CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND ETHNIC INTERMINGLING: A STUDY OF CHINESE DESCENDANTS IN KAMPUNG KAPITAN PALEMBANG

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study challenges assumptions about negative relationships between ethnic Chinese and other residents, focusing on highlighting harmony in the long-term habitation of Chinese descendants in Kampung Kapitan Palembang. Emphasis is on preserving distinct cultures during adaptation.

Purpose: This research explores the ethnic intermingling among Kapitan Tjoa Ham Lim's descendants in Kampung Kapitan Palembang through a cultural communication lens, aiming to understand intercultural dynamics.

Theoretical Framework: Using a cultural communication perspective, the study emphasizes openness and acceptance of cultural differences in the acculturation process. Non-verbal communication is a key focus, highlighting cultural sensitivity in fostering positive relationships within diverse communities.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Qualitative and ethnographic methods explore long-term cultural acculturation in Kampung Kapitan. The study centers on non-verbal communication, openness, and recognizing the dynamic nature of communication, culture, religion, and economics.

Findings: The study reveals gradual cultural acculturation in Kampung Kapitan, facilitated by openness and acceptance, especially through non-verbal communication. Palembang becomes the dominant language, reflecting sustained interaction between Chinese descendants and locals. Acceptance of cultural diversity fosters harmonious relationships, recognizing physical traits as integral aspects of identity.

Research, Practical & Social Implications: Enriching qualitative understanding, the research contributes to communication science by shedding light on motives behind ethnic intermingling and bridging differences in historically rooted communities. Practical implications include maintaining social connections within diverse communities.

Originality/Value: This study challenges assumptions, provides nuanced insights into ethnic intermingling, and enhances understanding of cultural communication in historically rooted

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communities. Its significance in the field of communication science inspires further exploration by academics and researchers.

Keywords: cultural communication, ethnic intermingling, chinese descendants, kampung kapitan palembang, intercultural relations.

COMUNICAÇÃO CULTURAL E ENTRELAÇAMENTO ÉTNICO: ESTUDO DE DESCENDENTES DE CHINESES EM KAMPUNG KAPITAN PALEMBANG

RESUMO

Contexto: Este estudo desafia suposições sobre as relações negativas entre os chineses étnicos e outros residentes, com foco em destacar a harmonia na habitação a longo prazo dos descendentes chineses em Kampung Kapitan Palembang. A ênfase está na preservação de culturas distintas durante a adaptação.

Propósito: Esta pesquisa explora o cruzamento étnico entre descendentes de Kapitan Tjoa Ham Lim em Kampung Kapitan Palembang através de uma lente de comunicação cultural, com o objetivo de compreender a dinâmica intercultural.

Quadro teórico: Utilizando uma perspetiva de comunicação cultural, o estudo enfatiza a abertura e a aceitação das diferenças culturais no processo de aculturação. A comunicação não verbal é um foco-chave, destacando a sensibilidade cultural na promoção de relações positivas dentro de diversas comunidades.

Design/Metodologia/Abordagem: Métodos qualitativos e etnográficos exploram a aculturação cultural a longo prazo em Kampung Kapitan. O estudo centra-se na comunicação não-verbal, abertura e reconhecimento da natureza dinâmica da comunicação, cultura, religião e economia.

Conclusões: O estudo revela uma aculturação cultural gradual em Kampung Kapitan, facilitada pela abertura e aceitação, especialmente através da comunicação não-verbal. Palembang torna-se a língua dominante, refletindo a interação sustentada entre os descendentes chineses e os locais. A aceitação da diversidade cultural promove relações harmoniosas, reconhecendo os traços físicos como aspetos integrantes da identidade.

Pesquisa, Implicações Práticas e Sociais: Enriquecendo a compreensão qualitativa, a pesquisa contribui para a ciência da comunicação, lançando luz sobre os motivos por trás da mistura étnica e colmatando diferenças em comunidades historicamente enraizadas. Implicações práticas incluem a manutenção de conexões sociais dentro de diversas comunidades.

Originalidade / Valor: Este estudo desafia suposições, fornece percepções matizadas sobre o entrelaçamento étnico e melhora a compreensão da comunicação cultural em comunidades historicamente enraizadas. O seu significado no campo da ciência da comunicação inspira uma maior exploração por académicos e pesquisadores.

Keywords: comunicação cultural, interminação étnica, descendentes chineses, kampung kapitan palembang, relações interculturais.
1 INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, immigrants encompass both Chinese and Arab ethnicities. The Arab community has a long-established presence and has made significant contributions to the country’s economic, social, and cultural aspects, historically advising the Kingdom of Palembang Darussalam. They maintain distinct physical features and uphold exclusive marriage traditions, emphasizing their unique identity. On the other hand, the Chinese community faces occasional challenges due to political, economic, and religious differences, leading to a less unified presence. The Arab community generally experiences smoother acceptance and recognition, likely due to their shared Islamic faith, which mitigates other distinctions. Challenges in the adaptation process contribute to issues between the Chinese community and the local population, involving integration into surrounding society and acceptance as integral members of daily life. Religion, physical characteristics, traditions, customs, and politics contribute to the divergence between the ethnic Chinese and the local community (Febrianty et al., 2023; Mulyana & Zubair, 2015). Religious sentiments can be a source of conflict (Sai & Hoon, 2012), as demonstrated during the 1998 events when ethnic Chinese in Indonesia displayed prayer mats on their shop doors to avoid disturbances, symbolizing Islam.

