



FROM ASENG TO OSING “HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE EXISTENCE AND DYNAMICS OF CHINESE ETHNIC IDENTITY IN BANYUWANGI”

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ABSTRACT

The existence of Chinese ethnicity in Banyuwangi is estimated since the 17th century, the existence of Chinese in Blambangan has certainly experienced an interesting dynamic process to be revealed, especially how the history of the existence and change of ethnic Chinese identity itself, from Aseng who incidentally is a foreigner to Osing who is a native of Banyuwangi. A certain society always presents stereotyped views. Likewise with Chinese identity in Banyuwangi. Referring to the view of cultural studies, identity is entirely a socio-cultural construction. No identity can emerge outside of cultural representation or acculturation. The dynamics of social change in the cultural dimension refers to cultural changes in society such as contact with other cultures which causes cultural diffusion and borrowing. This identity change phenomenon can be seen in the Chinese ethnic identity in Banyuwangi Regency. The history of the Chinese ethnic in Banyuwangi as a whole has experienced ups and downs caused by the conditions of Indonesian domestic and foreign socio-political culture, placing the Chinese ethnic in an uncertain position, and tending to become victims of Indonesia's social and political situation which is always turbulent. This then causes the ethnic Chinese to always be faced with difficult conditions that affect their existence as an ethnic group. As Chinese people in Banyuwangi, they generally admit to being confused about choosing whether to retain their distinctive Chinese (hereditary) characteristics, or have to completely abandon everything they received from their ancestors and completely merge into the majority society. This paper aims to discuss how the emergence of the history of ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi Regency, formerly known as Blambangan, and how the dynamics of the development of social change for ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi.

Keywords: *historical review, identity dynamics, Chinese ethnicity*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese ethnic community in Indonesia, or more specifically in Banyuwangi, actually existed centuries ago. They merge to become 'local residents' who have had a long history of ups and downs, although not always smooth. This is because it is an undeniable historical fact that ethnic Chinese are immigrants (despite the fact that their arrival occurred centuries ago, so their existence is no longer new). This historical fact cannot be erased and must be accepted as an integral part of Chinese life in Indonesia. The arrival of the Chinese to Indonesia began in 413 AD, with the arrival of a Buddhist priest named Fa Hsien to Java. Historically, Fa-Hsien was the Chinese who first set foot on the island of Java (Beny Juwono, 1999).

While the first arrival of the Chinese to Blambangan recorded in historical sources is estimated to have occurred in the early 14th century AD. At that time, Admiral Cheng Ho's troops made his pilgrimage to Majapahit and Blambangan. The arrival of Cheng Ho's troops to Blambangan in 1405 at that time the relationship between the kingdoms of Blambangan (Eastern Kingdom) and Majapahit (Western Kingdom) was in conflict (Ika Ningtyas, 2015). After the arrival

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of Admiral Cheng Ho's troops, information about the arrival of the Chinese to Blambangan was minimal. Then in 1631 began to see the development of people Chinese in Blambangan they have started to settle in the area. To meet the needs of the Chinese people raise cattle and pigs. At that time Blambangan was very prosperous so that it could export rice to Ambon, Batavia and Bandha (Arifin, 1995).

However, it is estimated that the Chinese people came to Blambangan to save themselves from the post-Chinese massacre in Batavia in 1741. This was written by Samsibur (2011) that the coast of Blambangan was used as a hideout for Bugis pirates and Chinese people. This was the result of the killing of Chinese people in Batavia in 1714 AD. Apart from saving themselves the arrival of Chinese people to Blambangan to trade at that time, Blambangan was rich in wood, bird nests and rice. Pampang Harbor (also called Lopampang or Ulupampang) in Blambangan was at that time the busiest port in the Bali Strait. Many traders from various Ethnicities such as Bugis, Mandar, Chinese, Malay and Javanese regularly congregate there. Around Pampang Harbor, Chinese people live with the Bugis and Mandar Sulawesi ethnic groups.

