

THE CULTURAL ASPECT OF JAVANESE AND CHINESE ACCULTURATION IN LASEM

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Received: 22nd July 2021/ **Revised:** 10th November 2021/ **Accepted:** 12th November 2021

How to Cite: Basiroen, V. J. & Manuaba, I. B. K. (2022). The cultural aspect of Javanese and Chinese acculturation in Lasem. *Humaniora*, 13(2), 91-97. <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v13i2.7527>

ABSTRACT

The research aimed to document the history and culture of Lasem, thereby increasing the knowledge base of cultural history in Indonesia. The interaction between Javanese and Chinese in Lasem experienced three phases: the Zheng He period, the Yellow War period, and the 20th century. Relations between Javanese and Chinese had been peaceful and harmonious until now. In the middle of the 18th century, there were incidents of violence against ethnic Chinese carried out by the company. This event led to the strengthening of relations between Java and China. The collaboration between the two became a momentous event that the Lasem residents could not forget. Harmonious life in Lasem was not only seen in batik. Still, it was also seen in the daily life of the Lasem people, such as togetherness in celebrations, religious rituals, or family rituals. There were three research questions: What was the process of acculturation in Lasem? What cultural elements underwent acculturation, and what were the results of acculturation? The research applied a qualitative narrative method by collecting data from the literature, interviewing cultural observers, observing, and analyzing. The research discussed the results of acculturation in Lasem in several forms of culture, namely in language, architecture, batik, and rituals. The results of the research indicate that harmonious inter-ethnic life in Lasem can embrace all Indonesian citizens in revive the spirit harmoniously.

Keywords: cultural acculturation, Javanese-Chinese acculturation, Lasem, harmonious spirit

INTRODUCTION

Lasem is a coastal city that was once developed as a trading port. Since time immemorial, Lasem has become a multicultural area with diverse tribes and communities that uphold tolerance and pluralism. The interaction between Chinese and Javanese is very dynamic and reflects the harmonious blend of Javanese and Chinese cultures. Acculturation occurs in terms of language, architecture, batik, and ritual traditions. Lasem earns the nickname 'Little China' because of the many buildings and Chinese traditions in Lasem

The Groote Postweg (*Jalan Raya Pos*) initiated by Governor-General Daendels (1801-1811) through Lasem resulted in significant changes in the city and

provided a new impetus for its economic development. The discovery of a large shipyard on the Babagan Lasem river indicates that Lasem has become a port city and the lifeblood of people's lives since the 16th century, long before the presence of *Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie* (VOC) in the archipelago (Tjiok, 2017).

The history of Lasem is divided into three periodizations, namely the history of Lasem during the royal period, colonial era, and post-independence. In the 13th century, Lasem was only a small town that was part of the Majapahit Kingdom. In *Serat Badra Santi*, written by Mpu Santi Badra in 1479, it is stated that in 1273 Saka or 1351 AD, Lasem was included in the core area of the Majapahit kingdom under the

leadership of Dewi Indu. The *Badra Santi* book also explains that Bi Nang Un, a *Dhang Puhawang* or captain, was a Campa and a Chinese who landed in Lasem. The captain's wife, Puteri Na Li Ni, is said to have brought batik art to Lasem. Long before the advent of Chinese batik, Na Li Ni taught residents (W. Sigit, personal communication, September 28, 2018).

The tragedy of the massacre of Chinese people happened in Batavia in 1740. The VOC distributed weapons to the "lower class masses" to massacre Chinese citizens. 10.000 Chinese people were killed, and only about 3.000 people survived. After the Angke tragedy during the colonial period, the exodus of the Chinese community from Batavia to Lasem was massive (Figure 1). They formed a new settlement to the north of Babagan and Soditan Village (Noor & Carey, 2021).



