International Conference on Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship

Vol. 01 No. 01 August 2026, ISSN: 3163-2912

Toapekong: The Existing Of Chinese Indonesian Culture Case Study In Tegal City

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is widely recognized as a multicultural nation with extraordinary cultural diversity. This diversity does not merely represent national identity but also reflects deeply rooted values of tolerance and coexistence. One of the tangible manifestations of cultural acculturation can be found in the Chinese-Indonesian community of Tegal City through the annual Shedjit Toapekong Cultural Carnival. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method supported by literature review and documentation. The research aims to explore how the Shedjit Toapekong cultural relay functions not only as a religious ritual but also as a representation of interethnic tolerance and a potential cultural tourism attraction.The findings indicate that the active participation of multi-ethnic communities demonstrates strong social harmony. Furthermore, the integration of local Javanese elements within the celebration strengthens its position as a cultural tourism asset capable of promoting intercultural dialogue and sustainable heritage preservation.

Keywords: *Chinese-Indonesian Culture, Cultural Tourism, Cultural Relay, Toapekong,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in diverse cultures. This culture seeks one of the characteristics possessed by Indonesia. Indonesia is known to have around 300 ethnic groups, one of which is ethnic Chinese [1]. Indonesia is also known as a country with the largest ethnic Chinese population in the world living outside China [2]. This is due to the history of the arrival of Chinese people in ancient times with the aim of trading in Indonesia. In addition, there is evidence of the crossing of Chinese culture with the archipelago, especially Java, from traces of archaeological relics [3].

The influence of the arrival of China gave rise to a new culture that acculturated with local culture. The role of this culture must indeed be preserved through assistance from the community and [4]. According to [5] the population of Tegal in 2022 will reach 290,988 people. People from diverse backgrounds will undoubtedly bring much cultural diversity to the city of Tegal. Tegal City itself is a city that is very open with a culture so that a harmonious state is established in the community. Tolerance between religious communities is a characteristic of the city of Tegal and is manifested by the frequent holding of religious activities regardless of feathers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chinese-Indonesian Descent

Indonesia is a country with diverse tribes. One of the tribes is the ethnic Chinese tribe spread throughout Indonesia [6]. However, Indonesians who are ethnic Chinese are not native Chinese who come from China but are of Chinese descent. The word "Peranakan" is Malay, which means "child" [7]. In general, it can be understood that people of Chinese descent are Chinese people who have settled in Indonesia and have descendants who have lived in Indonesia since birth, giving rise to a new generation of descendants. The offspring of this new generation is called the Chinese-Indonesian breed. The initial story of China's entry into Indonesia was through trade relations [8]. Increasingly, the need for Chinese experts in gold mining is growing [9].

During the trading period, many ancient Javanese kingdoms collaborated to establish business relations with Chinese dynasties [10]. Over time, people of Chinese descent began to live in Indonesia for a long time to blend in with the local community. The problems of Chinese descent society arise when faced with the new order period and improve when entering the reform period [11]. In the city of Tegal, referring to [5] there are approximately 1305 people who adhere to Buddhism and Khong Hu Chu. Based on these data, the greater the number of adherents of a religion, the greater the effect of carrying out a religious activity on a group.

2.2 Cultural Relay

One form of tourism attraction is culture. According to [12], culture is the idea and work of humans that must be familiarized through learning and become the whole result of the cultivation of a work. Indonesian culture is comprised of culinary, fashion, and diverse arts [13]. Art in implementing its introduction can be done in various ways, one of which is relay. Kirab is a journey with regular and consecutive herrings (parades) [14]. If understood together, a cultural relay can be interpreted as an accompaniment activity for a cultural element to carry out certain traditional celebrations. This cultural relay is carried out by all levels of society regardless of anything and is an effort to preserve culture [15].