The existence of ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi, whose population is increasing every year, also results in a form of relationship/contact with the indigenous people in Banyuwangi, namely the Osing ethnicity. There is a relationship with the Osing community, contact with each other, both intensely and rarely, because one of human nature requires other humans to live, and are creatures that like to socialize (animal society). The contact between ethnic Chinese, which in this paper I nicknamed "Aseng" with the indigenous people of Banyuwangi or "Osing", then had an influence both in terms of diffusion and evolution for each ethnicity, both Aseng (Chinese) and Osing (Banyuwangi). Changes in the cultural identity of an ethnicity, where the dominant culture will try to co-opt the minority culture, and the minority culture will try to adopt the products of the dominant culture to maintain its existence.

This phenomenon of changing identity can also be seen in the ethnic Chinese identity in Banyuwangi, especially in the Karangrejo sub-district where the Chinese/Chinese community lives or better known as the Chinatown complex, a colony for ethnic Chinese created by the colonial government. Where at that time the Colonial Government issued many policies that limited the movements of Chinese people in the Dutch East Indies. The regulations of the Dutch colonial government were discriminatory. Since November 1740 the Chinese were concentrated in a certain settlement called "Chinatown" which was located in the Karangrejo village. The rule, called Wijkenstelsel, was continued by the Dutch colonial government which was promulgated and reinstated from time to time in 1835, 1854, 1866, and 1871. How will the historical study of the existence of Chinese ethnicity in Banyuwangi Regency, formerly known as Blambangan, and how will the dynamics of the development of social change of Chinese ethnicity in Banyuwangi be tried to be revealed in this study. Based on the background problems above, there are three main formulations that are studied, as follows: (1) How is the historical study of Chinese existence in Banyuwangi? (2) How does the emergence of change and the meaning of the existence of ethnic Chinese cultural identity in Banyuwangi?

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with a critical paradigm by using a cultural history study approach that is critical, interdisciplinary and multidimensional as a basis for thinking. Sources of data used are primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from informants and objects directly observed in the field. The author's primary data was obtained from direct interviews with the Chairperson of the Tridharma Banyuwangi Place of Worship, ethnic Chinese elders in Karangrejo Banyuwangi, Banyuwangi cultural observer/historian. Primary data was also obtained from direct observations in the field to see how the social life of the Chinese ethnic community in Karangrejo was. Secondary data sources in the form of data obtained through literature studies such as theses, dissertations, books and articles that are relevant to the research



being conducted. The author's secondary data is obtained from references to books related to Chinese ethnicity.

Qualitative research instruments are "human instruments" or humans where the researchers themselves are the spearhead of data collectors (instruments). Researchers go directly to the field to collect the amount of information needed by first having some guidelines that will be used as a tool to collect data. The guidelines are developed from categories/sub-categories for which field data will be searched using appropriate techniques. The techniques used can be in the form of observation, interviews and documentation.

Data analysis begins by examining all the data collected from the start. Data analysis is the process of arranging data sequences, organizing them into a pattern, category and basic description. The process of data analysis actually started since data collection was carried out in the field and was carried out intensively when they left the field. Data analysis was carried out in a qualitative descriptive and interpretive manner. Descriptive analysis aims to make a description or description in a systematic, factual and accurate manner regarding the facts, nature and relationships between the phenomena investigated. While qualitative analysis is a way of collecting data with a chronological classification which includes the amount of information that shows a systematic relationship.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Historical Study of Chinese Ethnicity in Banyuwangi

The arrival of the first Chinese to Blambangan recorded in historical sources is estimated to have occurred in the early 14th century AD. At that time, Admiral Cheng Ho's troops made his pilgrimage to Majapahit and Blambangan. The arrival of Cheng Ho's troops to Blambangan in 1405 occurred when the relationship between the Kingdoms of Blambangan (East Kingdom) and Majapahit (West Kingdom) was hit by conflict. According to Groeneveldt (2009:52), a year later the two Javanese kings fought each other. The Eastern king was defeated and his empire was destroyed. At that time, the emperor's envoy was at the Eastern King. When the soldiers of the King of the West entered the market, 170 of these envoys were killed by the soldiers.