Physical characteristics, such as narrow eyes and slightly yellowish-white skin, distinguish the ethnic Chinese from the local community, which generally has larger eyes and darker skin. Additionally, many ethnic Chinese descendants continue to use Mandarin daily, reinforcing their distinct identity from the local community (Mulyana & Zubair, 2015). The history of ethnic Chinese descendants in Indonesia dates back hundreds of years, with their presence even noted during the time of the Srivijaya Kingdom in the 7th century AD, particularly in the Palembang region of South Sumatra (Yusalia et al., 2021). Over the centuries, they have played significant roles in various social, cultural, and traditional aspects, supporting the economic system and being involved in social and political issues (Anggela, 2021; Sahrasad, 2019). However, the 1960s and 1970s were challenging for the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, marked by the G30S/PKI event and mass killings (Hoon, 2021).

In Indonesia, the ethnic Chinese community can be classified into two categories: Totok Chinese, representing those who migrated while retaining their original traditions and identities, and Peranakan Chinese, who are individuals of full Chinese descent but have grown up in Indonesian culture and identify less strongly with their Chinese heritage.
(Brahma, 2018). The prominence of Peranakan Chinese is on the rise in Indonesia. Additionally, other ethnicities, such as Arabs from Yemen, have a long-standing presence in the country and have played significant roles in its economic, social, cultural, and political aspects. Accepting Arab ethnicity is generally easier due to religious similarities (Yusalia, 2017). Palembang, the oldest city in Indonesia, holds historical and cultural significance (Yusalia et al., 2021; Zakharov, 2019). Kampung Kapitan, located in the city center along the Musi River, is a notable settlement for people of Chinese descent. Over time, ethnic intermingling has occurred between Chinese descendants and the local population, leading to unique cultural communication patterns.

This study focuses on cultural communication in Kampung Kapitan Palembang, particularly among the descendants of Kapitan Tjoa Ham Lim. It aims to comprehend how cultural symbols and traditions have intermingled over time and explores the resulting communication patterns. Contrary to assumptions of negative relations between ethnic Chinese and other residents, the research highlights the harmony and coexistence found in Kampung Kapitan. The study considers various factors influencing interethnic dynamics, including religion, physical characteristics, traditions, customs, and politics. The research seeks to contribute insights into fostering positive intercultural relationships within diverse communities by understanding the communication patterns and cultural adaptation in this community.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of cultural communication has been extensively discussed, especially regarding the adaptation of ethnic groups in different regions, generating substantial interest and research. A literature search for this dissertation reveals a vast body of research on intercultural communication, highlighting its significance and relevance to the current study. Moreover, discussions on adapting ethnic groups extend beyond communication studies, encompassing multiple disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology, Architecture, Politics, and Linguistics. For instance, King & Wilder (2020) explored anthropological aspects, Chen (2022) focused on identity politics, Burhani (2019) discussed sociological aspects within Arab and Madurese communities, Putri & Jufrizal (2022) investigated linguistic aspects of Chinese and Minang ethnic languages, and Aripudin et al. (2022) explored sociological aspects of trade within the Chinese community.

Among the significant studies, Farnia & Wu (2012) explored Chinese and Malaysian university students’ refusal of invitations, emphasizing the influence of cultural aspects on communication practices. Shi & Fan (2010) analyzed non-verbal behavior in intercultural communication, underlining the significance of non-verbal aspects in human interaction and their close relationship with culture. Matondo (2012) compared cross-cultural values between Chinese and Sub-Saharan Africans within business and strategy.

Regarding the cultural communication perspective, Kuntowijoyo (2018), in historical research, provides valuable insights into understanding the historical context’s significance in communication behavior. Ethnography, an essential aspect of socio-cultural approaches, allows observing how social groups construct meaning through linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors.

Furthermore, Mead’s perspective on impulse, perception, manipulation, and settlement stages underscores the importance of human thought processes in determining actions and responses. In intercultural communication, Gudykunst’s (1997) model highlights multiple factors influencing communication, particularly in intercultural contexts.

Cultural communication is an essential study area with wide-ranging implications for understanding ethnic adaptation and intercultural relations (Hart, 2022). A comprehensive approach encompassing various disciplines and theoretical perspectives enriches our understanding of the complex dynamics between ethnic groups in specific regions, such as the intermingling process of Chinese descent in Kampung Kapitan Palembang.
Gudykunst (1997) emphasize the importance of the interaction between encoding and decoding processes and their role in constructing meaning in intercultural communication. Their eight core intercultural communication principles, which emphasize the symbolic nature of communication, the complexity of message interpretation, and the influence of power dynamics, offer insightful information for comprehending cultural understanding in Palembang. This study examines the cultural symbols used and how they are shared to examine the reality of communication between various ethnic groups, specifically the ethnic Chinese in Palembang. According to Samovar & Porter (2003), the study acknowledges the significance of cultural perception, including worldview, symbol system, and belief system, in determining the success of cross-cultural communication. These theoretical frameworks are incorporated into the research better to understand interethnic relationships and communication patterns in Palembang and promote cooperation and better cross-cultural understanding between various communities.

