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## **Communication Patterns in the Process of Ethnic Mixing in Kapitan Village, Palembang, among the Descendants of Kapitan Tjoa Ham Lim**

**Henny Yusalia<sup>1</sup>, Atwar Bajari<sup>2</sup>, Dadang Suganda<sup>3</sup>, Siti Karlinah<sup>4</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*This article discusses the intermingling of ethnic Chinese descendants and local communities in Kampung Kapitan, Palembang. The results of this research are based on qualitative methods and an ethnographic communication approach, which includes observation, interviews and data analysis. Research highlights communication patterns that are important in the assimilation process, especially in the context of Chinese communities. This communication pattern involves understanding cultural characteristics, adhering to ancestral teachings, and the belief that all traditions and rituals have the same goal for good. People of Chinese descent and local communities in Kampung Kapitan understand that these cultural differences and traditions are for good and safety, so they can accept and adopt each other's rituals. This article also links the research results with similar phenomena in other communities in various regions in Indonesia, which shows a relationship pattern that adopts all religions and emphasizes aspects of togetherness as a solution to absorbing cultural diversity. This study highlights the importance of understanding cultural characteristics in establishing inter-ethnic relationships and overcoming cultural differences. This communication pattern is key in the process of inter-ethnic assimilation in Kapitan Village, with an emphasis on understanding cultural characteristics, adhering to ancestral teachings, and the belief that all traditions have the same goal.*

**Keywords:** *Communication Pattern, Ethnic Integration, Cultural Adaptation*

### **Introduction**

The existence of ethnic communities of Chinese descent cannot yet be said to be unified, even though they are present as part of the history of that community. Problems can arise caused by political contestation, economic disparities, or religious differences. In some cases the problems that occur are still latent (Ling, 2016). Open conflict was not very prominent, except for the events of 1998 which had dominant political overtones, but ethnic Chinese were the main targets.

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<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Program at Communication Science, Faculty of Communication Science, Padjadjaran University, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Communication Science, Padjadjaran University, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Cultural Studies, Padjadjaran University, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Faculty of Communication Science, Padjadjaran University, Indonesia

Several analyzes state that the problems between ethnic Chinese and local residents are due to problems of adaptation that have not been resolved, or the adaptation process is not going well (Wu, 2016; Hoon, 2019). This adaptation is related to how ethnic Chinese people adapt to the conditions of the surrounding community, including social, cultural, economic and even political aspects (Hoon, 2019), including how the local population accepts them as part of them. This acceptance covers all aspects that appear in everyday life.

There has been an assumption that the lack of integration with local communities is caused by religious factors, physical characteristics, traditions and habits that are still maintained, as well as political factors which often contribute to problems (Mulyana & Zubair, 2015). Ethnic Chinese are generally Christian, Protestant, Confucian and Buddhist. This is different from the local community which is predominantly Muslim. Religious sentiments are very easy to raise and become ammunition when there is a problem (Hoon, 2006). This was proven during the 1998 conflict, many ethnic Chinese in Indonesia were busy displaying prayer mats on their shop doors in the hope that they would not be disturbed by rioters. The prayer mat is a symbol that is synonymous with Islam.

Hoon also said that the economic incentives offered by China have been a major impetus for Chinese Indonesians to undertake a renewal in reconnecting with their Chineseness, learning Mandarin and enthusiastically consuming Chinese cultural products. By examining the historical trajectory and contemporary dynamics of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, this article argues that for now, Chineseness is understood positively among Chinese Indonesians as an economic asset. It was also stated that the post-Soeharto reform and democratization process had opened up new space for Chinese Indonesians to rediscover their cultural heritage and identity, which coincided with China's rise in the global economic, military and political arena.

In the larger context, it is quite logical, of the many assimilated ethnic Chinese in the region, who are now finding the urge to rediscover their ethnic identity and heritage to engage with the emerging Chinese state. Even though currently the issue of Chineseness is being received positively in an economic aspect, no one can predict if there is a possibility of a backlash against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia if bilateral relations between China and Indonesia change and if Indonesia's domestic economy and politics face challenges in the future.

This means that here, the issue of inter-ethnic relations remains a big problem. The possibility of major problems arising in the future in the context of ethnic relations can still occur. This assimilation is not yet complete, because there are many political and policy aspects surrounding it. For the future in long-term discussions, it is not certain what conditions will occur. Hoon agrees that everything can change and occur in various forms and conditions.

Meanwhile, Tanasaldy (2013) made his analysis in the Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs volume 47 number 2 entitled Opportunities and challenges: Social and political activism of the Indonesian Chinese in post-Reform Indonesia. Tanasaldy's study is based on the activists of the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia, especially in the reform era. This article highlights various problems faced, but still wants to say that the problems of past conditions cannot be forgotten.

