

## Integration of Chinese and Javanese Ethnicities in Multicultural Life as a Manifestation of Historical and Cultural Harmonization in Surakarta

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*Received 19 Februari 2024; Received in revised form 11 March 2024; Accepted 12 March 2024*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengulas integrasi dan interaksi antara etnis Cina dan Jawa di Kota Surakarta, dengan fokus pada berbagai aspek kehidupan masyarakat. Latar belakangnya mencakup gejala kuat terkait masalah etnis pasca reformasi tahun 1998, terutama di Kota Surakarta, dan upaya rekonsiliasi untuk mengurangi gejala etnis yang semakin menguat. Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk memahami bagaimana interaksi terbentuk antara kedua etnis tersebut melalui pendidikan, bahasa, ekonomi, agama, kegiatan masyarakat, kesenian, perkawinan, dan kebudayaan. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode sejarah dengan tahapan heuristik, kritik, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya interaksi positif antara etnis Cina dan Jawa dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan, menciptakan harmoni dan integrasi dalam masyarakat multikultural di Kota Surakarta. Kesimpulannya, interaksi tersebut memainkan peran penting dalam menjaga harmoni sosial dan keberagaman budaya di Kota Surakarta.

**Kata kunci:** integrasi, interaksi, etnis, surakarta.

### Abstract

*This research reviews the integration and interaction between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in the city of Surakarta, with a focus on various aspects of community life. The background includes strong symptoms related to post-1998 ethnic problems, especially in the city of Surakarta, and reconciliation efforts to reduce increasingly strong ethnic symptoms. The aim of the research is to understand how interactions are formed between the two ethnic groups through education, language, economics, religion, community activities, arts, marriage, and culture. The method used is the historical method with heuristic, criticism, interpretation, and historiography stages. The research results show that there is positive interaction between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in various aspects of life, creating harmony and integration in the multicultural society in the city of Surakarta. In conclusion, this interaction plays an important role in maintaining social harmony and cultural diversity in the city of Surakarta.*

**Keywords:** integration, interaction, ethnicity, surakarta.

### INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the concept of post-reform multiculturalism has apparently not been fully able to accommodate ethnic Chinese descendants as an integral part of Indonesian society (Basri et al., 2022; Rokhman & Yuliati, 2010). Reconciliation efforts are continuously being carried out to reduce increasingly strong ethnic

phenomena (C. B. Utomo & Wasino, 2020).

At the beginning of the 21st century AD, an extraordinary democratization process occurred in Indonesia, giving hope to people of various ethnicities to have equal space and opportunities, especially in the political field (Wasino, 2013).

This process gradually led to the growth of national integration which was

manifested in various community activities and culture (C. B. Utomo & Wasino, 2020; Winarni et al., 2021). Conflict and integration can be likened to two sides of a coin that cannot easily be separated from each other. After conflict, integration will emerge which is marked by the restructuring of social systems in society (Jumardi, 2017; Setiawan & Hadi, 2018).

In the life of Indonesian society, national integration is part of the nation's glue. National integration is built on the diversity of the Indonesian nation which has various regional cultural subductions (Setiawan et al., 2020). This view is based on the reality that Indonesian society is a multiethnic society that was born with the culture and customs that are preserved within its ethnic groups. Apart from that, Indonesia's geographical background as an archipelagic country is also the reason why Indonesian society now has a diverse culture. It is from these cultural differences and the vast expanse of territory that the integration of the Indonesian nation was formed (Matitaputty, 2019).

The strength of the bonds of integration does not only lie in the similarity of activities and goals in life, but also in the ability to bind all forms of diversity and differences in society. This conception ultimately gave rise to a problem of its own for the Indonesian people. In Indonesia's multi-ethnic society,

negative stereotypes towards ethnic groups will always emerge which are feared to disrupt the integration process.

One area in Indonesia that has this problem is the city of Surakarta. This city, located in Central Java Province, is a multicultural city and has long been home to various ethnicities and tribes, one of which is the Chinese ethnic group which has a population quite large for an ethnic minority. The city of Surakarta has a long history of Chinese-Javanese ethnic conflict, especially since the Chinatown commotion in the 1740s and the riots in May 1998 (Ricklefs, M, 2007).

This conflict then left negative stereotypes towards ethnic Chinese as a result of behavior and ideas that tended to be contradictory between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in Surakarta. Several years after this incident passed, efforts emerged to formulate alternative solutions for the Chinese-Javanese ethnic group to reduce all the consequences of the prolonged conflict.