In Palembang, interactions between the Chinese community and other locals exemplify the clash of cultures and emphasize the importance of adaptation and integration. However, the persistence of cultural identity frequently prevents the blending of cultures. According to Barth (1969), as cited in Verver et al. (2020), ethnic
communities, like the Chinese community, have unique cultural traits that contribute to their sense of self. Since maintaining their cultural distinctiveness is important to these groups, this identity endures even after contact with other cultures. Kim’s Cultural Adaptation Theory sheds light on the intercultural communication adaptation process, which includes stress, adjustment, and growth stages. New cultural forms emerge as a result of adaptation through acculturation and deculturation. Cultural identity is important to intercultural communication as it develops during cross-cultural encounters and interactions.

In Bangka, ethnic Chinese, and Malay communities’ perceptions reveal problems with cultural identity. In contrast to how the Chinese see themselves, the Malay community views the Chinese as sly and frugal. This is highlighted by the research of Mulyana & Zubair (2015). These perceptions shape the identity that emerges during communication. Intercultural communication depends heavily on nonverbal cues like body language, intonation, and traditional behavior. Disparities in customs and symbols can frequently act as roadblocks to effective communication. Additionally, stereotypes and ethnocentrism hinder communication by misrepresenting group norms and failing to account for individual differences.

Gudykunst (1997) emphasizes maintaining social harmony within collective cultures by avoiding conflicts and minimizing stereotypes by recognizing individual similarities and differences. Understanding the impact of cultural factors, historical aspects, and verbal/non-verbal differences is crucial in assessing the integration of the Chinese community in Kampung Kapitan, Palembang. The discussion of the research topic is based on this theoretical framework, which emphasizes the significance of comprehending the historical context of the arrival of ethnic Chinese in Palembang and its impact on intergroup mixing. The research aims to comprehensively investigate this aspect, encompassing historical elements and contemporary communication processes, to gain insights into cultural dynamics and promote harmonious intercultural relations.

Acculturation and assimilation are significant considerations that must be given prominence in this study. Acculturation, as defined by Redfield (1964) as cited in Alexander (2021), occurs when different cultural groups come into contact and result in changes to the original culture of one or both groups. Mulyana and Rahmat (2001), as cited in Farida (2017), make a case for a clearer definition, highlighting minority groups’ acceptance of new patterns and traits while preserving aspects of their cultural heritage.
According to Kim, as cited in Farida (2017), acculturation is a type of enculturation in which immigrants adapt to and pick up the culture of the locals, ultimately leading to assimilation. One-way or two-way complete assimilation of two cultures is known as assimilation. When a person or group adopts the culture and identity of the dominant group, it is known as one-way assimilation. On the other hand, two-way assimilation entails the sharing and adopting of cultures by various ethnic groups.

The gradual blending of minority and majority groups, known as assimilation, causes the distinctive identities of minority communities to erode. This mixing happens on several levels, including culture, structures, marriage, identity, acceptance of attitudes and behaviors, and assimilation into citizenship. In the context of acculturation, assimilation, and interethnic relations, the question of ethnic identity is crucial because it helps to define and defend ethnic group boundaries through ongoing disclosure and affirmation of values within the group (Barth, 1969, as cited in Verver et al., 2020). Competition over ethnic symbols, power dynamics, and collective memory all play a role in the complicated process of identity construction. It is essential to comprehend ethnic identity to promote nationalism and tolerance. The assimilation of the Chinese community in Palembang is thoroughly examined in this study using theoretical frameworks and practical components that analyze historical contexts, cultural influences, and assimilation dimensions. Concepts like acculturation, assimilation, and ethnic identity are crucial to this study.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study uses interpretive paradigms and qualitative research techniques to investigate the issue. The naturalistic approach enables the researcher to be the main data collection tool and expressively conduct inductive analysis, leading to discoveries and suggestions. To understand community behavior patterns and cultural themes, ethnographic communication techniques are used to observe interactions in natural settings (Creswell, 1998). The study concerns several facets of Chinese society in Kampung Kapitan and Palembang, including cultural values, tradition transmission, the use and interpretation of symbols, acceptance of other cultures, acculturation processes, and historical and environmental factors influencing ethnic identity. Key informant determination techniques aid the identification of informants with knowledge of the Chinese community. The snowball method widens the informant network to include
Kampung Kapitan locals, government employees, and academics with relevant experience.

According to Creswell & Poth (2016), gaining access can be a complex initial stage, depending on the characteristics of the problem being studied. The difficulties in approaching particular subjects are also highlighted by Kuswarno (2006), as cited in Ferdian et al. (2022), who uses his encounter with the Bandung beggar community as an example. The research is accessed through established networks and frequent interactions with well-known Chinese communities. In-depth interviews, participation in observational studies, and document analysis are all examples of data collection techniques. Developing themes and exploring connections between various aspects of the research is done using ethnographic analysis, a continuous process that includes data collection, organization, coding, interpretation, and representation.

This study uses these qualitative methods and techniques to fully comprehend how the Chinese community in Palembang interacts with other ethnic groups and how they communicate with them.

4 RESULTS

The prevailing belief that there is a strained relationship between the Chinese ethnic community and other locals in some areas is contested by this study. It examines the interaction and blending of cultures between the indigenous people of Chinese heritage in Kampung Kapitan, Palembang. The study aims to comprehend how mutual peace and harmony can arise after an ethnic group has inhabited a region for a considerable time. It also highlights coexistence and harmony in particular places and examines how rigid adherence to cultural traditions can prevent adaptation.