Over the past fifteen years, Chinese in Indonesia have maintained strong social and political activism in addition to their already prominent role in the country's economy. The role of non-governmental organizations, including the media, in promoting pluralism and supporting Chinese emancipation is very necessary. Emancipation would not have been achieved without the active participation of the Chinese themselves in reasserting their citizenship status.

The issue of citizenship is indeed a serious problem among ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The existence of a policy during the New Order which required changing Chinese names to Indonesian, was considered as part of strengthening Indonesian identity. Meanwhile, on the other hand, this citizenship issue puts Chinese in a difficult position. Therefore, the challenges ahead are challenges regarding citizenship issues and policy challenges faced. However, the position of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia remains a major part and cannot be separated, but integration will really depend on how policies are issued by the state. This means that here, in society's position, there is actually no significant problem. Policy interventions that make this problem a big challenge in the future.

In another study, Yang et al. (2006) published the results of his research entitled Chinese Indonesians in a rapidly changing nation: Pressures of ethnicity and identity published in *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* volume 48 Number 1. The main idea in this publication is the historical aspect of the existence of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia which according to the author is indeed closely related to conflicts and various problems. The history of antagonism towards Chinese Indonesians in Indonesia must not be forgotten so that past mistakes can be avoided in the future. The tragic riots and murders that occurred in 1998 directly and disastrously impacted thousands of Chinese throughout Indonesia. Evidently, this crisis triggered various reactions from Chinese Indonesians.

## **Methods**

This research was conducted using qualitative methods and an ethnographic communication approach. The researcher was directly at the research location for approximately 3 months, observing community activities in Kapitan Village, following several activities, and interviewing 6 research informants. The observations looked at social activities, ways of communicating, people's responses to the symbols being interpreted, as well as non-verbal methods used by the community, both by residents of Chinese descent and local residents. For interviews, addressed to community leaders, ordinary members of society. The interview material emphasized aspects of community knowledge about the existence of each tribe, the history of regional origins, community understanding of ongoing communication symbols, and the ongoing assimilation process. The research results were then analyzed through ethnographic communication. This analysis was carried out from the beginning of the research, where the researcher began reducing data, grouping data, interpreting each data, then confirming it with relevant theories and the results of other previous research. After all the analyzes are completed, research conclusions are drawn. The focus of this method shows certain aspects of society, cultural values, learning or passing on traditions to the next generation, symbols used and interpreted, acceptance of other cultures, acculturation carried out, as well as historical and environmental factors that surround them.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Communication Patterns for Inter-Ethnic Mixing**

Referring to the discussion in the previous section, it appears that the communication aspect is an important factor in the process of assimilation between ethnicities, especially ethnic Chinese and local residents. The communication referred to here is not just limited to conveying messages or inter-ethnic conversations. Communication is a broad aspect, covering various symbols, the meaning of symbols including verbal and non-verbal sides which are always involved.

In the context of intercultural communication, it becomes very clear that contextual communication is in an important position. This is mentioned by Littlejohn (1999) that

communication occurs in certain situations and systems that influence what and how we communicate and what the meaning of the messages we carry. Communication does not occur in isolation or in isolation, but is part of a large system consisting of various elements that need to be considered. Communication always occurs in a context and the nature of communication depends greatly on this context. This means that places and environments encourage humans to determine the words and actions produced and interpret symbols produced by other people.

Referring to the principles of communication, as explained by Griffin, communication is symbolic, and communication also occurs in various spaces and times, so communication is everywhere. Mulyana (2001) also emphasized that problems can arise from communication, although problem solving cannot only be resolved by communication (communication is not a problem). It is important that communication plays a big role in establishing and maintaining relationships between people, especially in the context of cultural differences.

In the context of the case of inter-ethnic communication that took place in Kapitan Village, it appears that there was an effort to understand the culture and social conditions that existed in the community since the beginning of their occupation of this area. Understanding the existing culture can be said to be the key to the success of ongoing intercultural communication. There is understanding and knowledge about cultural characteristics which are then implemented in the relationship patterns that are built. There are two reasons why these characteristics will be important in order to become a better intercultural communicator. First, during the study of these characteristics, the close relationship between culture and communication will become clear. Huntington stated that, the most important things in culture include language, religion, traditions and habits. Second, learning and knowledge about cultural characteristics will lead to understanding and adjustments, which are fundamental for better intercultural relations (Samovar et al., 2002).

Samovar et al. (2002) also explains that culture is communication and communication is culture. It also explains the important relationship between culture and communication. He said that humans learn cultural views and patterns in the communication process. When humans interact with other people, humans will understand cultural beliefs, values, norms and language.

Therefore, referring to the context of this research, there are several important elements that shape intercultural communication patterns in society, especially in the community of Chinese descent in Kapitan Village.