With the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (E. P. Utomo, 2017; Wulandari et al., 2023), now the Indonesian nation has risen and grown amidst threats and challenges that are stronger than before. Solutions are expressed in the form of social interactions covering various fields. Social interaction is a social process carried out by each individual as a member of a society. The purpose of writing this article is to find out how interactions are formed

between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in Surakarta.

## **METHOD**

The method in writing this study uses the historical method (Herlina, 2020; Wardah, 2014). The historical method is a way or technique of reconstructing past events, through four stages of work, namely heuristics (gathering sources), source criticism (external/material and internal/content), interpretation, and historiography (Wasino, 2020). The historical method as a systematic set of principles and rules is designed to help effectively collect historical sources, evaluate them critically and present the results that have been achieved and displayed in written form.

The author carries out the heuristic stages, namely by finding and gathering sources. Next is source criticism, this stage is testing or verifying the data both with internal and external criticism. The third stage of interpretation, in this case, must carry out an analysis or interpretation of the sources that have been obtained the interpretation must maximize his imagination so that the last stage, namely Historiography (history writing) can liven up the storyline of an event. In historiography, at least it can connect the story and the reality of the events that occurred so that it can provide a good and correct interpretation for its readers (Daliman, 2012).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Multicultural Conditions In Indonesia**

Multiculturalism in Indonesia Refers to the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and religions that exist in this country. Indonesia is a country with a very diverse population, consisting of more than 300 ethnic groups and more than 700 different regional languages (Setiawan & Hadi, 2018).

One of the most famous examples of multiculturalism in Indonesia is religious diversity. Although the majority of the population is Muslim, Indonesia also has a large number of adherents of other religions such as Christianity, Hindu, Buddhist, and traditional beliefs. All these religions live side by side in harmony and tolerance, with officially recognized religious celebrations recognized by the state.

Apart from that, Indonesian culture is also very diverse, with each province having its own unique traditions, customs, and culinary culture. This diversity is reflected in the various festivals and celebrations held throughout the country.

However, although Indonesia is known for its multiculturalism, challenges remain in maintaining harmony between ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Several issues such as religious intolerance, inter-ethnic tensions, and cultural recognition still need to be addressed.

The Indonesian government seeks to increase inter-ethnic and religious tolerance and harmony through policies that strengthen human rights, protect religious freedom, and encourage inter-cultural dialogue. In addition, civil society and advocacy groups are also active in building understanding and appreciation of diversity in Indonesia.

### **Surakarta as a Multiethnic and Multicultural City**

The people of Surakarta City have ethnic diversity. Apart from being dominated by Javanese ethnicities, the city of Surakarta is also inhabited by ethnic minorities such as Arabs and Chinese. These ethnic groups live in their own areas in Surakarta. For example, Chinatown Village is the area where Chinese people and their descendants live, as well as Arab Village is where Arabs and their descendants live. These two ethnic groups live in groups and are placed in a special area in Surakarta to facilitate communication between their members. However, in everyday life, these ethnic groups still interact with the indigenous population, most of whom are Javanese. The existence of these ethnic groups makes an important and positive contribution to the indigenous people of Surakarta City and its surroundings, including aspects of religion, economics, education, culture, politics and social organizations.

Apart from being a multiethnic city, Surakarta is also a multicultural city. This term refers to cultural diversity that arises because society consists of several different ethnicities. Members of the multicultural society in Surakarta have similar cultural characteristics and act based on the same patterns. Sometimes, there is not just one culture possessed by each ethnic group, and there are several ethnic groups in Surakarta. This accumulation of culture from various ethnicities is what makes Surakarta known as a multicultural city.

As a multicultural city, Surakarta is very strong in the characteristics of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is characterized by integration in society, where local governments not only seek to unite, but also facilitate immigrants or minorities in maintaining their true language and cultural traditions. Surakarta is opening itself up to ethnic immigrants, so that when visiting this city, visitors will discuss various diverse cultures.

As a multicultural society, the people of the city of Surakarta, which have a diversity of social groups, ethnic groups, cultures, religions, political aspirations, etc., can be simply called a multicultural society. Multiculturalism here is not only understood as the concept of ethnic or cultural diversity as a characteristic of a pluralistic society. However, the emphasis of

multiculturalism is more on cultural diversity in equality.

Pranata explained that the concept of a multicultural society has several meanings (Pranata et al., 2020). First, there is recognition of the differences and complexity of life in society. The people of the city of Surakarta are open and appreciate differences and diversity in the structure of their society. Second, equal treatment of various communities and cultures (minorities and majorities). In the concept of a multicultural society, members of the Surakarta city community interact with each other by giving the same treatment, even though they have different cultures.