After the arrival of Admiral Cheng Ho's troops, information about the arrival of the Chinese to Blambangan was minimal. In the local chronicle, Babad Notodiningratan, it is stated that in 1631 Chinese people began to settle in Blambangan. They keep a lot of cows and pigs. At that time Blambangan was very prosperous so it could export rice to Ambon, Batavia and Bandha (Arifin, 1995:278).

However, it is estimated that many Chinese people began to migrate to Blambangan to save themselves, after the massacre of ethnic Chinese in Batavia in 1740 and continued until Semarang in 1741. This is written by Samsibur in his book History of the Kingdom of Blambangan (2011: 215): "The Blambangan Coast became hiding place for Bugis pirates and Chinese people. This is the result of the killing of Chinese people in Batavia (Jayakarta) in 1741 AD, it is still felt here for the Company."

In 1766, British traders (EIC) were interested in this economic potential in Blambangan. With three large ships and hundreds of small ships, the British arrived at Blambangan under the command of Edward Cole. They approached a local Chinese trader named Encik Lok and rewarded him with a request to help get permission from the King of Mengwi, Gusti Agong Mengwi to buy rice in Blambangan. At that time Blambangan was under the rule of the Mengwi Kingdom.

Through Encik Lok, the British merchant managed to exchange a packet of opium, 21 firearms and two tonnes of gunpowder for 10 koyans of rice. In addition to its natural products, the flourishing of trade in Blambangan is due to the fact that many Blambangan residents smoke opium. So that Blambangan became a potential lucrative opium market for the UK. The arrival of the British and the free opium trade around the Bali Strait attracted the Chinese to come to Blambangan. From this information it can be concluded that the arrival of the Chinese people to

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Mahfud, Dian Arief Pradana, Herdiana Dyah Susanti

Blambangan was for trading. The ethnic Chinese have played an important role in the economy in Blambangan by acting as intermediaries between native, royal and British merchants.

Raffles in Carey (2008: 122) mentions that in 1815 the number of Chinese living in the Banyuwangi Chinatown was 319 people or 3.59 percent of the 8,873 inhabitants of Banyuwangi at that time. The majority of ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi carry out trading activities as their livelihood and control the economic sector in Banyuwangi.



Figure 1. Chinatown Village in Banyuwangi in 1910 (source kitlv)

Historical evidence of the existence of ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi is also evidenced by the erection of the Hoo Tong Bio Temple which has a uniqueness not found in other temples. This temple worships a local deity named Tan Hu Jincin in addition to the gods in the Tri-Dharma teachings. According to hereditary stories, Tan Hu Jincin came from Kwan Tung Province who was known to be very clever in various knowledge and skills, including as a sinsean, hong shui expert, building and landscaping architect. Tan temporarily resided in the Blambangan Kingdom during the reign of Prince Danureja (1697-1736). While in Blambangan, Tan was asked by the king to build a palace in the Macan Putih area and often helped the sick Blambangan people.

The Chinese then built a house as a tribute to Tan Hu Jincin in Lateng (now Blimbingsari, Rogojampi) which is not far from Ulupampang Harbor. At that time the capital of Blambangan was in Ulupampang or what is now called Muncar District. Because Ulupampang was suffering from an acute infectious disease, the VOC finally moved the capital to Banyuwangi in 1774. This transfer of the capital was also accompanied by the implementation of wikenstelsel and passenstelsel, for the ethnic groups living in Blambangan. The ethnic Chinese were forced to move their temple to downtown Banyuwangi.

Thus, the Hoo Tong Bio temple is a historical witness that Chinese people have lived in Banyuwangi Regency more than 4 centuries ago. They then spread to a number of areas in East Java and Bali. However, they firmly believed in their ancestor, Tan Hu Jincin, by establishing these temples. The Hoo Tong Bio Temple is currently one of the oldest buildings still standing and maintained in Banyuwangi Regency.

The Hoo Tong Bio Temple is not only a religious center but functions socially and culturally for residents of ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese. Socially, the Hoo Tong Bio temple serves residents who wish to ask for treatment, a mate, and fortune through divination or djiamsie. Djiamsie is not only intended for the Tri Dharma religious group, because not a few Muslim and Christian residents do it.



