century. Historian Peter Carey referred to Diponegoro's resistance as a marker of the end of the old order in Java and the beginning of the modern era. In this sense, the Java War can be seen as part of the significant changes that swept the world at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century [8].

3.2 The Yellow War of Lasem

The history of the people of Lasem's resistance against Dutch colonial rule began during the time of Amangkurat IV (1717-1726 AD). In 1740, there was a massive massacre of the Chinese people by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Batavia, known as the Angke tragedy, which claimed thousands of lives [9]. Lasem has a unique history of acculturation and assimilation. From the arrival of Cheng Ho to the patriotic story of Oey Ing Kiat, Tan Kee Wie, and Raden Panji Margono, who made a blood oath and

fought together against the VOC. The understanding of Lasem's history has been passed down through generations to this day, serving as a cultural heritage in Lasem. The process of assimilation and acculturation has occurred naturally without coercion and external interference. Many people have engaged in intermarriage and lived in harmony [10]. The distribution of Chinese people in Indonesia, particularly on the island of Java, is mainly found in the northern coastal regions. Most of them come from the provinces of Fukien and Kwang Tung. One of the areas with a significant Chinese population in Central Java is Lasem [11].

Lasem has a long history of tolerance and harmonization between the native population and the ethnic Chinese immigrants. As a small town, Lasem has proven the flourishing of tolerance among the Javanese community as the indigenous people and the Chinese community as immigrants. The blending of these two ethnic groups is evident in various aspects of life, especially in the economic and social sectors. Even when the nation was fighting against Dutch colonialism, both communities in Lasem fought side by side against the colonizers. The long history of Lasem being a city of plurality did not suddenly appear in the present time. In the early 14th century, the small town of Lasem was part of the Majapahit Kingdom. Historical records have noted the social interaction between the native population of Lasem and the Chinese ethnicity, even since the 14th century until the 16th century, following the wave of Chinese migration to the land of Java during the Majapahit era. Although the interaction between these two ethnic groups had its ups and downs, harmony and tolerance always prevailed [4].

In 1740, a massive resistance against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was carried out by the Chinese community in Batavia, known as the Angke incident, which claimed thousands of lives. As a result, approximately 1,000 Chinese people from Batavia fled and sought refuge in Lasem. Their arrival was welcomed by Adipati Lasem Tumenggung Widyaningrat (Oei Ing Kiat), who allowed them to establish several new settlements. Concurrently with the uprising against the Dutch East India Company by a combined Javanese-Chinese force, the people of Lasem appointed three rebel leaders named Panji Margono, Oei Ing Kiat, and Tan Kee Wie. The rebel forces from Lasem were known as the "Laskar Dampo Awang Lasem".



Fig. 1. Panji Margono Miniatur's at Gi Yong Bio temples (Personal documentation, 2023)

Battles occurred between the Lasem forces, consisting of religious students (*santri*) and Chinese individuals under the command of Oei Ing Kiat, against the Rembang legion soldiers. The war raged on continuously for three months. The fever of resistance against the Dutch East India Company spread everywhere, prompting villages and districts around Lasem and Rembang to join the struggle. During those three months of battle, thousands of lives were lost on both sides [4].

Although ultimately the resistance of the people of Lasem ended in defeat, the fiery spirit of the Lasem community, united in plurality, against the hegemony of the VOC at that time became a turning point where various races, tribes, nations, and ethnicities united to expel the colonizers. After the death of Oei Ing Kiat, the resistance in Lasem was completely extinguished. Lasem was once again controlled by the Dutch, and Oei Ing Kiat's house was occupied by his nephew, who was appointed as Captain Tituler of Lasem, while all his ships and boats were confiscated. Tejakusuman residence owned by Raden Panji Margono was occupied by Mr. Happen, a Dutch controller, in 1751. The Lasem region was separated from Rembang de facto. Rembang was led by Hangabei Honggojoyo, while Lasem was led by Tumenggung Citrasoma IV. Suroadimenggolo III was returned to Semarang for being considered unsuccessful in preventing the rebellion of the Lasem community. In 1780, after the situation in Lasem calmed down, the Chinese population in Babagan, Lasem, established the Gie Yong Bio Temple to commemorate the services of the three rebel leaders of Lasem, namely Tan Kee Wie, Oei Ing Kiat, and Raden Panji Margono.



Fig. 2. The Lasem War diorama in the city of Lasem (Personal documentation,2023)

4 Conclusion

The historical event holds significant importance for the present-day people. It symbolizes heroism and unity in the plurality of Lasem, bringing together indigenous religious students, nobility, syncretic followers, and the monumental Chinese ethnic group. This event needs to be immortalized and passed down to future generations. Moreover, it is hoped that this event can become a local historical content taught in schools in Lasem and the Rembang Regency, serving as a pioneer towards regional and national historical awareness. Another undeniable fact acknowledged by the people of Lasem is their acceptance and willingness to allow immigrants to occupy strategic positions in society. They welcome those who wish to contribute and provide enlightenment, holding important positions within the community. The integrated togetherness and harmonious relationships in the narrative of the Yellow War serve as the foundation for maintaining peaceful relations among the residents of Lasem. This harmonious relationship is upheld among the Chinese elite (businesspeople and organization managers) and the religious student elite (Islamic scholars and pesantren caregivers) to ensure communication and mitigate the threat of violence.

The values of struggle and unity that occurred in the past are hoped to serve as lessons for fostering mutual respect among ethnicities and religious communities. In this regard, it aims to reduce hatred and divisive sentiments towards specific ethnic groups. This can be achieved and has been exemplified by the Javanese society in the past, as reflected in the united struggle of the Lasem community against the VOC during

the event of the Yellow War. In the future, research on the Lasem Yellow War can become a reference for developing further research.

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