Third, there is an equal position in diversity and difference. The multicultural society of the city of Surakarta upholds equality in various cultural differences in its living environment. No individual or group is considered superior or inferior, even though they consist of various ethnicities.

Fifth, a multicultural society is synonymous with several elements, such as a sense of togetherness, cooperation and peaceful coexistence despite differences. The interaction of the people of Surakarta city in daily life creates a high sense of togetherness and fosters attachment to one another. This bond is reflected in cooperation in various areas of life, such as celebrating religious

holidays and respect for the cultural traditions of ethnic groups in Surakarta.

Surakarta's multicultural society is supported by a variety of cultures originating from various ethnicities that inhabit the city. Judging from their origin, ethnicities in Surakarta can be divided into two types, namely ethnicities originating from within the territory of Indonesia and outside the territory of Indonesia. Ethnic groups originating from within Indonesia generally have a culture that reflects Indonesian values, while ethnic groups originating from outside Indonesia most likely still maintain the original culture of their country of origin.

The Arab and Chinese ethnic groups in Surakarta, as examples of ethnic groups originating from outside Indonesia, can live side by side with the Javanese ethnic group by forming a separate ethnic community. A social group can be called an ethnic community if it has several characteristics, such as the ability to reproduce biologically and survive, the same cultural values, awareness of a sense of togetherness in the form of culture, having its communication network and ways of interacting and having its own group characteristics which can be differentiated from other groups.

Ethnicity and culture are closely related. Culture is formed as a result of the interaction of society or social communities within an ethnicity, and sometimes culture becomes a

characteristic of the existence of that ethnicity. Society and culture have characteristics that are coherent with each other because culture always follows where society is located. Culture is the result of society's creation through association and interaction using the facilities, infrastructure, and potential it has.

The existence of various ethnicities in Surakarta is an interesting study to discuss. Apart from paying attention to the long history of these ethnic groups' journey to Indonesia, attention must also be given to the forms of interaction and communication used by these ethnic groups in building relationships with the indigenous population. Communication, as the activity of sending and receiving messages or information to each other, is very important in building relationships between individuals and social groups. Communication is an effective instrument for eliminating bad stereotypes in responding to differences that are motivated by the diversity of culture, physical characteristics, religion, language, and so on that society has.

Communication problems often arise in multiethnic and multicultural societies. To achieve social harmony, it is important to build communication that can ensure that society has strong and balanced relationships. Successful communication will determine the form of relationships experienced by community members.

Communication in a multicultural society has two main aspects. First, it involves cultural ways of communicating using certain methods so that the meaning and purpose of communication can be found at a certain time, place, and social environment. This means that cultural communication is communicative behavior that is reflected in a particular culture. Second, communication also plays a role in exploring culture and its function and how it works in shaping the communal life of society, giving individuals the opportunity to participate, identify themselves, and negotiate that life.

In other words, cultural communication can be considered as an activity carried out by individuals and social groups as a form of communication demands in their daily lives in the world. It is important to understand and appreciate the role of communication in a cultural context to create a better understanding between individuals and groups in a multicultural society (Purbasari & Suharno, 2019).

### **History of Chinese and Javanese Ethnic Interaction in Surakarta**

The majority of ethnic Chinese and their descendants in the city of Surakarta live in groups around Pasar Gede and Kampung Balong, Sudiroprajan Village, Jebres District. However, since 1919, ethnic Chinese began to live scattered throughout the Surakarta area and

occupied strategic areas to make trade easier. Even though for hundreds of years ethnic Chinese have lived in Surakarta, which is dominated by indigenous people, especially Javanese, nowadays there are rarely any problems in relations between these ethnic groups. Reconciliation and integration efforts are continuously carried out to maintain peaceful relations between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in Surakarta, including through interactions that cover various aspects of community life.

Social interaction between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in Surakarta has become a focal point in reconciling the effects of past conflicts and at the same time filtering various phenomena that have occurred. This form of interaction is a characteristic that differentiates Surakarta society from other communities. In this context, social interaction is needed to reduce gaps in society, achieve understanding, and provide recognition for the existence of certain cultures.

Rules of behavior, whether written or unwritten in the form of social norms, serve as guidelines for social interactions. These rules help people know what they should do, what they need, and how to interact. Social interaction is the result of multiculturalism, which involves various aspects of society's social life (Winarni et al., 2021).