Figure 1 The Chinese Massacre in Batavia (Schley, 1763)

According to *Carita* History of Lasem, in 1741, VOC established a trading office in Rembang with the aim of benefiting the Dutch. The VOC's actions were met with persistent challenges from Adipati Widyaningrat, who was assisted by Tan Ke Wie, a fishpond entrepreneur, and Raden Panji Margana. Then Oei Ing Kiat, a shipbuilder, together with Raden Panji Margana, attacked VOC soldiers in Lasem. In that battle, Raden Panji Margana and Oei Ing Kiat died (Wijaya, 2020). The VOC suspected Lasem City as a hotbed of Chinese resistance to VOC rule, so in 1751 the center of government was moved from Lasem to Rembang. Lasem is no longer a district city but has only become equivalent to a sub-district until now. Seeing the strength of the Chinese, the rulers of Mataram then formed a coalition with China to fight the VOC by attacking VOC guard posts. The war was called the Yellow War, which ended in 1743 (Wijaya, 2020). After the war, the people of Lasem have a strong brotherhood, thus blurring the boundaries of ethnicity in Lasem.

The Chinese who came to the north coast of Java came from the provinces of Fujian and Kwang Tung. They consist of various ethnicities, Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew, and Cantonese. After the generations changed, there were many mixed marriages between Chinese and Javanese. Many Chinese people converted to Islam and married girls from the nobility. Thus, the ruling elite of coastal cities in Java consisted of families of mixed Chinese and Javanese blood (W.

Sigit, personal communication, September 28, 2018). The Chinese heritage in Lasem is the Cu An Kiong Temple, often called the *Mak Cho* Lasem Temple, located on Jalan Dasun No. 9. This temple keeps *Kio* (palms) to accompany the Goddess of the Sea with a grand procession around Lasem City, held once every ten years (Basiroen & Kana, 2019).

The Islamic boarding school in Lasem developed rapidly in the 18th and 19th centuries, which was why Lasem was nicknamed "The City of *Santri*". The *Santri* (religious leader) live side by side and in harmony with Chinese society. Some of the great figures include Sayyid Abdurrahman Basyaiban or known as *Mbah Sambu*, K.H. Baidawi, K.H. Ma'sum who has contributed to the spread of Islam in Lasem (Atabik, 2016). The process of harmony and cultural acculturation in Lasem also has its uniqueness which is rarely found in other areas. In the Lasem society, Javanese and Chinese elements are found, which are formed due to the acculturation process over a long period. This acculturation forms a distinctive cultural identity, an essential part of the coastal culture (Basiroen, 2021).

Based on interviews and data collection, questions arise in the research; why can acculturation of culture in Lasem produce harmony in people's lives? This question raises sub-problems, such as (1) How did the Chinese-Javanese acculturation process take place in Lasem? (2) What cultural elements have been acculturated? (3) What are the consequences of acculturation?

METHODS

The research focuses on searching archives, literature studies, interviews, and observations to gather information. The literature study is carried out by searching primary and secondary sources to explore information related to the culture formed in the Lasem community, especially regarding acculturation. There is harmony between Javanese and Chinese cultures in the Lasem area. The literature study is conducted to gain insight and sources related to the research theme. Document data are analyzed to reveal information from documents, official reports, books on various socio-cultural aspects, and community cultural activities that focus on research (Nawawi, 2019).

Research in the field is carried out in two ways: observation and interviews conducted to obtain information, views, knowledge, and the meaning of activities in the socio-cultural field in Lasem. Oral history from sources is used to record and document historical developments and certain social phenomena. Interviews are conducted using the in-depth interview method to dig as deep as possible information related directly or indirectly to the research theme. This is done to get a comprehensive picture from various parties so that the built analysis becomes accurate. Observations are carried out by conducting a series of visits to several research locations. The research

is conducted in Lasem for one and a half years, from 2020-2021.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Acculturation occurs when two or more completely different foreign and native cultures are combined. The processes or the spread of foreign cultural elements are gradually processed in such a way into the original culture without losing their identity or authenticity (Putra & Sartini, 2016). Based on the periodization described in the introduction, it appears that there is a wave of culture that characterizes the culture and life in Lasem. This is because, during that time, there was a wave of migration from ethnic Chinese to Lasem. In addition, Lasem also grew as a center for the spread of Islam. Javanese and Chinese acculturation is the primary cultural adaptation process to the environment (Atabik, 2016). From the analysis obtained from literature studies, interviews, and observations, the results of acculturation in Lasem can be seen in several forms of culture, such as language, architecture, batik, and rituals.