4.1 ORIGINS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN PALEMBANG

Arab and Chinese immigrants are just two of the many ethnic groups settling in Palembang. The Chinese community assimilated with the local population through intermarried relationships and cultural assimilation. Racial segregation laws divided the communities during the Dutch colonial era, but trade built a bridge and encouraged understanding between them. Chinese merchant groups dominated the water transportation and rubber processing industries in the early 20th century, strengthening their economic position. Trade was the primary link between the various communities
due to the distinct classifications imposed by colonial rule, further dividing social interactions between the Chinese and indigenous people. Despite these historical divisions, Palembang’s cultural diversity and interactions have contributed to a pluralistic society, embracing the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups and promoting harmony among its inhabitants (Hanafiah, 1988; Jumhari, 2010).

4.2 KAMPUNG KAPITAN

During the early Dutch rule after the decline of the Palembang Sultanate, Tjoa Ki Tjuan and his son Tjoa Han Him became the first Chinese leaders appointed as Mayor and Capitent, respectively, in Palembang (Hanafiah, 1988). The term “Kampung Kapitan” originated from Tjoa Han Him’s rank of Captain, and he played a significant role in overseeing Chinese affairs and tax collection in Palembang. The architecture of Kampung Kapitan reflects a cultural fusion of Chinese, Malay, and European influences, with the Kapitan house symbolizing this blend and representing the village’s long history, dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. The village’s central location in Palembang City, which reflects its rich and varied heritage, is further highlighted by its closeness to the Ampera Bridge and Kuto Besak Fort.

Figure 1. Kampung Kapitan

Source: Prepared by the authors (2020)
There used to be about 25 Chinese households in Kampung Kapitan, but there are now only 13 Chinese families there. People of different ethnicities have settled close by, increasing the diversity of the local population. This racial distribution resulted from new residents buying land from long-term ones and constructing homes.

According to historical accounts, the Chinese community in Palembang experienced prejudice and difficulties from the city’s original inhabitants and the local government. A case in point is the land dispute involving Tjia Tjim Seng, a Chinese resident whose government denied his claim to land ownership despite his long-term use and transactions.

Nevertheless, despite these historical difficulties, Kampung Kapitan continues to be a place of cultural diversity and coexistence. Its designation as a Cultural Heritage site highlights its significance in protecting the history of the Chinese community and showcasing Palembang’s rich cultural diversity.

4.3 RELIGION AND BELIEF

The ethnic backgrounds of its inhabitants influence Kampung Kapitan’s religious diversity. The village welcomes different religions from various ethnic groups because it is open. The predominant religion among the local ethnic groups is Islam, followed by Protestantism and Catholicism, each of which has a relatively small number of households—the Chinese community practices Confucianism, especially in the Kapitan’s house, where ancestor prayers are held. The community promotes harmony and interaction among various racial and religious groups. Each group continues its customs and traditions, which have all been practiced for a long time. Examples include Tahlilan for Muslims, ancestral pilgrimages for the Chinese community, and religious holidays for Christians. In Kampung Kapitan, these customs are an essential part of daily life.

4.4 CULTURAL HERITAGE

As a reminder of the arrival of the Chinese people in the archipelago, including Palembang, Kampung Kapitan, and particularly the iconic Kapitan Tjoa Han Lim’s house, they are of significant historical significance. Two main houses are present, one of which is a mosque. The houses’ original materials are still present, with the front being well-kept and the back deteriorating. The village’s layout and homes are reminiscent of
Palembang’s native inhabitants, combining elements of Chinese and Palembang architectural styles.

Figure 3. Kapitan Tjoa Han Lim’s house

Source: Prepared by the authors (2020)

The government designated Kampung Kapitan, particularly the Kapitan house, as a Cultural Heritage site in 2010 because of its historical significance. Despite this acknowledgement, the government has not responded adequately regarding maintenance, leaving the Kapitan house’s physical state needing attention. However, the recognition has increased visits to Kampung Kapitan, with the Chinese community coming for prayers and the general public coming for sightseeing, helping to fuel the village’s growing popularity. The Kapitan House is the focal point for various Chinese traditions and customs routinely observed in the area, vital in preserving their cultural heritage. These traditions include Village Alms, God’s Birthday, Chinese New Year celebrations, Ceng Beng grave pilgrimage, Earth God Ceremony, Cap Go Meh, and Kirap Srivijaya. These events, rooted in Chinese traditions, contribute to reviving and preserving the heritage of Kampung Kapitan, making it a historical tourist destination in Palembang, and showcasing its rich cultural tapestry.

5 DISCUSSION

The discussion in this study explores the formulation of problems and research questions, focusing on the development of cultural symbols, traditions, and communication patterns in Kampung Kapitan as interpreted by the local community of
both Chinese descent and other ethnicities residing in Palembang, beyond Kampung Kapitan.

5.1 KAPITAN HOUSE

The Kapitan house is a prominent symbol of Kapitan Village’s historical significance. Originally consisting of 15 houses clustered together, some have disappeared over time. The 139-year-old house exhibits a blend of Chinese, European, and Palembang architectural elements. The architecture is typical of the Chinese and later became a symbol of Chinese influence in Palembang (Taal, 2022).

