

## Chinese Identity in God Temple's Birthday Ceremony as a Form of Social Network

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**Abstract** - This study aims to show a form of Chinese social network in the form of a god's temple birthday ceremony. This ceremony shows a form of social group identity as Chinese people in which shows a concept of social networks. This research is ethnographic research, with the case of a god's temple birthday ceremony. Data obtained through interviews with the temple administrator, and observations during the preparation and the day of the god's temple birthday ceremony. The result is the god's temple's birthday ceremony is a tradition that is maintained by the Chinese so as not to disappear and become an identity as a Chinese. The tradition is transmitted from time to time from one place to another place through a social network. This social network which is formed comes from a network between the temples as an institution that has the same main god. Ceremony as a tradition is taught from generation to generation, demonstrated, and trusted. The ceremony was held in order to maintain a relationship with the past with the ancestors and preserve the social group identity.

**Keywords:** *identity, ceremony, social network*

### INTRODUCTION

This study aims to show a form of Chinese social network in the form of a god's temple birthday ceremony. This ceremony shows a form of social group identity as Chinese people in which shows a concept of social networks. The identity which is constructed through the social network is a social identity. The concept of social identity refers to how other people identify a person in broad social categories and attributes, such as age, occupation, or ethnicity as in the description of "middled-aged Jewish lawyer" [1]. This Chinese identity is not an individual identity, but social group identity which is formed through the institution or organization. Identity is very closely related to social networks in Chinese society. Chinese people who have the same surname, have the same dialect group usually gather in one association or organization that in addition trying to preserve cultural values as well as to foster solidarity, mutual cooperation among members who will foster a relationship (*guanxi* 关系) and also trust (*xinyong* 信用) which is the basic concept in a social interaction.

Chinese social organizations can be in the form of dialect associations, clan associations which in the past have helped to raise awareness of the origins of individuals and community awareness. Although as a sub-ethnic group, it seems increasingly less relevant to the life of the Chinese people who now mainly identify themselves with the country where they live. These associations can still be used to strengthen the awareness of identity as Chinese [2]. The organization in this paper is a temple as a social institution. Temple has a function both as a religious institution and a social institution. Temple is a social institution because it has a social function, as a center of culture and tradition. Temple becomes the center of Chinese culture and tradition because all ceremonies that are communal are held in the temple. Chinese temples generally have art groups for performances such as the lion dance group, *potehi* puppets and gamelan groups in Central Java.

Chinese temples are part of Chinese culture. The temple displays both visible and invisible cultures expressed in signs, symbols and also the dynamics of the discourse that are brought to life in the form of historical, mythological and legendary

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figures. Temple contains meanings related to cosmology and philosophy of the Chinese. Temple aims to build character and build vertical and horizontal relationships between people with "transcendent" people and fellow humans and the natural surroundings. Myths and legends often appear in art in Chinese temples and myths as well as most myths in many Indonesian societies are more cosmocentric, so it is not surprising that the architecture of the temple also contains Chinese cosmological concepts.

The temple as a cultural center also because the temple is reflected in the principles of *yinyang* (阴阳) and the five elements (*wuxing* 五行: fire, earth, metal, water, wood) that defeat each other, strengthen each other, weaken each other, build to each other, and mutually destroy each other. The culture that appears (materialism) is an element that is and that is not visible (idealism) is an element of *yin*. The principles of *yinyang* (balance) and *wuxing* (five elements) gradually became correlative cosmology and correlative thinking in the 1st century BC by Dong Zhongshu, a philosopher of the Han dynasty. In general, each temple has a front yard or courtyard that is usually large enough to hold ceremonies and performances. Almost every major ceremony held in the temple there is a certain performing arts. The Chinese temples become social institution because it is a place where the Chinese gather to build the network.

Social networks which is build through temple institution are special type networks. This network have the bonds that connect one point to another in a network are social relations. People who are members of a social network are humans being. [3] Chinese temple associations in this sense are non- political social organizations or institutions. Institutions or social organizations discussed in this study are organizations that focus attention on aspects of identity behavior that are established in the presence of norms, and cultural values.

