

Harmony in Difference: Inter-ethnic Harmony Model in a Pluralistic Community

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The aim of this study was to identify factors of inter-ethnic harmony, shapes of the assimilation, and social interaction patterns of Javanese and Chinese in Sudiropuran, Surakarta. Eight subjects were recruited, consisting of four Chinese and four Javanese. *Verstehen* technique was used to analyse the data. The result shows that: 1) factors of inter-ethnic harmony were social-economic equal, empathy, and inter-dependence attitudes; 2) shapes of assimilation were structural, cultural, and receptional; and 3) social interaction patterns of Javanese and Chinese consist of two kinds, namely the inside interaction of the *kampung* was harmony, but the outside interaction of the *kampung* was potential to conflict.

Keywords: inter-ethnic harmony, Javanese, Chinese.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor keharmonisan antaretnis, bentuk-bentuk asimilasi, dan pola-pola interaksi sosial antar etnis Jawa dan Tionghoa di Sudiropuran, Surakarta. Subjek penelitian berjumlah delapan orang, terdiri atas empat orang etnis Tionghoa dan empat orang etnis Jawa. Analisis data menggunakan teknik *Verstehen*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan: 1) Faktor-faktor kerukunan etnis Jawa dan Tionghoa antara lain: adanya persamaan status sosial ekonomi, empati, dan sikap saling-ketergantungan; 2) Bentuk-bentuk asimilasi meliputi asimilasi struktural, kultural, dan resepsional; dan 3) Pola-pola interaksi etnis Jawa dan Tionghoa terbagi menjadi dua yaitu interaksi di dalam kampung dan di luar kampung, interaksi di dalam kampung berjalan harmonis, sedangkan interaksi di luar kampung potensial konflik.

Kata kunci: kerukunan antaretnis, etnis Jawa, etnis Tionghoa.

During the last decade, intergroup and interethnic conflicts in Indonesia have not yet been dissipating. From time to time, violence-laden conflicts still erupted. These conflicts usually sprang from intergroup differences. Those differences gained greater significance when different ethnic groups were involved in the conflict. Although not every ethnic group has become perpetrators during violent conflicts, some specific ethnic groups were often involved (either voluntarily or involuntarily) in these conflicts. Even more disturbing is the fact that violent conflicts have been embedded in the history of particular ethnic groups (Sjahrir, 1997). One of the oldest and ever-recurring conflicts is the conflict between the “native” (Javanese) and non-native (Chinese/Tionghoa¹) people. “Chinese” and “Tionghoa” have the same meaning, with “Tionghoa” being a local word.

In Indonesia, Tionghoa are minorities (make up only 2.1% of the entire national population). However, nation-

wide they controlled 75% of the private capital (Redding cited in Onghokham, 2008). Demographically, they inhabit various islands in Indonesia. In Java (including the island of Madura, East Java), the highest percentage of Tionghoa live in urban areas meanwhile the rest (21.6%) live in rural areas (Coppel, 1983). This finding showed that the majority of Tionghoa who lived in Java worked in the fields of trading and industry.

Although a minority, economic domination of Tionghoa in Indonesia often caused problems that could not be underestimated. Onghokham (2008) explained that among the top ten richest capitalists in Indonesia, seven or eight were Tionghoa (although it must be mentioned that there were also many poor Tionghoa in Indonesia). Among the list of 200 richest people in Indonesia, more than 50% are Tionghoa. Sjahrir (1997) added that the Tionghoa domination in economic sector has been increased in such a substantial amount that it began to create social problems in Indonesia. Inequality of productive assets controlling, which mostly were dominated by Tionghoa people, often caused strife between

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the Tionghoa and the native people (Winarni, 2009).

The circumstances mentioned in the above paragraph outlined the issue regarding 'Chinese Problem' (*Permasalahan Cina*) (Habib, 2004). Several Javanese communities labeled the Tionghoa as 'troublesome' because their existence has been seen as a threat to the existence of another ethnic (Allen, 2003). This judgment often developed into rejection of the Tionghoa, which lead into a number of social problems, including violent actions toward the Tionghoa (although, in many cases, the Tionghoa victims played no role to incite the conflict). This conflict, in turn, strengthened the label that Tionghoa people were "troublesome ethnic".

In the city of Surakarta, conflicts between Javanese and Chinese communities have been happened across generations. These violent conflicts occurred repeatedly (although not annually). Even the birth of the city itself was spurred from a conflict between Javanese and Tionghoa communities. According to Taufik's report (2011) which analyzed a time span from 1740 to 1998, at least ten large violent conflicts have been occurred in Surakarta³. The report stated that violent conflicts have been part of the history of the city, as if "inherited" from the previous generations. It was pertinent to note that the majority of the people of Surakarta possessed no clear understanding of the antecedents or causal factors behind the conflicts, yet each time issues of inter-group violence sprang, they considered the Tionghoa as the targets of their aggressiveness.

In reality, violent conflicts did not occur within the entire Surakarta. There is a *kampung* (village) of Sudiroprajan, located behind Pasar Gede (a traditional marketplace), which displays interaction that is in stark contrast with the surrounding communities. According to Nurhadiantomo (2004) and Rahardjo (2005), 36.48% of the population of Sudiroprajan were Chinese and 63.52% were Javanese. Inside this *kampung*, people from both ethnic groups have been living in harmony for decades. According to Taufik (2007), Sudiroprajan was a unique old-time *kampung* located in the middle of Solo. Most Tionghoa who lived in Surakarta were descendants of the population of *kampung* Balong, which is a part of *kelurahan* Sudiroprajan. They were worked as business owners (shops, restaurants, pharmacies, and beauty shops) or street vendor operators (*pedagang kaki lima* or PKL). The majority of Tionghoa who lived in present-day Sudiroprajan are Christians or Catholics, and some are Moslems. Few are Confucianists. Their primary languages are Javanese or Bahasa Indonesia. They are no longer understand Mandarin; only old Tionghoa infrequently uses the language of their ancestors.