Figure 2. Hoo Tong Bio Temple, historical evidence of the presence of ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi (internet source)

3.2. Aseng (China) becomes Osing (Banyuwangi Indigenous Tribe)

During the New Order era (1967-1998) the life of the Chinese ethnic group experienced extraordinary restrictions and discrimination. Chinese people received special surveillance, because the government argued that communism was alive again in Indonesia. Given the Bamboo Curtain country at that time was a communist country. The involvement of Chinese citizens in the September 1965 incident was considered by the New Order government to be the result of the non-assimilation of Chinese citizens in Indonesian society. Therefore the government launched a very vigorous assimilation program. The government issued Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 regarding the prohibition of Chinese religion, belief, and customs which impede the expression of the daily lives of Chinese citizens.

The New Order government only recognized Buddhism for Chinese people, so Chinese New Year celebrations were banned and Chinese arts were not allowed to be performed. Mandarin-language schools were disbanded and Chinese people were required to change their names to Indonesian names. Suhandita (2009:135) says: "Chinese religious events are only carried out in the temple environment or in the family's residence. Apart from public order reasons, the government argued that celebrations such as Chinese New Year are not Buddhist celebrations and therefore there is no good reason to hold them."

The New Order policy also had a serious impact on the social and cultural life of the Chinese community in Banyuwangi. Activities at the temple are supervised by the Special Executor (Laksus) of the Regional Security and Order Command (Kopkamtib). Kopkamtib is a central organization directly under the command of the President of the Republic of Indonesia at that time, General Suharto and founded on October 10th 1965. Kopkamtib was established immediately after the incident occurred September 30th Movement 1965.

Ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi as a minority group certainly cannot do much to oppose existing policies. As minority groups are also present and form cultural diversity which should also force the state to accept its presence and form a multiethnic state. Banyuwangi, with the Osing tribe as the original community and a city that is thick with its culture, of course, must also be able to accept Chinese ethnicity and culture while maintaining the ethnic and cultural characteristics of the Osing itself.

Egalitarian character is a very dominant feature in Osing society. This can be seen in the Osing language which does not recognize language levels such as Javanese or Madurese. The

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Mahfud, Dian Arief Pradana, Herdiana Dyah Susanti

structure of the Osing society is not oriented to the priyayi like the Javanese nor to the kyai like the Madurese nor to the Kshatriyas like the Balinese caste. The people of Banyuwangi are predominantly Muslim, but the syncretism of religion and culture is strong.

Even though it is a typical Banyuwangi ethnicity, in proportion, the Osing ethnic population is not the majority in Banyuwangi. There is no exact data that states how many Osing tribes are in Banyuwangi. However, as an illustration, the number of Osing residents is around 20% of the total population. Even though they are grouped in a certain territorial pocket, the Osing people are not as exclusive as the Tengger people who live in the Tengger highlands (near Mount Bromo) or the Baduy people in Banten. Osing is very adaptive, open and creative towards elements of other cultures.

Osing's openness to other cultural elements makes the Aseng (ethnic Chinese) look at the Osing as an ethnicity that can be compromised with their culture. As Chinese during the New Order, they generally admitted to being confused about choosing whether to retain their distinctive Chinese (hereditary) characteristics, or to completely abandon everything they had obtained from their ancestors and completely merge into the majority society. On the one hand they feel that as Indonesian citizens in this multi-ethnic nation, their culture and political rights have been denied. But on the other hand, they are proud to be Chinese, partly because of their high economic status, even though they don't feel protected from the aggressiveness of the majority group which can arise at any time.

According to David Miller, cultural groups in the life of a multiethnic country then need political recognition and affirmation of their different identities. This phenomenon is called political recognition, which must be controlled and accepted if ethnic and cultural divisions are not desired. This search for identity is important for a group when identity becomes uncertain and threatens to disappear. The need for recognition arises because of the subjugation or oppression experienced by identity-bearing groups, and collective identity must be consolidated and legitimized. This identity recognition actually does not come from other parties (people outside the community area), but from the closest people/groups who live together in the country's territory. Their demands are usually in the form of basic rights that must be respected. Chinese ethnic in Banyuwangi need recognition of their existence as an ethnicity which also brings cultural civilization, the Osing people as the closest group/ethnic group that has an open character and is adaptive to outside cultures accepts the presence of ethnic Chinese in Banyuwangi and then makes cultural compromises.

