Pertanika Proceedings 1 (1): 41 - 45 (2025)

PERTANIKA JOURNALS

PERTANIKA PROCEEDINGS

Journal homepage: http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/

Dynamics of Interethnic and Interreligious Relations: Building Harmony (Case Study of Chinese and Non-Chinese Ethnic Group in Tangerang, Indonesia)

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ABSTRACT

Various conflicts influence the presence of the Chinese minority in Indonesia. There are many negative stereotypes attached to Indonesian Chinese, which causes poor relationships with non-Chinese ethnic groups. However, in Tangerang, Indonesia, the Chinese ethnic group called Cina Benteng; has lived in harmony with local people who are non-Chinese. This study aims to uncover the strategies used by Cina Benteng and non-Chinese ethnic groups in the Tangerang area to negotiate their identities to maintain harmonious relations in society. This study utilises a qualitative approach employing the case study method. The data collection involves in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs), while the data analysis techniques include pattern matching. The informants in this study are religious figures, cultural figures, village heads, and residents in the Tangerang area. The results showed that the Cina Benteng and non-Chinese ethnic groups in Tangerang, which are Sunda ethnicity, are able to negotiate their socio-cultural identities in the form of ethnic and religious identities. The intercultural communication competencies possessed by the Cina Benteng and Sunda ethnic groups create a multicultural, harmonious, and inclusive community group. The city government and local community leaders also have a significant role in maintaining harmonious relations between ethnicities in Tangerang.

Keywords: Cina Benteng, harmonious society, identity negotiation, interethnic relations, interreligious relations

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 09 January 2025
Published: 17 February 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47836/pp.1.1.009

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a longstanding history of resentment towards the ethnic Chinese community in Indonesia, characterised by unfair beliefs and negative stereotypes that persist to this day. Historical records showed that Chinese ethnicities in Indonesia have become victims of inter-ethnic conflicts since

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Indonesia's independence in 1945 (Hidayat & Farid, 2021; Nurrahmi & Putra, 2019). In the Chinese ethnic settlement area in Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia, the Chinese ethnic group known as Cina Benteng; has displayed remarkable adaptability and identity negotiation, fostering harmony and tolerance with diverse ethnic and religious groups. Establishing a reputation for minimal conflict and harmonious living (Hidayat & Farid, 2021; Malik et al., 2022).

In the given framework, many elements require negotiation by both parties to establish harmony. During the process of negotiating identity, individuals aim to uphold and affirm their identities through interaction (Compton-Lilly et al., 2017; Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2020; Eko & Putranto, 2019, 2021; Ting-Toomey, 2017). In multicultural settings, it is important to flexibly negotiate one's socio-cultural and personal identity across different social boundaries (Blair & Liu, 2020; Ting-Toomey, 2017). Interactions in multicultural society lead to the emergence of dual or bicultural/biracial identities, where individuals identify with two different ethnicities. This identity results from mixed marriages between races, ethnicities, or religions and is shaped by complex and layered life experiences (Compton-Lilly et al., 2017; Hussain & Muhamad, 2022; Janík, 2017; Kim & Meares, 2024).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employs a qualitative approach utilising a case study method to examine the dynamics of inter-religious and ethnic relations between the Cina Benteng and non-Chinese ethnic groups in the Tangerang area. Data was collected in July 2024 through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observation of ethnic Chinese residential areas to acquire extensive data on the interactions between the Cina Benteng and non-Chinese ethnic groups. The study involved religious and cultural figures, local officials, community members, and representatives of the Tangerang City Interfaith Harmony Forum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History of Cina Benteng

According to research data, it is estimated that around 1407 Chinese people settled at the mouth of the Cisadane River. Over time, this Chinese ethnic group integrated and intermarried with local inhabitants, giving rise to a generation of Peranakans known as Cina Benteng that communicate in regional languages such as Betawi and Sundanese. The Cina Benteng represents a group that has deeply assimilated into the local culture and considers itself an essential part of the Indonesian nation. Unlike the more visible Chinese population known for their business success, the Cina Benteng are often unfairly stereotyped as lower-class citizens by many Indonesians (Muhammad et al., 2023; Sugihartati, 2019).

Examining the Negotiation of Religious Identity Among Cina Benteng and Non-Chinese Ethnic Group

The data shows that the people of Cina Benteng strongly follow Confucian teachings, which emphasise love for others. These teachings guide their daily lives, shaping their interactions with others. It leads to conceptualising local wisdom values into religious values known as "tepo seliro", a Javanese concept emphasising tolerance's importance. Meanwhile, non-Chinese ethnic groups who are Muslim adhere to the principle of Rahmatan Lil'Alamin, which includes Islamic teachings of peace, prosperity, and tranquillity for all individuals in the universe (Ulva et al., 2021).

Examining the Negotiation of Ethnic Identity Among Cina Benteng and Non-Chinese Ethnic Group

Non-Chinese people living in the Tangerang area are mainly from the Sundanese ethnic groups. The Sundanese people in Tangerang valued "Someah", which shows their friendly and open attitude towards others. To embrace their identity as Sundanese citizens open to newcomers, non-Chinese ethnic groups incorporate Mandarin words into their daily communication. The daily lives of the Cina Benteng are also influenced by various local cultures, with the use of the Sundanese language in their interactions. The diverse forms of art in the Tangerang area also reflect the integration of Chinese elements into traditional arts, showing that non-ethnic Chinese groups embrace foreign cultural influences and express them through original cultural arts in their region. As a result, the unique arts of Tangerang are closely linked to Chinese culture.

Through the process of identity negotiation, the Cina Benteng in the Tangerang area developed a biracial identity, facilitated in part by intermarriage between Cina Benteng and non-Chinese ethnic groups, constructing the Cina Benteng identity as Peranakan Chinese, descendants of black-skinned Chinese, their lack of fluency in Mandarin, and their fluency in Sundanese. As a result, they construct personalised identities that distinguish them from other ethnic Chinese residents in Indonesia. It demonstrates the ability of Cina Benteng residents to negotiate their socio-cultural identities (Malik et al., 2022).

The same occurred for non-Chinese ethnic groups in the Tangerang area. They established their identities as welcoming Sundanese Tangerang residents who embrace and respect diversity. This identity sets them apart from Sundanese ethnic residents in other regions. This discovery illustrates that both Cina Benteng and non-Chinese ethnic groups acquire effective communication skills through their daily interactions within their multicultural environment (Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2020). The Tangerang City Government, along with religious and cultural leaders, has played a key role in integrating Cina Benteng as valued members of the local community.

CONCLUSION

Identity negotiation entails the dialectical process that occurs when members of minority groups enter a culturally distinct society and negotiate their identities through verbal and non-verbal communication. This process was evident in the interactions of Cina Benteng with non-Chinese ethnic groups in the Tangerang area. They negotiated through verbal communication in Sundanese and non-verbal adoption of Sundanese cultural practices in their daily lives. The integration of the Cina Benteng and non-Chinese ethnic groups is furthered by intermarriage, which gives rise to the Peranakan Chinese with a dual racial identity. This unique identity eases the acceptance of differences and facilitates learning among Tangerang residents. This phenomenon, not commonly observed in Indonesia, stands as a symbol of inclusivity and mutual understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by Universitas Multimedia Nusantara contract No. 065-RD-LPPM-UMN/P-INT/VI/2024.

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