According to the *Carita* History of Lasem, Lasem was a landing place for traders, including traders from China. The arrival of Chinese traders led to interactions between the immigrants and the Javanese population. The Chinese language spoken in Lasem is Mandarin, with a Hokkien dialect originating from the Chinese capital, Fujian. The largest migration of Chinese who stopped and settled in the archipelago mostly came from Fujian Province. The daily language used by the community is Javanese. The Chinese descendants in Lasem do not use Mandarin in their daily communication, even most of them do not understand Mandarin (Liong, Rosina, & Hadi, 2010).

Sigit Witjaksono, an elder of tolerance and assimilation in Lasem, has said that the Chinese living on Java are fluent in Javanese. Sigit can speak smooth Javanese and Mandarin because he was born before the ban on using Chinese customs. Mandarin has not been used by the Chinese since the policies imposed by the Dutch since the 19th century. Sigit has said that everyone must adapt wherever they are and respect the local culture. The daily language used by the Lasem people generally is Javanese. Most Chinese descendants in Lasem currently do not use Chinese in daily communication and do not even understand Hokkien. The Chinese have abandoned the Hokkien language since the Dutch introduced the *Vreemde Oosterlingen* policy in the 19th century. At the same time, the development of Chinese culture had been grounded in Java before that period. In subsequent developments, the Hokkien language was used by the Chinese in Lasem, especially Confucians, only when praying at the temple (W. Sigit, personal communication, September 28, 2018).

The architecture of the Chinese in Lasem is the result of the typical Chinese architecture of Lasem, which is a combination of South Chinese

architecture, Javanese architecture, and the influence of Dutch colonial architecture, which has developed from time to time. The architecture in Lasem develops according to the changing times. The development of architecture before Dutch colonialism was different from the architecture during the colonial period and the development of modern architecture today. The city of Lasem, at the end of the 19th century, experienced a golden age due to the opium trade (Lestari & Wiratama, 2019). The house building was built in the *Indische Empire* architectural style, an architectural style developed in the 19th century in the Dutch East Indies, popularized by Governor-General H. W. Daendels, led in 1808-1811 (Purwanto & Titiek, 2017).

Chinese society still maintains a way of life with Confucian beliefs. During the forced cultivation period in 1830-1870, the Chinese people of Lasem were influenced by Dutch culture. As a result, the architecture in the Lasem area is mixed with Dutch architecture with Chinese interiors, such as prayer rooms and goods. Javanese arts such as *gamelan*, *wayang*, and *keris*. The combination of cultural acculturation architecture in Lasem can be found in several villages, including Karangturi village, Babagan village, and Soditan village (Nurhajarini, Purwaningsih, & Fibiona, 2016). It can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Houses at Karangturi and Babagan Village (Basiroen, 2019)

Chinese house buildings always have rooms for traditional prayers, complete with tables and incense. It can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3 Prayer Altar (Basiroen, 2019)

Cu An Kiong temple is located on Dasun Street, Lasem. Cu An Kiong, or temple of mercy and peace,

is a temple covering an area of approximately 150 meters. It can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Cu An Kiong Temple (KesengsemLasem.com, 2019)

Figure 5 shows two European-style lions on the left and right of the gate. This gate was founded on the initiative of Kapitan Huang Xingguo in 1922 and repaired in 1950 and 1960 (Basiroen & Kana, 2019).



Figure 5 Cu An Kiong Temple with Two European-Style Lions (Basiroen, 2019)

Cu An Kiong Temple (Figure 5) was built in 1477, located on the east of Babagan River, Soditan village. Cu An Kiong is a Chinese-style temple accompanied by distinctive interior and exterior ornaments, carvings, ceramic paintings, and thick Chinese calligraphy. The Cu An Kiong temple was built to worship the Goddess of the Sea, Thian Siang Seng Bo. The Thiang Siang Seng Bo celebration is held every 23rd of the third month of the Chinese calendar at the Cu An Kiong temple by holding several events such as *wayang kulit*, *klonengan*, and *gamelan*, collaborations between the Chinese and residents (Haryanto & Angelia, 2016).