2. 3 Shedjit Toapekong

The series of Chinese cultural relays are usually held when there is a birthday celebration of one of the ancestors of the temple, known as shedjit [16]. The celebration of the shedjit followed by tapering is identical in the Asian region, which includes Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and China. Toapekong has a designation as "Great Uncle", which is described as a god who brings good luck [17]. The celebration of shedjit toapekong is usually done in a temple as the host. The host god that each temple has will be different from one another. This difference makes each temple have shedjit celebrations at different times. This difference factor is influenced by tradition. Tradition is the cycle of human life from the womb to the lifeless.

In addition, tradition can survive because it benefits the community that supports it. This culture is usually followed by the majority of people who belong to the Chinese race. In reality, based on cultural acculturation, shedjit celebrations can be enjoyed by every level of society, regardless of race or religion. This is realized based on tolerance in the social environment that has succeeded in melting into one unit. This worship teaches about filial piety towards elders and shows loyalty to maintain the good name of the community [18].

2. 4 Tek Hay Kyong Tegal Temple "Klenteng Tek Hay Kyong"

Klenteng is the name of a place of worship for Chinese people and represents several kinds of religions, such as Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Apart from being a place of worship, temples are also often used as places of social activities [19]. According to [20] in terms of history, the temple is an essential architectural art point that is full of culture from ethnic Chinese. Tek Hay Kyong Temple has been established for more than 2.5 centuries, precisely 262 years [21]. Since its inception in 1760 by Kapiten Souw Pek Gwan, this temple has witnessed the development of Chinese descendants in Tegal. This temple is also known for having an heirloom gamelan called Kiai Naga Mulya [22]. The existence of this heritage gamelan shows the role of Javanese customs in the cultural life of the Chinese community at that time and has developed until now.

3. METHOD

Location: Tek Hay Kiong Tegal Temple (July 15-16, 2023). In this study, researchers used qualitative descriptive study methods. This research method describes in detail the research results obtained by the researcher. Qualitative descriptive research, according to [23] explains that research with collected data in the form of words, images and not numbers, but all collected data is the key to quality research. According to [24] descriptive research is defined as research to investigate a condition or condition and the results are presented in the form of research.



Figure 1. Event's Rundown
Source**:** Instagram (2023)

According to [25] data collection techniques are the most strategic stage in a study because the goal is to attract data. Therefore, the data collection technique chosen uses documentation techniques and literature review. Documentation techniques are used to collect all information related to research in the form of images, sounds, manuscripts, and many other types. A literature review is used to ensure or validate research with a relevant correlation between theory and practice in the field.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Shedjit celebration at the temple's religious event is an annual agenda that is celebrated based on birthday

celebrations. This birthday is intended to commemorate the ancestors of the great gods "Kong Cho" and "Ma Cho" worshipped by the temple.



Figure 2. Event Brochure
Source**:** Instagram (2023)

As seen in Figure 2, it is known that this celebration is reserved for the god 'YM. KC. Ceng Gwan Cing Kun'. This god is one of the gods considered ancestral to the Tek Hay Kiong Tegal temple. Thus, the statement will be carried out in addition to being a birthday activity, also used as a momentum to introduce and preserve Chinese culture.



Figure 3. Welcome Banner
Source: Documentation (2023)

The background of Tegal is known as a peaceful city. The reason is that the city of Tegal, which consists of various cultures, religions, tribes, and others, always has harmony among its people. This has become a characteristic of the city of Tegal as a city of religious tolerance. Figure 3 even firmly shows the words 'Welcome to the Village of Religious Moderation'; through the banner, the city of Tegal proves its ability to establish harmony between religious communities. Data regarding guests and facilities are found as follows:

Table 1. Event Data's

No	Event	Planning	Facts
1	Toapekong	30 Palanquins	45 Palanquins
2	Culinary Market	30-40 Tenants	>50 Tenants (full)

Sumber : Interview (2023)

This special celebration invites up to 45 participants Palanquin to participate in performing the toapekong relay. The participants included Tegal, Slawi, Semarang, Banjaran, Pekalongan, and Cirebon. In addition, there are also culinary tours of various exciting foods and drinks to visit. Related data have been presented in Table 1 above.