Previous research has identified important consequences concerning the relationship between network diversity and organizational belonging, especially in regards to religious belonging. At the individual level, Porter and Brown (2008) find evidence that, in relation to other religious affiliations, conservative Protestant belonging lessens the likelihood of having a diverse friendship network. This finding indicated an individual-level phenomenon of tight, demographically homogenous, ingroups with low levels of acceptance of individuals unlike themselves.

Furthermore, Porter (2010) found that this relationship is intensified as the share of the community identifying itself as conservative Protestant increases. [4]. But this study wants to elaborate and explain the social network which is constructed among the Chinese temple as social institution and the identity showed as Chinese.

Chinese temples not only shows religious activities but also covers many sectors, including tradition, economy, trade, and other social activities. The Chinese temple network not only interlinks all temples in Indonesia but also in the foreign countries and in China itself. This network deals with the temples' lineages and their foreign countries and in China itself. This network deals with the temples' lineages and their spread abroad. These temples have ancestral gods and local deities to form bridges between Chinese abroad and China. As Tan Chee-Beng said that, in his analysis of the Guangze Zunwang temple in Nan An, South Fujian, the god Guangze Zunwang is very popular among Minnan people who generally migrated to Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore [7]

A number of family associations in the Southeast Asia organize the pilgrimage to the original temples in China. The local relationship and ancestral gods are not only the symbols of trust but also the relationship between China and other countries. The Chinese immigrants, like other migrants, remain in their traditions and beliefs even though they have migrated crossing geographical boundaries and living in a new place because such traditions and beliefs have been inculcated. Both aspects have characterized their Chinese identity. The Chinese people in Southeast Asia re-establish their Chinese religious traditions and transnational networks that contribute to the trans-nationalization of traditions and beliefs.

Chinese people in Southeast Asia generally carry popular deities from the area where they migrate. Thus, the temples in cities such as Penang, Singapore, and Jakarta have gods from various villages and districts in Fujian and Guangdong as well as from other provinces in China and Taiwan. Singapore as one of many parts of Southeast Asia becomes the meeting point of gods from various locations in the mainland of China.

Similar in Indonesia, Chinese temple in Indonesia have specialized characteristics which is not found in other countries, because it is acculturated with local culture and show local wisdom. The existence of a temple or often

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referred to as *tepekong / toapekong* (Hokkien dialect) is generally located in the center of the city where at first the Chinese came from merchants who came and settled in an area and spread to the surrounding areas in Indonesia, especially the coast of Java. Every temple has the main deity with the main altar. Generally, in coastal areas worship Guanyin, Mazu, Guan Gong. Mountain regions, forests and agricultural areas usually worship Fude Zheng Shen (Hok Tek Ceng Sin / earth god), Shia Jin Kong (known as the god of medicine), and Han Tan Kong (god of wealth).

People who worship in temples are generally *Samkauw* or *Tridharma*, namely those who adhere to the three teachings namely Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Temple especially in Central and East Java, Sumatra is known as the Tridharma Worship Place (TITD). The term *Tridharma* only exists in Indonesia, generally called *baishen* or worshiping *shen*. Tridarma school in Indonesia can be divided into two major groups, which refers to syncretism or often referred to as *sanjiao heyi* (三教合一) and refers to equality or *sanjiao pingdeng* (三教平等).[8]

The temple buildings have been in the archipelago along with the arrival of early immigrants from South China. This building is a joint infrastructure that was built collectively by the first immigrants as a form of gratitude to a figure who is considered a protector because it has provided safety in its journey from China through the vast ocean with very simple transportation equipment so that it reaches the new country to settle. After that, a type of temple appears that is adjusted to specific needs and is devoted to certain groups. The temple as a Chinese place of worship experienced a period of ups and downs in accordance with the developments and political changes that occurred in Indonesia, different with the function as social institutions, the networking among the Chinese temple still exist.

## METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method and case study with an ethnographic study approach. This method is used because it relates to the study of social network which is constructed in the Chinese temples that uses data from informants. Qualitative research methods are carried out in reasonable situations and the data collected is qualitative. Qualitative methods are more based on phenomenological philosophy that prioritizes appreciation. Qualitative methods try to understand and interpret the meaning of

interaction between human behavior in certain situations [5]. According to Yin, case studies are widely used in social science research, both in traditional disciplines (psychology, sociology, political science, and anthropology) [6]. Case studies are also used as research methods to complement qualitative descriptive methods. In this study, researchers used an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic studies (ethnographic studies) describe and interpret culture, social groups or systems. Although the cultural meaning is very broad, ethnographic studies are usually focused on patterns of activity, language, beliefs, rituals and, ways of life. An ethnographer focuses his attention on the details of local life and relates it to broader social processes. Case studies were carried out by temples namely Hok Lay Kiong Temple, Bekasi, and Welahan temple Semarang, Central Java.

This research was conducted in 2016, 2017 and 2018. These two temples are chosen because they have same main God, namely Hian Thian Siang Tee (Xuan Tian Shangdi/ 玄天上帝). Besides these two temples, there are Hiap Thian Kong/ Xie Tian Gong Temple 协天宫, Karawang, Han Tan Kong/ 玄坛 , Cileungsi, and Ngo Kok Ong Temple/五穀王, Cibarusah. These temples also became a research locus due to the social network which is constructed among the Chinese people in Bekasi and the spirit medium network in temple association. Data were collected through interviews with temple administrators, people, observations and participant observations. The study was conducted at the time of the god's temple birthday ceremony, and on normal days

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first temple is Welahan temple. This temple is also one of the oldest temples in Indonesia. This temple is located 24 km to the south from the center of Jepara, in the village of Welahan, Jepara district, at Jalan Gang Pinggir No. 4, Welahan, Jepara, Central Java. This temple is located in Welahan market, a historical heritage of Chinese in Jepara and becomes the icon of Jepara. This temple was established since 1600 so it is said to be one of the oldest temples in Indonesia and in Java island. which is located in Welahan, Central Java. This temple is dedicated to Hian Thian Siang Tee as the main god. Welahan temple is managed by Pusaka foundation. Every Chinese temple is managed by a foundation as a social institution.

Similar to the Welahan temple which is dedicated to Hian Thian Siang Tee, Hok Lay Kiong temple Bekasi is also dedicated to Hian Thian Siang Tee. The god's birthday ceremony is on the third day of the third lunar month. Hok

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Lay Kiong temple(福来宫) is the largest and oldest temple in Bekasi City. It is located on Kenari I Street No. 1. This temple is managed by Pancaran Tri Dharma Foundation. The age of this temple is estimated to be approximately 250 to 300 years. According to the informant, the renovation of the temple was done in the roof of the temple (*tiongcit*) written with 1,818 figures that become an estimation to think out the age of the temple. Both in these two temples, the god's birthday ceremony dedicated to Hian Thian Siang Tee held for three days.

In the context of social network among the Chinese temples, there is a concept namely *fenxiang* (分香) or to divide the ashes. Temples that have the same main deity usually have the principle of dividing ashes, meaning that ash from burning incense in one temple's *hiolo/xianglu* (香炉) is brought to another temple which has the same main deity. Not all temples that have the same main deity have a relationship with one another. Although Welahan Temple and Hok Lay Kiong have the same main deity, they are not connected each other.

The ashes in Hok Lay Kiong temple is not originated from Welahan. When I searched for the information about the relationship between the two temples, the people at the Hok Lay Kiong Bekasi temple did not know of a relationship between the Hok Lay Kiong temple and the Welahan temple. Likewise, when I visited the Welahan temple, the Welahan temple said there was no connection. The existence of Hian Tian Shiang Tee as the main deity of the Hok Lay Kiong temple is from the very beginning of this temple. Nobody knows about the management of the Hok Lay Kiong temple because there are no written records about this temple. The statue or image of this god is not original as it was in the beginning of its existence but the initial statue still exists at the altar of this god. The Welahan temple divided the ashes to Hian Thian Siang Tee temple Padang, West Sumatera.