Gie Yong Bio temple (Figure 6) is located on the highway or in *Grotepostweg*. This temple was built to commemorate three famous heroes: Tan Kie Wie, Oei Ing Kiat, and Raden Panji Margono, who died fighting the VOC in 1740. The respect of Raden Panji Margono as a god by the Chinese community in Lasem can be called unique throughout Indonesia, besides being proof of the friendship of the ancestors of the two communities, regardless of religion, ethnicity, and other differences (Purwanto & Titiek, 2017).

Poo An Bio temple is located at Jalan Karangturi VII No. 13, Karangturi village, Lasem district. This temple is adjacent to the Maha Karuna Vihara or

peace building. Poo An Bio temple was founded in 1740 to worship Kwee Sing Ong, the god of the Kwee family, the god of protection from natural disasters (Ayuningrum, 2017).

Cultural acculturation can also be seen from the security post located in Karangturi village, near the Kauman Islamic Boarding School owned by Gus Zaim. The existence of the security post with Chinese architecture is a form of cultural acculturation in Lasem that runs harmoniously (Atabik, 2016). It can be seen in Figure 7.



Figure 6 Gie Yong Bio Temple and the Altar of Raden Panji Margono (Basiroen, 2019)



Figure 7 The Security Post Pondok Pesantren Kauman Lasem (Basiroen, 2019)

During the reign of the 1st Bhre Lasem of the Lasem Kingdom (1350 - 1375), batik had become the clothing of royalty in the Lasem region. Bi Nang Un, one of Admiral Cheng Ho's men, landed and lived in the area now known as Binangun village. Bi Nang Un and his wife, Na Li Ni, have two daughters, Bi Nang Ti and Bi Nang Na. Na Li Ni is believed to teach batik and dance to Lasem youths. The Adipati of Lasem, Badranala, married Bi Nang Ti, and his descendants became leaders in Lasem. Bi Nang Ti continued to teach Lasem and batik skills (Liong, Rosina, & Hadi, 2010).

Lasem Chinese Peranakan Batik emerged because of many trades and Chinese residents who settled in Lasem. The motifs that often appear on batik cloth sheets are typical Chinese motifs such as pomegranate flowers, partridges, chrysanthemums, lotus flowers, peacocks, and phoenixes, which are combined with Javanese motifs such as *Sekar Jagad*, *Udan Liris*, *Kawung*, and others (Oetojo & Basiroen, 2018). From the 18th century until now, Chinese Batik entrepreneurs have played an essential role in producing batik production houses on the coast of Lasem. People in Java are well acquainted with the various motifs inspired by the Chinese traditions they have propagated. As a result of the acculturation of

Javanese culture with Chinese culture, Batik Lasem has various ornaments in the form of patterns that are rich in Chinese symbols (Nurhajarini, Purwaningsih, & Fibiona, 2016), which are listed in Table 1.

Along with the arrival of China to Lasem, the variety of batik motifs in Lasem developed. Lasem batik is no longer a Mataraman batik motif, but a Coastal motif. Lasem batik is very famous for its characteristics as beautiful coastal batik with distinctive coloring. One of the colors that characterize Lasem is the blood-red color (*getih pithik*) produced from the roots of the noni plant (*Morinda citrifolia*) and castor oil, which reflects the Chinese tradition. The dominant color is red; a typical Chinese motif used to decorate the Confucian prayer altar. Lasem Chinese batik uses a thick layer of wax, where the color produced from the coating must include all Chinese symbols, ranging from good luck, prosperity, and longevity. The red and blue coloring technique on Batik Lasem is very complicated, so it takes a lot of time, skill, and patience. The color red or *bang-bangan* symbolizes happiness and is a symbol of fertility. Red batik is often associated with happiness in Chinese marriages (Enrico, Sunarya, & Hutama, 2020). The color of the chicken's blood is not found in other areas. The effect of water content in the Lasem area mixed with the roots of the noni tree causes the color of chicken blood batik not to be imitated in other areas (Suminto, 2015). It can be seen in Figure 8.