Figure 4 illustrates the cultural fusion in Kapitan Village, where the Kapitan house, known as “Rumah Kapitan” or “ash house,” holds significant meaning as a cultural heritage site. The house’s distinct attributes and ornamental decorations display Chinese symbols, reflecting the ongoing acculturation and shared practices among different ethnicities in Palembang. The house serves as a gathering place for residents and individuals of Chinese descent, celebrating Chinese holidays and engaging in daily activities together. Its architectural elements combine local values with Chinese spatial layouts, exemplifying a harmonious blend of cultures within the house and showcasing the village’s cultural communication and integration.

Figure 4. Kapitan House

Source: Prepared by the authors (2020)
5.2 PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIETY

People of Chinese descent are distinguished in Kapitan Village by physical traits like fair skin, narrow eyes, and straight hair that are acknowledged as part of their Chinese identity. However, because the community celebrates cultural diversity and coexists peacefully, these differences do not cause issues or hinder interactions. The Chinese community is referred to by terms like “Wong Cino.” Still, terms like “Koko/Ko” and “Cici/Ci” indicate interpersonal relationships, which reflect respect and acceptance of one another. Accepting cultural diversity and intermarriages has caused some indigenous people to share similar physical characteristics, fostering integration and unity in the village. With an emphasis on acceptance and familiarity over physical markers, these distinctions encourage various communication experiences and interpretations. Finally, Kampung Kapitan’s Chinese and non-Chinese communities coexist peacefully, placing more value on harmony and cultural acceptance than outward appearances.

5.3 LANGUAGE AND WRITING

Language is critical in shaping inter-ethnic relationships in Kampung Kapitan, facilitating communication and fostering understanding. Despite the linguistic diversity within the Chinese community, individuals of Chinese descent predominantly use the local Palembang language, reflecting strong influence and adaptation. Previous generations did not pass down the Chinese language, limiting its usage and proficiency among current residents. As a result, Chinese writings and characters are no longer understood, indicating a lack of familiarity. The widespread use of the Palembang language has contributed to the Chinese community’s assimilation into the larger Palembang citizenry. In Kapitan Village, Chinese language symbols are now restricted, and understanding them is uncommon (Mulyana & Zubair, 2015).

Chinese-speaking people in Palembang use and adopt local languages as part of their acculturation strategy, which has resulted in their limited knowledge of Chinese. For instance, Yanto and Uu mainly speak Indonesian or the regional tongue. By reflecting the assimilation of the Chinese community into the local culture, this use of the Palembang language encourages social integration and lessens the sense of ethnic distance. The language dynamics in Kampung Kapitan emphasize the Chinese community’s adaptation and acceptance of the local culture while maintaining their Chinese identity. Language dynamics symbolize this integration of the Chinese community into the larger Palembang
community. Language adoption in Kampung Kapitan reflects the changing dynamics of interethnic relations because language is a potent symbol of culture and identity (Ho et al., 2018).

5.4 STATUES OF GODS AND TRINKETS OF WORSHIP

People of Chinese descent regularly worship rituals in Kapitan Village, honoring various deities thought to impact human life significantly (Clart, 2012). The Kapitan House is a focal point of worship during occasions like Cap Go Meh, Ceng Beng, Imlek, Kirab Sriwijaya, and regular weekly worship, where locals bring their god statues to pray. Mulyadi, the caretaker of the Kapitan House, ensures the space is prepared for worshipers, regardless of his Catholic faith. The Chinese community views physical statues as embodiments, with the true power lying beyond the tangible forms. Each god holds a unique significance for the community and local population, with Dewi Kwam Im, the Goddess of Mercy, one of the most renowned figures in the Dewa Kwam Tung Temple. The worship rituals occur in the living room of Rumah Kapitan, where worshipers arrange the god statues and offer incense and prayers, with each individual worshiping according to their beliefs. The worship objects and god statues represent the Chinese community’s diverse religious and cultural practices, deeply integrated into their daily lives, showcasing their strong cultural identity and the harmonious coexistence of various religious beliefs within Kapitan Village.

5.5 TRADITIONS PRACTICED

In Kapitan Village, the worship objects and Chinese symbols associated with the “Wong Cino” rituals are well-known and commonplace among the locals, reflecting the strong ties between these symbols and Chinese culture deeply ingrained in the community. The locals continue to practice these traditions despite not fully understanding the significance of some symbols, attributing them to Tjoa Ham Lin’s ancestors’ guidance. The Chinese community can preserve its cultural identity while incorporating elements of the dominant culture thanks to acculturation and ongoing assimilation (Mulyana and Rahmat, 2001). Jiobu (1988) emphasizes that while assimilation is sometimes the result of acculturation, it does involve an effort on both sides to understand one another. The village acts as a focal point for the fusion of numerous rituals and traditions, some of which have Chinese roots and others which have
been locally developed. These rituals and traditions cross religious boundaries and promote peaceful coexistence and respect between various religious and cultural groups within the community.