The presence of Aseng (China) in the midst of the Osing community forces them to implement multiculturalism policies, thus affecting the relations and characteristics between the two. According to Michael Walzer, pluralism in the Old World is first classified as cultural pluralism; made up of people who have rooted and united communities in their region for centuries, and New World cultural pluralism; originating from the immigration of individuals or families, who are generally open to change, and it is they who are actually divorced from their original cultural roots. Precisely these two forms of pluralism ultimately influenced the multicultural policies adopted by these immigrants in subsequent periods.

In Banyuwangi, which is multi-ethnic and consists of many tribes, cultures and languages, it is able to form a national identity that unites its citizens in one common interest. The people of Osing must also be sympathetic to the newcomers who come following the old world model of cultural pluralism, although they still exhibit some issues of identity and recognition of their existence. And what is most visible in this regard is the acknowledgment of Aseng's existence.

The choice with an Indonesian identity was also facilitated by the New Order government which imposed (total) assimilation for the Chinese to lose their Chinese identity and become Indonesian. However, the motivation for implementing assimilation in corporations seems to be more nuanced 'punishment' because of the alleged involvement of the Chinese in the PKI rebellion in 1965. In reality this policy actually contributed to various social vulnerabilities and upheavals of concern such as prejudice, mass riots targeting the Chinese ethnicity. This policy also left trauma



for this minority group, apart from the consequences of the various acts of violence they experienced, it was also the result of the discriminatory treatment that shackled the movement of the Chinese people's lives.

Becoming Osing was a choice made by the Aseng ethnic (Chinese/Chinese) at that time in order to obtain an identity and then have rights and obligations attached to it. These rights and obligations apply equally to everyone who is referred to as a resident of Banyuwangi. In other words, there is uniformity of identity (and position) attached to those who are legally declared as residents of Banyuwangi.

The process of shifting to confirm identity from Aseng to Osing was also carried out through marriage channels between ethnic Chinese and Osing people, especially from Chinese men who married Osing women. Apart from that, by employing household assistants and shopkeepers/shop employees belonging to ethnic Chinese, from among the Osing residents, there is a process of interaction and communication from the Aseng to learn the language and traditions of Osing, making them understand and understand the culture of Osing more deeply to henceforth then they can be called Osing people.

The existence of unification of identity (and position) by the state that ethnic Chinese as residents and citizens of the State, places Chinese Indonesians on equal footing with Indonesian citizens of other ethnicities, but on the other hand also demands Chinese Indonesians not to be (appear) different from other Indonesian citizens. . So the Osing identity attribute is used by Aseng for the benefit of community legitimacy that they are also Indonesian citizens who are the same as other ethnicities, many Banyuwangi Chinese citizens also use Banyuwangi udeng in government activities and other daily activities. Therefore, the sociological view that the position of ethnic Chinese has changed from immigrants to residents and native residents of Banyuwangi, namely Osing, is valid, because uniformity denies differences.

4. CONCLUSION

The presence of Chinese community groups in Banyuwangi centuries ago should have been 'accepted' as part of a nation-state that is integrated in a multicultural society and becomes part of the Banyuwangi diaspora. However, the problem of historical complexity proves that this group of Chinese people is 'difficult to accept' so that it requires a struggle to get recognition of their basic rights. Becoming Osing is the path taken by Aseng (Chinese) so that their existence is recognized, gets social protection, and can be accepted by the people of Banyuwangi. They did various ways and dynamics of becoming Osing so that the negative stigma and the label part of communism in the 1965 incident could disappear from the people of Banyuwangi.

FROM ASENG TO OSING "HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE EXISTENCE AND DYNAMICS OF CHINESE ETHNIC IDENTITY IN BANYUWANGI"

Mahfud, Dian Arief Pradana, Herdiana Dyah Susanti

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FROM ASENG TO OSING “HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE EXISTENCE AND DYNAMICS OF CHINESE ETHNIC IDENTITY IN BANYUWANGI”

Mahfud, Dian Arief Pradana, Herdiana Dyah Susanti

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