Figure 8 Getih Pithik Color from Batik Sekar Kentjana (Basiroen, 2019)

For economic purposes, batik entrepreneurs in Lasem make a combination of *Mataraman* and coastal motifs, namely *Sekar Jagad*, *Pasir Kawung*, *Pring-Pringan*, *Lung-Lungan*, *Gunung Ringgit*, *Watu Pecah*, *Kendoro-Kendiri*, *Bledag Mataraman*, and *Kawung Babagan* (Setyoningrum, Lukman, & Rismantojo, 2019). Chinese motifs widely known and found are dragon (*liong*) motifs, phoenix (*hong*), and *kilin*, with bright colors. Most other motifs are acculturation motifs dominated by images of birds, insects, and butterflies combined with flower tendrils. Chinese and Europeans in Java love the phoenix and other fantastic

Table 1 Variety of Chinese Motifs at Batik Lasem

Motif	Chinese	Meaning
Butterfly	<i>Hu-die</i>	Happiness and long life hope
Bat	<i>Pian-fu</i>	Good luck
Fish	<i>Li</i>	Abundant wealth
Dragon	<i>Liong</i>	Men, the power of goodness, bringers of prosperity and happiness
Butterfly with cherry blossom	<i>Men-hua</i>	Long life and perfection
Kilin	<i>Qi-lin</i>	Perfect wisdom, long life, generosity, obedience and respect for parents
Centipede or Centipede	<i>Wu-gong</i>	The arrival of fortune
Hong bird	<i>Feng huong</i>	Loving womanhood
Hong Bird with Dragon		Luck
Peacock	<i>Kong-que</i>	Beauty and glory
Crane	<i>He</i>	Long life
Prenjak bird	<i>Qiao</i>	Excitement
Pomegranate	<i>She-liu</i>	Fertility
Cloud	<i>Yun</i>	Good luck and happiness
Peony flower	<i>Mu-tan</i>	Virginity and privilege
Chrysanthemum	<i>Ju</i>	Long life
Magnoli flower	<i>Mu-lan</i>	Beauty
Lotus	<i>Lian-hua</i>	Purity and perfection
Roses	<i>Qiang-wei</i>	Youth
Narcissus flower	<i>Shui-xian</i>	Wishing good luck for the coming year
Cherry blossoms	<i>Mei</i>	Good luck and sincerity
Coin	<i>Qian</i>	Fortune
Swastika	<i>Wan-zi</i>	Big luck

birds in Lasem's batik motifs (Basiroen, 2020). It can be seen in Figure 9.

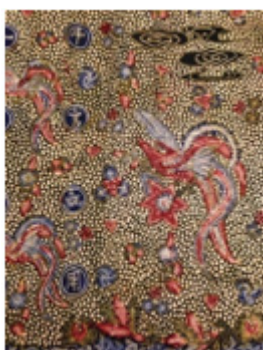


Figure 9 Batik Lasem Sekar Kentjana Phoenix Motif with Chinese Letter from Sekar Kentjana (Basiroen, 2019)

The Lasem community is known as a multicultural society. Acculturation is also seen in terms of rituals or traditions in the form of salvation. Many ethnic Chinese adopt this activity by applying it to events in their family. In the ritual of salvation, food, prayer, and procedures for its implementation follow the Javanese ethnic salvation procedures. In addition, for public ritual events such as the lion dance carnival, Lasem residents help each other in their respective roles and positions. The family grows a new culture originating from the local community. These cultures do not become a barrier in life. *Peranakan* Chinese families in Lasem are familiar with *Kenduri* events to welcome births or other family rites, such as marriages or deaths. The *Kenduri* event is held by inviting local people from various ethnic backgrounds to help to cook all the dishes served. Ustad leads *Kenduri* in leading the prayer. The people of Lasem believe that God will accept prayers even if offered in various religions. Suppose the residents of the *pesantren* hold a traditional event. In that case, the Chinese will help, such as the haul event or the celebration of Islamic holidays at the Kauman Islamic boarding school, who act as traffic controllers, including Chinese citizens. Likewise, at the Chinese arts festival, residents around the temple will intervene to help in securing the procession (Putra & Sartini, 2016).