5.6 VILLAGE ALMS

Chinese and non-Chinese community members value the Kapitan Village Village Alms ritual because of its distinctive fusion of indigenous, Chinese, and Islamic elements. Incorporating Islamic principles, this tradition was passed down by Kapitan Tjoa Ham Lim and is open to all locals, regardless of their Chinese ancestry. In addition to fostering ties between Chinese and non-Chinese villagers and a sense of community, the ritual includes prayers for ancestors and protection from impending disasters (Yani, 2019). Similarly, Muslims worldwide regularly observe *ruah*, a Javanese custom that was later assimilated into Islamic doctrine (Wuryansari et al., 2014). The event is organized with Islamic religious figures leading prayers and reciting the Quran, while non-Muslims pray according to their beliefs. The collaboration and support between the Chinese and non-Chinese residents during Village Alms showcase the harmonious coexistence and acceptance of diverse religious traditions within the village, highlighting its cultural richness and interwoven traditions that shape Kapitan Village’s unique identity.

5.7 WORSHIP THI KONG

Pai Thi Kong, also known as Thi Kong prayer, is a significant ceremony for the Chinese community in Palembang, dedicated to their god, Thian Kong. Held during Chinese New Year at the Kapitan House, the event involves burning agarwood sticks (*hio*) as participants recite prayers in front of statues of gods. The central location of Kapitan House attracts Chinese citizens from various places, making it a communal and festive ritual. The Thi Kong Prayer showcases cultural diversity, incorporating elements of belief, symbols, and customs from both the Chinese community and the residents. Using *hio* as a cultural symbol and accessory in various rituals practiced by all community groups fosters acceptance and understanding of its role in the Thi Kong Prayer ritual. The local community respects the sacred symbols of the Chinese gods, viewing them as part of the Chinese tradition without considering them sacred.
5.8 CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

Chinese New Year is significant in Kampung Kapitan, symbolizing new beginnings and hope for a better future. The village is adorned with vibrant Chinese decorations, and both Chinese and non-Chinese residents actively participate in installing them. Although not fully understood, these decorations are seen as distinct identifiers of Chinese heritage, reinforcing the village’s Chinese roots. The significance of Chinese ethnic symbols is further highlighted by the symbolic meanings attached to traditional foods, particularly basket cakes and vegetable-based foods. During this festive occasion in Kapitan Village, unity and togetherness are strengthened by the shared appreciation and understanding of Chinese cultural heritage.

5.9 CHENG BENG

Chinese culture attaches great significance to the grave pilgrimage known as Ceng Beng, a tradition in Kapitan Village. Chinese descendants come together to prepare offerings for their ancestors as part of this ritual to show gratitude to their divine and human ancestors. Even though not everyone fully understands the symbolism, they respect and adhere to the customs passed down by their ancestors. The pilgrimage is actively organized by non-Chinese locals, highlighting the close ties between the two communities. The local community’s participation in Ceng Beng promotes harmony, respect, and understanding between Chinese and non-Chinese residents of Kapitan Village, strengthening this relationship. This shared participation in the ritual serves as a cultural bridge, promoting cohesion and cooperation among the diverse cultural groups in the village.

5.10 EARTH GOD CEREMONY

The ceremony before the main event of Cap Go Meh in Kampung Kapitan serves as an introduction, seeking permission from ancestors and gods for specific activities. The Earth god offering ceremony, held at the Kapitan House’s yard, involves prayers and the placement of hio. Although performed individually, residents perceive it to represent Chinese cultural identity and an integral part of their daily lives. Residents actively participate by preparing equipment, assisting with parking, and ensuring security and comfort at the site. The well-organized activities facilitate resident involvement, as they are invited and welcomed by the Rumah Kapitan residents. Proactive communication and
citizen engagement play a vital role in fostering a sense of community and neighborly relations, turning the event into a shared experience where residents willingly volunteer to contribute, similar to a gathering at a neighbor’s house.

5.11 CAP GO MEH

Cap Go Meh, a Confucian holiday celebrated in Kampung Kapitan, holds a tradition of praying for deceased parents and ancestors. The symbols and community involvement during Cap Go Meh are similar to Chinese New Year, representing the community’s strong connection to Chinese identity and tradition. Residents actively participate in various activities, offering assistance and donations to support the event. They facilitate processions, donate food and equipment, and help with pre-event preparations, showcasing their spontaneous and customary practice of community involvement. The celebration holds cultural significance and is viewed as an opportunity for economic benefits, as increased footfall and economic activity during the event benefit the community.

5.12 KIRAB SRIVIJAYA

The city government organized the annual procession in Kapitan Village on December 10 to display Chinese symbols throughout the community and promote cultural tourism and economic benefits for locals. The area’s strong sense of community and historical roots create an inclusive and peaceful atmosphere during the event. In contrast to other places with Chinese communities, worship rituals, and Chinese symbols are voluntary in Kapitan Village, respecting individual interpretations and fostering harmony among locals and visitors. The village’s distinctive cultural identity and appeal as a destination for cultural tourism are enhanced by the harmonious integration of cultural traditions, tourism, and community involvement.

5.13 INTERPRETING CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS

5.13.1 Meaning in Cultural Signs

The research’s findings emphasize several crucial ideas concerning the interpretations made of the Chinese community in Kapitan Village and elsewhere. Rumah Kapitan’s historical significance as a representation of Chinese settlement in Palembang highlights the cultural significance of the Chinese presence in key urban areas, promoting
regular and welcoming interactions between the general public and the Chinese community. Long-standing economic ties, particularly the Chinese community’s participation in trade and business ownership, influence perceptions of their economic capabilities by emphasizing transactional dynamics. Due to historical events and interactions, meanings associated with the Chinese ethnicity and Kapitan Village have emerged, forging strong cultural ties among the locals. These results highlight the complexity of cultural interactions and meanings in Kapitan Village.