There is an understanding of the cultural characteristics of local communities and vice versa. Since the beginning of the founding of Kampung Kapitan by Tjoa Ham Lin, there has been an awareness that they have different cultural characteristics. There are certain peculiarities, so these must be studied and understood well. This culture is of course different from the culture of the Chinese people in their area of origin, and that cannot be underestimated. The manifestation of this knowledge and understanding is the adoption of a culture that has developed. At a minimum, this is shown in the desire to follow and carry out various rituals that are prominent in society. Alms village and alms ruah, is one form of ritual that was adopted and continues to be developed today. Not only that, this adoption also includes other aspects such as food, clothing, houses and housing. Everything is an adoption of local community knowledge and habits. Settlements that are not clustered but are integrated with other residents, as well as the shape of the houses that imitate and are even exactly the same as the stilt houses of the Palembang people, are one real indicator.

Understanding these cultural characteristics is an important basis for ongoing integration. To understand acculturation, one must understand the interactional context in which it

occurs. This context includes the characteristics of the migrants themselves, the group or country from which they come, their socioeconomic status and resources, the country and local community in which they settle, and their fluency in the language of the destination country.

In the process that occurs, it tends to lead to a kind of enculturation process, which refers to a process that selectively acquires or maintains temporary inherited cultural elements, including selectively acquiring several elements from the recipient's cultural context (Weinreich, 2009). In the context of constraints determined by demographic and contextual factors, individuals can deliberately decide which cultural elements they wish to acquire or retain and which elements they wish to discard or reject. For example, in Kapitan Village, the Chinese community still maintains traditions in their worship rituals, but on the other hand also accepts and adopts the rituals of the local community. This actually has a different understanding from the traditions that apply to Chinese society in their area of origin.

This enculturation is certainly different from the model scheme mentioned by Berry (2006) regarding the acculturation process which he calls 4 models of acculturation. These forms are assimilation in the form of adopting the recipient culture and discarding the heritage culture, separation (rejecting the recipient culture and maintaining the heritage culture), integration (adopting the recipient culture and maintaining the cultural heritage), and marginalization (rejecting the recipient's heritage and culture).

In this mechanism of dealing with local communities, the Chinese community tends to carry out a selective process, and vice versa, local residents also act selectively. In the sense of the word there are adjustments and appreciation for differences. However, this adjustment is not comprehensive, in certain parts the identity of Chinese and local communities is still maintained.

Conditions like this, understanding of cultural characteristics and tending towards a form of enculturation, were later found in other places. Kunst and Sam (2013) found almost the same conditions in three Muslim minority groups in several countries, namely Germany, Turkey, France, England and Pakistan. Here there are adjustments to existing conditions, but identity and characteristics as a different group also occur. However, there are always efforts to understand the cultural characteristics experienced.

A reality like this actually doesn't just happen, especially in communities of Chinese descent. The need to understand regional conditions, local culture and respect every difference will actually always be rooted because it has become a level of values. Confucian teachings seem to have a correlation with the attitudes expressed by local society. A research says that the cultural orientation of ethnic Chinese migrants is created in such a way that for many people, this concept (assertiveness) has to be learned because it conflicts with their education, cultural traditions and family upbringing. Confucian principles are deeply rooted, such as respect for authority and an emphasis on 'giving face' to others and maintaining social harmony. From the findings of this research, there is empirical evidence that Confucian principles are deeply rooted in the psyche of migrant ethnic Chinese minorities regardless of their country of origin. McIntrie's view is based on the results of his research on the Chinese community in New Zealand, where the community of Chinese descendants has very diverse national origins, from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and so on. This shows that the problem occurs because there is no clear perception.

Local people who are not of Chinese descent also experience almost the same conditions, namely the understanding that their environment is an environment that was originally opened by the Chinese. There are cultures and traditions inherent in the community that they must understand and then become a common habit. Culturally, Palembang society also has a basis for acceptance of foreign cultures, be it Chinese, European, Arab and even

Indian (Ari, 2002). This then becomes a synergy and mutual understanding in the context of ongoing intercultural communication.

Obedience to the teachings of the ancestors

Obedience to ancestral teachings is the main key for the people of Kapitan Village. For the community of Chinese descent, this ancestor is Kapitan Tjoa Ham Lin as the main figure who started this region. The teachings conveyed are what then form and build communication with local residents. This has been discussed in detail in the previous section, where all the important teachings of Tjoa Ham Lin became the basis for the behavior of people of Chinese descent in this region.

This rule of obeying ancestors is actually also a teaching for Eastern communities (including Chinese). This is evident from the various rituals carried out, such as Ceng Beng (Grave Alms), Cap Go Meh, Sembahyang Thi Kong (prayer of the Gods), all of which are tributes to ancestors and efforts to always remind ourselves of the strength of our predecessors. Chinese society is also famous for its belief in gods, who are positioned as very sacred, always respected and worshiped.