The participation of Chinese citizens is a form of good relations between ethnic groups in Lasem. When the Muslim community in Lasem commemorates the Mbah Sambu haul every year, the Chinese community maintains security and assists in the form of food, and this condition has been going on for a long time. On the other hand, Chinese citizens celebrate holidays such as *Cap Go Meh*, Chinese New Year, *Ceng Beng*, and the *Barongsai Kirab* procession (Nurhajarini, Purwaningsih, & Fibiona, 2016), and the surrounding community is also involved (Figure 10). Even when there is a Chinese art procession, the religious leader from the Islamic boarding school maintains security, so there is no need for security officers to regulate the procession.



Figure 10 *Gamelan* at Cu An Kiong Temple (nationalgeographic.co.id, 2016)

When there were riots throughout Indonesia in 1998, residents immediately initiated a dialogue forum to bring together Lasem residents across the group. The dialogue forum, which was initiated at the office of Hoo Hap Hwee Kwan at Babagan, resulted in an agreement, "Lasem belongs to all", namely a mutual agreement to make Lasem a safe, peaceful, united, and respectful area. The commitment to maintaining peace in togetherness continues today (Nurhajarini, Purwaningsih, & Fibiona, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

Acculturation means a process of change in which different cultures are integrated. This occurs when an element of a particular society's culture is faced with a cultural element of another society. Foreign cultural elements are absorbed into the receiving culture without losing the personality of the receiving culture. The two ethnicities that have become the culture in Lasem are Chinese and Javanese. Lasem is a port city on the north coast and has become a multicultural area with a highly tolerant society. The interaction between Java and China has existed for a long time, causing cultural diversity in Lasem to form dynamic and harmonious acculturation in the social, political, and economic life in Lasem today.

The research describes how acculturation between Javanese and Chinese ethnicities in Lasem occurs in harmony. Cultural acculturation that occurs in Lasem forms a cultural configuration, and harmony can be maintained until now. The form of harmony is found in language, architecture, batik, traditions, and rituals. This harmony certainly deserves to be maintained in society, the Indonesian nation in particular, and all people in the world in general.

The acculturation that occurred is supported by a long historical process, mainly the result of the collective memory of the Yellow war becoming a solid driving force in society. The acculturation in Lasem has resulted in a social harmony that the community continues to build. This harmony continues to be maintained by the *ulama*, Chinese, and the local government. The peace agreement built in Lasem becomes a substantial social capital to maintain and engineer harmony. This research still needs further

research to find other forms of acculturation in Lasem. However, the researchers hope that the research can be helpful for all human kindness.

As a suggestion, there needs to be adequate government socialization to the community regarding cultural acculturation and inter-ethnic harmony in Lasem by cooperating with the media. The public authority and the Lasem community are expected to develop Lasem for interactive cultural tourism and provide experiences for tourists by experiencing cultural attractions, batik making, and other activities. So that Lasem culture can be known to the broader community, and the Lasem people can feel the economic impact of developing cultural tourism. The inventory of cultural heritage in Lasem must be carried out comprehensively considering the many valuable cultural heritages, namely the many historical relics in the form of buildings with unique Chinese architecture, such as temples, residential houses, and other cultural heritages, which need to be preserved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research, was funded by Direktorat Sumber Daya Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, Indonesia, with a research contract in the year 2021, No. 309E4/1AK/04/PT2021, date of 12 July 2021. The authors thank Prof. Dr. I Wayan Dibia, SST, MA, for the support and guidance in writing this paper.

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