Figure 5. The emergence of Meanings about Chinese Ethnicity and Kampung Kapitan

The figure summarizes the factors contributing to the emergence of meanings about Chinese ethnicity and Kampitan Village. This phenomenon is not limited to Kapitan Village alone but can also be observed in other Chinatown areas in Palembang. Chinese communities in different regions exhibit unity through various events and active involvement in local and Chinese traditions and rituals. Kapitan Village stands out for its unique blend of economic, social, cultural, and identity ties among its residents, forming a cohesive social system. This concept aligns with Soekanto (1986), as cited in Nasir (2022), about social systems built upon common interests and mutually beneficial motives. Thus, the bonds within Kapitan Village go beyond mere economic transactions and reflect a comprehensive social fabric.
5.13.2 Transmission of Meaning

The emergence of meaning is a gradual and ongoing process, shaped and created through communication events. In Kapitan Village, the dissemination of meaning attached to ethnic symbols of Chinese descent relies on the occurrence of these events. Communication and culture are inseparable, continually constructing each other’s meaning, as highlighted by Liliweri (2004). Intercultural encounters and exposure to Palembang culture in Kampung Kapitan help to shape the changing interpretation of Chinese symbols. Participation in the community encourages a sense of ownership and profit-sharing, fostering understanding and erasing ethnic distinctions among locals. People of Chinese descent are more fully understood and valued by the local community due to their integration into village life. Despite how the media shapes public perceptions, locals are largely unaffected by unfavorable attitudes or stereotypes. Their relationship with the Chinese community is strengthened by the passing down of family legends, and regular interactions and information sharing are made easier by their proximity to the Musi River and the market and by promotional efforts made by the Palembang City Government. Overall, cross-cultural exchange, community involvement, media influence, storytelling, and daily interactions strengthen the ongoing transmission and understanding of Chinese cultural symbols and identity in Kapitan Village, emphasizing its importance in Palembang.

Figure 6. Process of Spreading Meaning about Chinese Ethnicity

Source: Prepared by the authors (2020)
5.13.3 Understanding Different Cultural Symbols

In Kapitan Village, Chinese cultural symbols carry diverse meanings but exhibit shared characteristics within the community. Despite notable cultural disparities between Chinese and non-Chinese residents, physical features like narrow eyes, fair skin, and accents are primary markers of Chinese identity. Routine celebrations with Chinese symbols, such as red colors, lanterns, and statues of gods, occur regularly and are integrated into daily life. The local community perceives these symbols as ordinary due to familiarity, fostering acceptance and integration. Despite not fully comprehending their meanings, non-Chinese residents respect and participate in the customs and rituals associated with these symbols. The designation of Kapitan Village and recognition of Rumah Kapitan as a Cultural Heritage area further emphasize the significance of Chinese symbols as representations of the region’s identity. These factors contribute to a harmonious coexistence of diverse cultural identities within the community.

Figure 7. Understanding of Chinese Symbols by the Community

Source: Prepared by the authors (2020)

In Kapitan Village, the understanding of different symbols is exemplified by how individuals of Chinese descent interpret differences from other societies. A concrete example arose when a resident constructed a mosque next to Kapitan House. Although the construction was not an issue, it became problematic as the land used for the mosque was part of the Ruma Kapitan property. Despite most individuals of Chinese descent following non-Muslim religions, they chose not to question the symbol of the mosque and let it be, demonstrating a desire to avoid conflict concerning places of worship. Ko
Mulyadi’s explanation echoed the sentiments of other residents, acknowledging the mosque’s presence in their community and choosing tolerance and coexistence of diverse beliefs and practices within Kapitan Village. This viewpoint emphasizes restraint and fosters an understanding of different symbols’ significant role in society (Mulyana and Rakhmat, 2006).

5.13.4 Patterns in the Process of Ethnic Intermingling

Ethnographic approaches are employed to explore the communication patterns in Kapitan Village, shedding light on the dynamics of relationships between the Chinese community and neighboring communities. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the discussion should not be confined to Kapitan Village alone. Extending the research to encompass other ethnic Chinese communities in South Sumatra is necessary due to their widespread presence and sizable population. While similarities may exist, slight variations among these communities also warrant examination.

Communication patterns encompass the relational structures observed in communication events involving multiple participants (Baskoro et al., 2023; Hidayat et al., 2023; Kalogiannidis et al., 2023; Kuswarno, 2006, as cited in Ferdian et al., 2022). The focus on communication events considers all aspects contributing to or influencing the communication process. These patterns and forms of communication represent ongoing interactions between individuals (Soekanto, 1986, as cited in Nasir, 2022). Thus, within the context of communication ethnography, these patterns and forms of communication are interwoven with the actors involved, verbal and non-verbal communication, the physical space and time of communication, message interpretation, and ethical considerations. The interplay of these elements gives rise to distinctive patterns in the communication process.

5.13.5 Communications Actors

In Kapitan Village, Pak Mul and Ko Godek are central figures representing the descendants of Kapitan Tjoa Ham Lin and bridging connections between individuals of Chinese descent and other residents. Pak Mul, the village head, plays a significant role as a local government representative. Previously, Gatot, also of Chinese ethnicity, held this position and earned the trust and respect of the community. After Gatot’s passing, his younger brother, Wijaya, succeeded him as the village head, continuing their family’s
glass business and fostering unity among citizens. These key figures are vital in promoting togetherness and breaking down barriers in interethnic interactions within Kapitan Village.