A context like this also meets the habits and traditions of local communities in South Sumatra who believe in the strength of their predecessors. In local language, there is a term known as appreciation for Puyang (ancestors) (Cahya, 2021, Irwanto, Purwanto, Suryo, 2018). The community believes that these puyangs are exalted figures, have their own sacred value, and most importantly, violating the provisions of the puyang is believed to have a negative effect or in regional language it is said to bring harm or trouble to the local community (Irwanto, Purwanto, Suryo, 2018). Therefore, the teachings of the puyang must be followed and obeyed. Even though in the current context, according to advances in technology and information, biases sometimes arise in the understanding of puyang, but historically, culturally, society has had this.

Therefore, when there is a meeting of beliefs with other people, in this case those of Chinese descent, the belief that there are other people who have gone before and who have made great contributions, whatever their ethnicity, can still be trusted. Moreover, in the context of Kapitan Village, there is a belief that the ancestors who founded this village were ethnic Chinese.

Contexts like this can also be seen in many other places, where there is adherence to local traditions which are considered the teachings of the ancestors. As an example, it can be seen in one area in Pekalongan where initially there was a lot of conflict due to the opening of the People's Inti Plantation (PIR), and it turned out that it was later resolved after various adoptions of local customs and knowledge. The existence of the tradition of ngaruhke or visits to share discussions with each other, as well as the tradition of wedangke or drinking together to solve problems, has been proven to be able to minimize conflict. Traditions as believed by the people do not just happen, but there are teachings from the ancestors to maintain harmony and the common good.

A similar phenomenon regarding ancestral teachings is also found in Indian communities in California. There is a tradition called the local basketry tradition as a solution to solving social problems and language differences in society. For Indian communities, this can be done because there is an element of unification in the basket tradition, even though in essence everything remains different (Jordan & Shennan, 2003). Languages and customs can be adopted and solutions can be found for harmony in society. All of these are believed to be teachings from predecessors who taught them.

The belief that all traditions and rituals have the same meaning for good

This is an understanding in anticipating ritual differences that develop in society. As is known, the Kampung Kapitan area has a variety of different traditions and procedures. This

difference can be due to religious factors, ancestral teachings, or regional or ethnic origin. For example, Islamic religious groups believe that it is not necessary and not permissible to make offerings to statues or other than God. This is also known in Catholic teachings. Meanwhile, in Confucian teachings and general traditions in China, this is very common and even recommended. This phenomenon continues continuously and has become its own variation in society.

Likewise, in Chinese tradition the term Alms Village or Sedekah Ruah is not known before Ramadhan. This is different from the Muslim community, which has the habit of praying together and asking the Almighty for salvation. There is even a belief that if this is not done there will be a disaster or calamity in the village.

Regarding cultural and traditional differences like this, the people of Kampung Kapitan make adjustments by assuming that all these rituals are for good with the aim of safety. Whatever form of ritual and tradition is carried out, they consider it to have the same goal. Therefore, these differences can be reconciled by taking the essence of each ritual. This phenomenon is often found in the Kapitan Village community, so it is very common for the Chinese community to sponsor the implementation of rituals carried out by Muslims, and vice versa. They can accept it because they think it has good, not bad, goals. From a conflict resolution perspective, this can be categorized as a conflict management method because of its wisdom in seeing diversity. In the people of Kapitan Village, this has been implemented and continues to this day.

The relationship pattern model that adopts all religions and emphasizes aspects of togetherness can also be seen in several other areas such as the Lawe Sigala-Gala Tradition in Southeast Aceh, namely between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Ismail, 2007). In this tradition at Lawe Sigala-Gala, all communities are involved, both Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, the tradition of Joint Prayer held by Muslims will also be followed or implemented by non-Muslim community groups. Likewise, non-Muslim traditions such as Ecumenical celebrations, where Muslims participate even though they do not follow the rituals held. This kind of phenomenon is also found in the Wonosobo community in the Nyadran tradition, namely a ritual carried out before the month of Ramadan and followed by all village residents, both Muslims and non-Muslims (Darisma et al., 2018). Everything stems from the understanding that whatever the tradition, all have the same aims and objectives, therefore it is the obligation of all communities to make it a success.

## Conclusions

The communication pattern in the process of ethnic assimilation in Kapitan Village, Palembang, is a communication pattern that tends to focus on the existence of the Kapitan House and the activities of its residents. The existence of the residents of the Kapitan House determines how other residents of Chinese descent act and behave. The local community also uses the residents of the Kapitan House as a reference and often becomes a general assumption about what the Chinese community in this area really is. Meanwhile, for the residents of Rumah Kapitan, they also position themselves as role models, therefore various things are prepared and they are always open to communicating and connecting with the local community.

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