In Welahan temple, during the god's birthday ceremony there is a parade of god's statue which is called *kirab* (parade). During the god's birthday ceremony, the temple organization invites the other temples to join the parade and usually those who join the parade are temples that have an ash connection, but this does not mean that the temples that do not have ashes connection cannot join the procession. What is meant by the relationship of ash is when

the inauguration of a new temple, the temple receives ash from another temple that is older and worships the same main god. Ash here is the result of burning incense sticks. The ash is used to stick incense in the first prayer sequence which is done in the temple (ash in *Hiolo* for *Tian* which is placed in front of the middle part of a temple). In this parade, there is a tradition known as *jinxian* (delivering incense). *Jinxian* is carried out by temples which have an ash connection. This parade/ *kirab* aims to strengthen the relationship between the ashes by bringing back the ashes of worship to the temple of origin.

In Hok Lay Kiong temple, Bekasi there is no *fenxiang* concept with other temples, this means that the Hok Lay Kiong temple does not have an attachment to the ash relationship with other Hian Thian Siang Tee temples, so that in performing the parade in this temple it is not like that of other temples by inviting gods from another temple. The parade at Hok Lay Kiong was performed at the time of *Capgomeh* festival and not at the god's birthday ceremony. Hok Lay Kiong Temple held a parade in Bekasi by carrying out all the gods statue in joly chair. Every birthday ceremony of the god Hian Thian Siang Tee, the organizer of Hok Lay Kiong temple makes invitations and distributes them to other temples, other foundations or business places. Other temple administrators will visit the Hok Lay Kiong temple and congratulate or send a greeting flower, and vice versa.

The organizer of the Hok Lay Kiong temple will visit another temple on the anniversary of the main temple god. Just like a party in general in this ceremony a guest book is provided, so guests who come write their names and put a number of donations into the red envelope (*angpao*) that has been provided. Through this ceremony, the social network is maintained. The invited guests and people who were present besides being given a birthday cake also received the blessing water from the Hok Lay Kiong temple. This blessing water is mineral water which the brand is covered and sticked on the words "Hok Lay Kiong Temple Blessing Water". Hok Lay Kiong Temple also provides the *tangyuan* which is made from the glutinous rice, rounded and sweet, which symbolize unity and gathering of people because of its round shape

Spirit medium is also part of the temple community which is constructed social network. Every temples have their own medium spirit.

The role of the medium is very broad in scope, ranging from the media to connect people to life and death, answer things for life's difficulties, as a healer, and many are involved in the life of modern society. The medium continues to play a role in serving individual needs. As long as uncertainty about the future, the problems faced by individuals is not solved then they will continue to provide services. In temple ceremony, spirit medium held a paper-writing ceremony, a cut tongue ceremony and a hot oil bath. God's birthday ceremony became festive because many visitors or residents both from around the temple and outside the temple to see this ceremony. The general public who came not to carry out ceremonies or do pies to the temple gods but wanted to witness various events organized by the temple such as trampling, hot oil baths, barongsai, gambang keromong, and puppet show. As a part of the temple community, the medium spirit travel from one temple to another, namely at the time of *Capgomeh*, the temple anniversary or the anniversary of the god, which is when there are medium spirit attractions, such as writing amulette paper (*hu* paper). Such as at god's birthday ceremony in Karawang, Cileungsi, and Cibarusah, these mediums visit each other from one temple to another, especially in the Greater Jakarta area.



**figure 1, 2**  
Hok Lay Kiong god's  
birthday temple ceremony

invitation



**figure 3,4**  
birthday greetings in the  
form of posters and flower  
boards

## CONCLUSION

The social network formed by the Chinese in the temples shape social and cultural identity. Every god's birthday ceremony of the god Hian Thian Siang Tee, the organizer of Hok Lay Kiong temple makes invitations and distributes them to temples, other foundations or business places. Other temple administrators will visit the Hok Lay Kiong temple and congratulate or send a greeting flower, and vice versa, the management of the Hok Lay Kiong temple will visit another temple on the anniversary of the main temple god. The ceremony at the temple not only aims to build solidarity among its members by instilling a collective feeling of past glory as a group but also aims to sustain the future of the relationship between the different temples with each other. The ceremony aims to maintain the tradition of honoring deities.

The ceremony at the temple is an important event in a community that lives together for a long time. The ceremony is carried out by

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believers to mark the social and cultural events of the community and the culmination is a series of performances, entertainment and ceremonies. The most important event of the ceremonial cycle in temple revived the entire community, making them aware of themselves as Chinese. This participation as a means to express and create ethnic identity and solidarity.

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