5.13.6 Residents of Kampung Kapitan of ethnic Chinese descent

Kapitan Village houses a small population of ethnic Chinese descendants who seamlessly integrate into the community’s customs and communicate primarily in the local language, Palembang. Economic and social activities are conducted harmoniously with established norms, with residents collaborating and promoting unity. During crises, all residents stand together as one, regardless of ethnicity, and festive occasions further foster togetherness. Face-to-face interactions remain integral to daily life in the village, although the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily affected such interactions. Kapitan Village exemplifies a harmonious coexistence among residents, transcending religious and cultural backgrounds.

5.13.7 Other Residents of kampung Kapitan

The village initially consisted of ethnic Chinese residents, but as settlements developed, people from other ethnicities in South Sumatra started to move in. The population of Kampung Kapitan Village is 210 people, with non-Chinese residents serving as communication actors who interacted and blended with the ethnic Chinese descendants. Inter-ethnic marriages were common, with Chinese descendants marrying locals, including Muslims. Non-Chinese residents now outnumber the Chinese, leading to denser settlements and the transfer of land ownership. Verbal communication played a vital role, involving words and language as symbols representing thoughts and facilitating resident interactions. In language, words will relate to people’s thoughts, not to matters or contexts alone. What is directly related is the word and the thought (Samovar & Porter, 2003).

5.13.8 Verbal Communication

Verbal communication involves conversations with specific topics, often held in homes or during special events. Chats are casual talks without specific topics, often seen in the courtyard of the Kapitan House. Daily calls differ between Chinese and local
Table 1. Family designations used by the Chinese community of Palembang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designations</th>
<th>Read</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ye Ye</td>
<td>Ye Ye</td>
<td>Grandpa (from next door to Papa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nai Nai</td>
<td>Nai Nai</td>
<td>Grandma (from papa's side)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gong Gong</td>
<td>Kung kung</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Po Po</td>
<td>Po Po</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo bo</td>
<td>Pek-pek/Apek</td>
<td>Papa’s uncle/elder brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shu shu</td>
<td>Acek</td>
<td>Papa’s younger brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gu gu</td>
<td>Ku ku</td>
<td>Daddy’s brother/sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiu jiu</td>
<td>Ju ju</td>
<td>Mommy’s brother/sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A yi</td>
<td>A yi</td>
<td>Brother/sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jie jie</td>
<td>Ce-ce</td>
<td>Older women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ge ge</td>
<td>Koko</td>
<td>Older males</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research interview with Suprapto Gunawan in 2020

In Kapitan Village, the Chinese community uses specific designations like Koko, Cece, and Apek while addressing locals with everyday terms in the Palembang language. Verbal communication is influenced by daily conditions and individual experiences, reflecting the adjustment between Chinese and Palembang cultures. Over time, the language adaptation has led to the dominance of the Palembang language in Kapitan Village, except for certain specific terms, showcasing the dynamic nature of communication in the community. Despite cultural differences, language adjustments occur, showcasing the process of adaptation and acculturation and aligning the language with local norms (Gudykunst, 1997).

5.13.9 Non-Verbal Communication

Nonverbal communication in Kapitan Village holds immense significance as it involves stimuli generated and utilized by individuals to convey potential messages through body language, gestures, and habits. This multidimensional activity coexists alongside verbal messages, complementing and enriching the communication experience. Various factors such as cultural background, socioeconomic status, education, gender, age, and personal health influence nonverbal communication, and understanding cultural variations are crucial in interpreting these cues (Patel et al., 2013).

In Kapitan Village, the interconnection between culture and nonverbal communication is a profound aspect of human interaction (Samovar & Porter, 2003). Diligent observation and categorization daily movements and habits are necessary to
comprehend nonverbal communication among its diverse residents. Nonverbal aspects dominate interpersonal, group, and social interactions (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008), where symbols play a prominent role in conveying nonverbal messages between Chinese and non-Chinese descent individuals. Speech markers, clothing choices, and unique handshake gestures signify cultural identities and highlight the complexity of interethnic communication. Understanding cultural differences and promoting cultural sensitivity is crucial for positive community relationships in the village.

6 CONCLUSION

The process of cultural communication and integration in Kampung Kapitan Palembang is a historical journey that involves the traditions and teachings of the Chinese community and their interaction with the socio-cultural context of Palembang society. This procedure can be traced back to Kapitan Tjoa Ham Ling, a legendary figure who established the Chinese community’s structure and direction in Palembang. His teachings, which emphasized the value of adhering to Chinese traditions and adopting local customs, were passed down to succeeding generations.

The Kapitan House and its residents play a central role in the communication patterns between the various ethnic groups that coexist in Kampung Kapitan Palembang. The residents’ actions and behaviors impact how other people of Chinese descent behave. Additionally, the locals use the Kapitan House residents as a point of comparison and frequently conclude the Chinese community from their behavior. On the other hand, those who live in the Kapitan House see themselves as role models and take an active role in connecting with and communicating with the neighborhood, which promotes a spirit of openness and willingness to engage.
REFERENCES


