

The Role of Benteng Chinese Women in Reinforcing Cultural and Economic Resilience

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Abstract

Cultural shift and poverty problem are two matters occurring most frequently in marginalized customary community environment. Those two matters also occur in Benteng Chinese community living in Tangerang area. This research aimed to describe the role of Benteng Chinese women in Community's cultural and economic resilience. The method employed in this research was qualitative one with Ethnographic approach. This research took place in Kelurahan Mekarsari, Neglasari Sub District, Tangerang City, Banten Province. Eight informants were employed in this study: Benteng Chinese community, members of *Lentera Benteng Jaya* Resource Development Female Cooperatives, members of *Cokek Sipatmo* Dance group, and those related. Techniques of collecting data used were interview and observation. Data validation employed source and method validities with Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence model analysis technique. The result of research showed that cultural and economic resilience problems can be dealt with using social capital the Benteng Chinese women affiliated in *Lentera Benteng Jaya* Resource Development Female Cooperatives have.

Keywords: Benteng Chinese women, cultural and economic resilience, cooperatives, social capital.

1. Introduction

Chinese community has been a part of Indonesian community diversity. Indonesian occupied the first position as the state other than China People Republic and Taiwan with largest Chinese community population of 7.6 million until 2016. The second and third positions are occupied by South East Asian countries as well, Thailand and Malaysia, with 7 million and 6.4 million people, respectively (Databoks, 2016). Meanwhile, another data shows that Chinese community in Indonesia dwell DKI Jakarta province most widely, 632,372 people, followed with West Borneo 358,451 people, and North Sumatera 340,320 people. The same data shows that Chinese community occupies the second rank following Batavian community to live in urban areas in Indonesia (Central Statistic Bureau, 2010).

One of Chinese communities living in urban areas is Benteng Chinese community in Tangerang. The term Benteng Chinese refers to the Chinese community's past history living around fortress (Benteng) area constructed by Dutch colonial government in Tangerang. This Chinese community gradually acculturated with Tangerang local community, thereby created Benteng Chinese community with distinctive peculiarity. This term is still used to refer to Tangerang native Chinese community until today.

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The peculiarity of Benteng Chinese community can be seen from their physique unlike common Chinese community. Physically, most of them are just like local community with brown skin big eyes. In addition, the peculiarity can also be seen from the culture they have. Benteng Chinese community culture is the combination between Chinese and Batavian cultures. Nonetheless, most Benteng Chinese people begin to abandon their culture and to be affected by values originating from foreign countries. One of its examples is the shift of noble values existing in *Sipatmo* dance into *Cokek* dance identical with eroticism. It becomes the main problem the Benteng Chinese community encounters. On the one hand, modernization facilitates their life so that their manual life formerly changes into modern one, but on the other hand it also results in substantial problem, the degraded local cultural values (Ruslan, 2015).

Another problem the Benteng Chinese community encounters is poverty. In contrast to the stereotype inherent so far to Chinese community that they are upper-class society, Benteng Chinese community is the lower-middle class-society. Its livelihood is also as same as that of local community. Although many Chinese people become merchants, their life is still simple and some of them instead have not been independent of poverty yet (Sugianta et al, 2012). As a result, most of them are entrapped into having debt to usurer – an address to call those lending money with high interest. This condition leads them to fall down to poverty further.

Departing those cultural and economic problems, Benteng Chinese women are encouraged to do something for their own community. Women are an element of family contributing to economic matter. Basically, women have production function within family. Production function relates to economy in which women participate either directly or indirectly in development according to interest and ability they have corresponding to the education they have attended (Puspitasari, 2012).

The role of women in the cultural and economic reinforcement attempt can perform maximally when they are in group. Their attempt should be institutionalized and structured as well. Therefore, in 2015, Benteng Chinese women helped with a non-government organization operating in women resource development field established a cooperative called Benteng Chinese Women Cooperatives. Cooperative is chosen as the form of their attempt institutionalization because it is easier and simpler to run. The data shows that the number of cooperatives increases significantly from 141,326 in 2006 to 194,295 in 2012. The increase in cooperative quantity indicates that cooperative is a potential institution to improve economic, social, and cultural conditions (Faedlulloh, 2015; Rukin, 2018).