The forms of interaction between Chinese and Javanese ethnic groups in

Surakarta can be grouped into eight aspects/fields, namely: language, education, economics, religion, community activities, arts, marriage, and culture (Purbasari & Suharno, 2019). The description is as follows.

#### **a. Language**

In everyday life, ethnic Chinese and Javanese people in Surakarta communicate using regional languages and Indonesian. The Javanese languages Ngoko and Krama are used, with Ngoko for everyday communication with peers, and Krama for speaking with older people or foreigners. Even though ethnic Chinese speak Mandarin, they prefer to use regional languages or Indonesian to integrate with Javanese society.

#### **b. Education**

Educational institutions in the Chinatown area of Surakarta, such as kindergartens and elementary schools, are open and intended for all levels of society regardless of ethnic background. Ethnic Chinese and Javanese children receive equal treatment at school, working together in various activities such as class pickets, scouts, and extracurriculars. The aim of this educational institution is to direct children's relationships in a positive direction, regardless of their ethnic origin. Multicultural education is taught so that children have an understanding of diversity as the richness of the Indonesian nation (Pranata et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2020).

### **c. Economy**

The majority of ethnic Chinese in Surakarta, especially in Chinatown Village, work as traders. They open various types of shops such as supermarkets, wholesalers, and food stalls. These shops became gathering places for Javanese traders who bought goods for resale. There is economic collaboration between ethnic Chinese and Javanese, where Chinese who own large shops will employ Javanese as laborers. In the economic sector, there is also the development of batik businesses that reflect Chinese culture in the Balong area, Surakarta.

### **d. Religious**

In the religious aspect, ethnic Chinese in Surakarta tend to maintain religious diversity (Setiawan, 2023). Even though Confucianism is the original teaching, some Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent tend to change religions to follow the majority religion around them such as Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, or Buddhism. However, Chinese cultures such as Chinese New Year celebrations and Cap Go Meh are still preserved. This reflects the integration of diversity values with cultural diversity in Surakarta society.

### **e. Community Activities**

There are various community activities carried out by ethnic Chinese and Javanese in Surakarta. They are active in preparations for religious holidays, celebrations, births of children, and moving houses. Cooperation between the

two ethnic groups can also be seen in community activities such as competitions, women's social gatherings, community service, and night patrols. Organizations such as the Surakarta Community Association (PMS) were founded by ethnic Chinese, but received ethnic Javanese support in implementing their programs and sponsoring various social activities in the community.

### **f. Art**

"Santi Swara Laras Madya" is an association formed by ethnic Chinese and Javanese in the field of gamelan music. The Chinese in Surakarta showed interest in Javanese gamelan music. Artistic interactions can also be seen through Barongsai performances, which involve Javanese as players. The Barongsai art performance is jointly managed by the Chinese and Javanese ethnic groups, showing cooperation in appreciating the diversity of arts from each ethnic group.

### **g. Marriage**

Many members of the Chinese and Javanese ethnicities in Surakarta engage in mixed marriages, giving birth to offspring called "Ampyang". This mixed marriage process aims to strengthen inter-ethnic interactions. Even though mixed marriages can give rise to conflicts related to beliefs/religions and cultural differences, they are recognized as part of an integration process that enriches the diversity of society.

#### h. Culture

The contemporary culture that emerged from the interaction of Chinese and Javanese ethnicities in Surakarta is "Grebeg Sudiro". Grebeg Sudiro symbolizes the combination of Chinese and Javanese ethnicities in welcoming special days such as Mulud, Syawal, Idhul Adha, and Suro. This celebration displays agricultural products and food that are fought over by the surrounding community, reflecting inter-ethnic cooperation and integration in cultural activities. The interactions that occur in various aspects of life show that the people of Surakarta, especially between ethnic Chinese and Javanese, are trying to build harmony, mutual respect, and integrate in various activities of daily life. This reflects the strong multiethnic and multicultural spirit in the city of Surakarta (E. P. Utomo, 2017).

#### CONCLUSION

Ethnic Chinese have lived in Surakarta for hundreds of years, and the social interactions formed between ethnic Chinese and Javanese can be identified in various areas of life. Ethnic Chinese in Surakarta have a strong economic role, as evidenced by the many shops they own. Even though some Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent have changed religions, they still carry out Chinese culture such as Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh celebrations. As the peak of cultural

interaction, the ethnic Chinese and Javanese communities in Surakarta created a contemporary culture known as Grebeg Sudiro. Overall, the social interactions that exist between ethnic Chinese and Javanese in Surakarta reflect a spirit of cooperation, respect for diversity, and joint efforts to build harmony in everyday life.

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