Figure 4. Sequence Number of The Palanquin
Source: Documentation (2023)

Figure 4 explains that each participant from various regions gets a sequence number that can be used as a place to put and show off the Palanquin that will later follow the relay process. This process makes it easier for the committee to collect data and coordinate the number of Palanquins participating in the toapekong cultural relay activities.



Figure 5. Route of Carnival
Source**:** Instagram (2023)

This relay process takes more than 5 Km to travel because of the large number of Palanquin participating in the relay process and the enthusiasm of the community. The enthusiasm of the community can be seen in the number of crowds of travel companions jostling from the beginning to the return route, according to Figure 5. Activities before the procession, on the previous day, of course, were held first. In the culture section, Tegal temple, which still refers to Javanese culture, had the opportunity to exhibit a work offering in the form of a heritage gamelan performance, 'Kyai Naga Mulya', in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Gamelan Exhibition
Source**:** Instagram (2023)

This gamelan has enormous cultural value for the surrounding community. Moreover, as a Javanese people, the gamelan itself is a musical instrument that has social and spiritual meaning in every song it plays. This activity was made as a form of togetherness in the preservation of local culture raised. This is one way to introduce and promote local culture, seeing the momentum of a significant event attended by many tourists.



Figure 7. Religious Procession Altar
Source: Documentation (2023)

Without losing the essence of the activity, the religious event in Figure 7 is also unforgettable. This religious procession is intended to give thanks to respected ancestors. This activity is also an opportunity for people who are able and want to be prayed for to make a Thanksgiving offering in the form of buying an offering package that has been provided. It is believed that this procession is a stage of thanksgiving and offering all offerings to the ancestor. After that, the necessary process is blessing all the statues of the deity that will follow the relay. This blessing is done through a procession of prayers and asking permission for his willingness to ride on the Palanquin that has been prepared. This process for Khong Hu Chu's belief has enormous spiritual significance, where the organizers and the general public who believe will flock to get the opportunity to touch the statue to find the opportunity to be the person who accompanies the deity of his belief.



Figure 8. Toapekong Palanquin Carnival
Source: Documentation (2023)

This toapekong Palanquin relay effort has the term 'pikul' which means carrying a Palanquin. In the Tegal language, it is also called the term 'mikul tepekong'. Residents and other Javanese regions often speak this local language because the term is very familiar, so it is easy to remember. Mikul itself was initially only carried out by people of Chinese descent as an ancestral culture that was preserved. Gradually, this culture experienced a positive shift where the positioning of this mikul culture did not become exclusive and could be enjoyed by all circles. There are so many people of non-Chinese descent who try to blend in and follow the procession because they are curious about this culture.

This curiosity finally attracted the interest of people who wanted to experience carrying a Palanquin. This Palanquin weighs up to more than 80 kg because it uses thick teak wood and its unique ornaments. In addition, this Palanquin lifting process has two versions, namely, Palanquin lifting by the 4-person method and Palanquin lifting by the 8-person method. The Palanquin itself is also tiny for children, medium size for women / general, and large size for the public. It is created based on a specific god figure, and its purpose of use is aimed at certain limits. By making Palanquin of various sizes, all community segments could play an active role and participate in the series of Palanquin relays. Without worrying about any social problems, this palanquin relay activity aims specifically to bring blessings that are believed to be for a temple, individuals who participate in carrying palanquins, to their families and descendants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Shedjit Toapekong Cultural Carnival represents more than a religious ritual. It embodies tolerance, intercultural harmony, and cultural continuity in Tegal City. From a tourism perspective, it holds strong potential as a cultural tourism attraction that enhances destination branding, promotes community empowerment, and sustains intangible cultural heritage. The collaboration between Chinese-Indonesian and Javanese cultural elements strengthens Tegal's identity as a city of religious moderation and social harmony.

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