Cooperative becomes a solution to the Benteng Chinese women who want to contribute to reinforcing the community's cultural and economic resilience. Through social capital existing in cooperative, it can run well. Social capital is productive enabling the achievement of certain end objective that is difficult to achieve without it (Trisnanto et al., 2017). The term capital generally symbolizes something producing or production factors that are expected to produce productive service in some periods of time (Slamet, 2012; Wulandari et al, 2018). Social capital refers to Bourdieu's relation theory defining social capital as a resource unit related to network ownership and institutional relation based on mutual recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman argued that the definition of social capital is related to its function. Furthermore, he suggested that social capital has two main elements: (1) social capital includes a number of social structure aspects, and (2) social capital facilitates individuals to do something in the social structure (Coleman, 1988). Meanwhile, Fukuyama (2001) defined social capital as an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between individuals. Putnam (1993) mentioned that social capital is "similar to the notions of physical and human capital refers to feature of social organization, such as network, norms, and trust that increase a society's productive potential". Furthermore, in his work entitled *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, Putnam (1995) added that one of important elements is reciprocity.

From the definitions aforementioned, it can be summarized that the elements existing in social capital are, among others: network, norms, trust and reciprocity. Gidden (in Damsar & Indriyani, 2015) defined trust as “a belief in an individual’s or a system’s reliability, related to various outcomes or events, in which the belief appreciates a faith in others’ integrity or affection, or in the appropriateness of abstract principle”. Suparlan (1982) stated that “social network is a grouping consisting of a number of people, at least three people, each of which has distinctive identity and interrelated through the existing social relations, so that they can be grouped into a social unity through the social relation”. Social norm “*specify what actions are regarded by a set of persons as proper or correct, or improper and incorrect*” (Coleman, 1990: 243). Meanwhile, reciprocity can be found in the forms of giving, taking, and helping each other that can result from social interaction (Soetomo, 2006).

2. Method

This research was conducted in 2018 in Kelurahan Mekarsari, Tangerang. The research approach employed in this study was ethnography. “*Ethno* means people and *graphein* refers to writing – and ethnography is a systematic description of habits, customs and norms of people who are the designated research subjects in a nuanced and detailed manner. It is about a culture studying a culture” (Spradley, 1979; Creswell, 2007). The process of collecting data was conducted through interviewing in-depth several informants and observing the research location. The sample was taken using purposive sampling technique. The sample was selected based on specified characteristics. Data validity used source and method validities with Spradley’s Developmental Research Sequence model analysis technique (Spradley, 1979).

3. Result

Lentera Benteng Jaya Resource Development Female Cooperatives (Indonesian: *Koperasi Wanita Pengembang Sumberdaya Lentera Benteng Jaya* or KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya) is the one established on the initiative of Women Resource Development Center (Indonesian: *Pusat Pengembangan Sumberdaya Wanita* or PPWS) NGO, Jakarta. In 2015, PPSW Jakarta has an empowerment program for marginalized customary community with Benteng Chinese community being the target of program. From a long discussion, KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya was established with original name “*Koperasi Wanita Cina Benteng* (Benteng Chinese Women Cooperatives) headquartered in RW 04 Kampung Lebak Wangi (Lebak Wangi Village) on May 2015, with 25 members. Originally, this cooperative was limited to Benteng Chinese descent women only, but currently it has expanded and become a kelurahan (village)-level cooperative named KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya and opened to the communities beyond Benteng Chinese descent.

KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya has save-loan activity and training to improve women’s knowledge and skill and to facilitate the members of community to get legal identity (demographic administration), and serves to be a media for women to learn organization and leadership. One of interesting programs in KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya is the development of *Cokek Sipatmo* dance. *Cokek Sipatmo* dance is a combination between Chinese and Batavian cultures. This dance was originally a *Sipatmo* dance usually performed in religious ceremony or rite in China temples. In its development, this dance changes into the one that can be enjoyed by all audiences and is renamed into *cokek* dance.

Cokek dance still can be enjoyed in Benteng Chinese community’s wedding events. Formerly, *gambang kromong* music accompanied this dance, but as time goes by, *gambang kromong* music is replaced with *dangdut* music. In *cokek* dance there is also a dancing movement along with the invited guests, called *ngibing*. This movement often reveals very intimate relation

between dancer and the guest invited to dance. Costume worn by *cokek* dancer no longer wear *kebaya encim* or *baju kurung* (enclosed dress) but wear tight dress featuring her body shape. Then, *cokek* dance is getting more identical with less good things featured through its dancer's movement and costume.

The existence of KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya initiated the recovery of *Sipatmo* dance's shifting values. This attempt was initiated by PPSW NGO of Jakarta in collaboration with a university and Coordinator Ministry for Human Development and Culture through Customary Community Care program. Through the program, a research was conducted on *sipatmo* and *cokek* dances in Tangerang and Jakarta areas. The result of research showed that *Cokek* dance well-known so far in Benteng Chinese community originated culturally from *Sipatmo* dance. Since then, *Sipatmo* dance began to be taught again to Benteng Chinese community, particularly the administrators of KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya by dance lecturers of universities in Jakarta. *Cokek Sipatmo* dance was chosen to name this dance as an attempt to recover *Sipatmo*'s values that have degraded in *Cokek* dance.

After the administrators have been able to perform *Cokek Sipatmo* dance fluently, a studio was established to practice other Benteng Chinese women. KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya also attempted to introduce this dance to the public, particularly in Tangerang area in the events held by Tangerang City's Government. Such attempt encountered some obstacles because the image of *Cokek* dance had been bad, thereby will worsen the Image of Tangerang City Government when it is performed. KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya also takes a sufficiently long time to make Tangerang City Government willing to see their performance and to permit them to perform in big events.

Cokek Sipatmo dance studio also introduces *Cokek Sipatmo* dance to school children. They teach the dance movement routinely to the students. Although *Cokek Sipatmo* dance studio does not close itself when other communities than Benteng Chinese community want to learn the dance, but Buddha- and Christian-based schools still become their main target. It is intended to lead the Benteng Chinese young generation to contribute to maintaining their own culture. The members of studio usually utilize their network in KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya to be allowed to enter into schools. For example, when there are some members whose children study in the targeted school, they will approach the school in order to be allowed to introduce *Cokek Sipatmo* dance. If the targeted school is still located in the same Kelurahan (village), the members of *Cokek Sipatmo* dance studio will use their connection that has structural position such as village secretary or even village head to recommend them, so that the school will allow them to introduce the dance.

In addition to reinforcing cultural resilience, Benteng Chinese women also contribute to reinforcing the community's economic resilience. KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya provides money loan to their members for education tuition, business development purposes, and for other family's needs. Previously, Benteng Chinese community often borrows money from usurer or called mobile bank or cooperative. It is called mobile bank or cooperative because the one giving loan will go around to collect and to offer the loan. Loan system in this mobile bank or cooperative tends to be easy because it does not need an elaborate administration. It is this that encouraged Benteng Chinese people to borrow money from this usurer disguised behind cooperative. Whereas, the interest the fund borrower should assume is substantial, 25% of total loan and it should be paid in specified time – usually one to two months. The due will be collected everyday by lender without exception.

Benteng Chinese people who have borrowed from usurer disguised behind cooperative are usually very difficult to stop and to escape from debt fetter. It is because the interest specified is so high that the money which should be saved for other purpose should be used to repay the loan interest. In addition, the profession of most people as small seller also encourages them to

borrow some money as the capital. When the profit they get is small, willy-nilly they should get more loans from usurer.

In contrast to the usurer disguised behind cooperative or bank, KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya with its save-loan cooperative program applies low interest, only 10% of total loan. This loan interest revenue will later be returned to the members who borrow with mechanism and calculation of dividend (Indonesian: *Sisa Hasil Usaha* or SHU) that will be distributed annually. The members will get loan recording book to be filled in any time they pay the due. The due is paid weekly when the cooperative member weekly meeting is held.

The rule of save-loan cooperative in KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya is fairly tight. It is intended to keep providing loan capital in the cooperative and to keep the save-loan cooperative program running continuously. One of its rules is that the member should save the fund first and is allowed to borrow the fund in the following day. It indicates the application of self-help value and principle. Then, the members having loan are obliged to repay the due timely according to the original agreement. If the members have not been able to repay the due, they are obliged to inform directly the difficulty they are encountering. If there is no information at all, the administrator of cooperative will call them by phone, and if there is still no response, the administrator will come to their house to ask the problem.

4. Discussion

Referring to social capital theory suggested by such scholars as Putnam (1993, 1995), there are four elements composing social capital: norm, trust, reciprocity and network. Social norms “specify what actions are regarded by a set of persons as proper or correct, or improper and incorrect” (Coleman, 1990: 243). Shared norms and values existing among Benteng Chinese women through KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya involve the rule enacted in save-loan cooperatives. In this case, the rule is enacted very orderly so that self-help principle as the value upheld can work. The enacted rule directs the members to know what is and is not allowed and what is right and wrong in running the cooperatives.

The second element is trust in the women cooperative group. Gidden (in Damsar & Indriyani, 2015) defined trust as “a belief in an individual’s or a system’s reliability, related to various outcomes or events, in which the belief appreciates a faith in others’ integrity or affection, or in the appropriateness of abstract principle”. The presence of mutual trust between the members leads them to obey the approved rule. The members who are willing to save their money in the cooperative, of course, trust in the administrators that the money they save will not be misused by them. It indicates that trust is an important element to support the sustainable operation of save-loan program. Trust also maintains the group’s intactness, particularly *Cokek Sipatmo* Dance Studio. Trust is manifested into the dancers’ movement harmony (compactness). In addition, for the mission of studio to reinforce the Benteng Chinese culture through dance to be achieved, they should trust in each other and consider that they will never leave the studio without a reason.

Reciprocity principle can be seen in the reciprocal relation between members through both weekly meeting and daily institutional practice. Reciprocity can be found in the forms of giving, taking, and helping each other that can result from social interaction (Soetomo, 2006). The reciprocity mechanism can be seen from save-loan system in which individual members contribute to saving fund so that the fund collected from the members can be used to give loan to other needy members. Reciprocity can also be seen from the distribution of dividend (*SHU*) in which all members will get profit according to their own contribution for a year. In dance area, reciprocity is indicated with the individual members’ attempt of introducing *Cokek Sipatmo*

dance. All members have contribution and do not depend on one person. The participation of members in the practice held routinely is the manifestation of reciprocity.

Viewed from social network aspect, the members of KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya automatically create a network. This network can be utilized in helping the members with economic problem or other problems. The affiliation of Benteng Chinese women with a cooperative help themselves escape from the usurer's fetter through save-loan cooperative constituting the manifestation of network itself. Suparlan (1982) stated that "social network is a grouping consisting of a number of people, at least three people, each of which has distinctive identity and interrelated through the existing social relations, so that they can be grouped into a social unity through the social relation". Networking is also very desirable in introducing Cokek Sipatmo dance. *Cokek Sipatmo* dance studio can introduce the dance through networking established between fellow members, for example, through entering into the schools where the children of KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya members are enrolled.

5. Conclusion

Cultural and economic problems existing in Benteng Chinese community is actually the collective problem to which a solution should be found. Benteng Chinese women take a part in solving the problems by relying on the cooperative they have established as the agent of change. The establishment of cooperative also reinforces women solidarity and position in Benteng Chinese community because it automatically provides social capital within. The elements of social capital such as trust, norms, reciprocity, and networking can be seen in the activity of KWPS Lentera Benteng Jaya and these keep improving along with the interaction they make. It is this social capital that makes the role of Benteng Chinese women in reinforcing culture and economy running smoothly. Somehow, this study focuses only specific location in Kelurahan Mekarsari. Therefore, further more comprehensive researches should be conducted with broader location. Thus, finally, both this study and other studies will complement each other.

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