Rahardjo (2005) further added that during daily communications, members from both ethnic groups commingled in harmony. They often used *emper* (the frontyard of the house) and public places, such as *poskamling* dan HIK² stalls as spots for hanging out. According to Rahardjo's research (2005), Tionghoa who lived in Sudiroprajan claimed that they never received any harassment from the Javanese. Both ethnic groups mutually help each other whenever a member of the community conducted thanksgiving events or experienced tragedies. During the violent conflict at May 1998, members from both ethnic groups have stood shoulder-to-shoulder to protect their *kampung* from external threats.

The phenomenon mentioned in the paragraph above indicates that differences need not to be positively correlated with conflicts. Cultural differences within a same demographic area need not to cause strife. Within the differences themselves were similarities which helped members of both ethnic groups not only to understand each other but also to be mutually dependent of each other. This dependence of each other's existence has created a give-and-take atmosphere. "*The difference is about how we think in groups*" and "*how our collective wisdom exceeds the sum of its parts*" (Page, 2007). In turn, this will enable members of the community to understand each other and learn from each other (Prashing, 2004). This finding shows that similarity of common goal will transform differences within the community into strengths to obtain common success.

The harmony as shown by Javanese-Tionghoa community in Sudiroprajan can be taken as a model of harmony for the larger communities, especially in Surakarta, in order to reduce the seemingly incessant inter-ethnic conflict. According to the problems stated previously, the author raised the research questions: What are the factors that contribute to the interethnic harmony between Javanese and Tionghoa who live in Sudiroprajan? How the assimilation process took place? How the patterns of interaction between Javanese and Tionghoa who lived in Sudiroprajan took place?

Method

Due to the type of data obtained in this study and the aim of the study itself, the author applied qualitative approach, which focused on the processes experienced by the research subjects. To an extent, this study also encompassed social structure, especially regarding the background of research subjects, who came from two different ethnic groups, namely Javanese and Tionghoa.

Table 1
Research Informants

| Informant | Ethnic | Sex | Age | Religion |
|-----------|----------|--------|-------|--------------|
| AL | Tionghoa | Male | 60 yr | Confucianism |
| TH | Tionghoa | Female | 45 yr | Catholic |
| SM | Tionghoa | Male | 55 yr | Islam |
| FE | Tionghoa | Female | 17 yr | Catholic |
| AS | Java | Male | 60 yr | Christian |
| SH | Java | Female | 35 yr | Catholic |
| M | Java | Male | 51 yr | Islam |
| JS | Java | Female | 22 yr | Islam |

Data collection method in this study includes *in-depth interview* and *participant observation*. Informant selection was initially done using purposive technique, based on psychosocial data of the informants. Next, the author used *snowballing*. The number of participants involved was determined by the availability of research subjects and the diversity required among the

The ethnicity of research informants were Javanese and Tionghoa. Both ethnic groups consist of four individuals (two males and two females), aged 17 to 60 years. Detailed description of the participants can be seen in Table 1. This study was conducted at *kelurahan* Sudiroprajan, *kecamatan* Jebres, Surakarta. This particular location was selected due to several judgments: 1) The people of Sudiroprajan were proper models of success-

ful ethnic assimilation; 2) Sudiroprajan has the highest percentage of Tionghoa population (36.48% of the population were Tionghoa and 63.52% were native Javanese and people from other ethnicities). This *kelurahan* was located in *kampung* Balong, which was also known as the “Old Chinatown” (*Pecinan Kuno*); 3) Relatively high interethnic relationship intensity, in the form of community events; and 4) there is still potential for conflict occurred in this *kelurahan* (especially among the native and Tionghoa who lived in the side of the road).

Data analysis technique used in this study was *verstehen* technique (Miller & Brewer). This is a technique that seeks to understand the meaning of research subjects’ concepts and actions according to the subjects’ themselves, in order to gain understanding of the underlying value system. Data exploration processes is shown in Figure 1.

Discussion

Factors that Contribute to Harmony Between Javanese and Tionghoa

Residential areas within Sudiroprajan have been formed since the days of the Dutch colonialism. A particular event was “Roa Malaka Incident” or “Batavian Fury” in 1740, in which more than 10.000 Tionghoa were slaughtered by Dutch army (Wijayakusuma, 2005). Some of the survivors escaped to Central and East Java; some others took refuge at Kartasura⁴. To further exploit the “*divide et impera*” strategy, Dutch Colonial Government applied exclusive residential policy, which utilized rivers as natural boundaries of the residential areas. The Tionghoa were reallocated around Pepe River (within Pasar Gede region), the Arab descendants were reallocated around Wingko River (within Pasar Kliwon region), and meanwhile the native Javanese were reallocated around Laweyan region, which was then known as the home of the native *santri*. The aim of these reallocations was to divide the focus of the three ethnic groups so that they were not unable to maintain harmonious relationship, which might lead to common struggle for freedom (Rahardjo, 2005; Nurhadiantomo, 2004). As time passed by, Tionghoa did not only reside at Sudiroprajan; they also moved to other villages, or even ventured outside the region of Surakarta. Similarly, the Javanese experienced similar processes. Since then, interactions between the two ethnic groups began to blossom. Members of both ethnic groups were actively involved during social events, trading, and other activities. According to AL, interaction of both ethnic

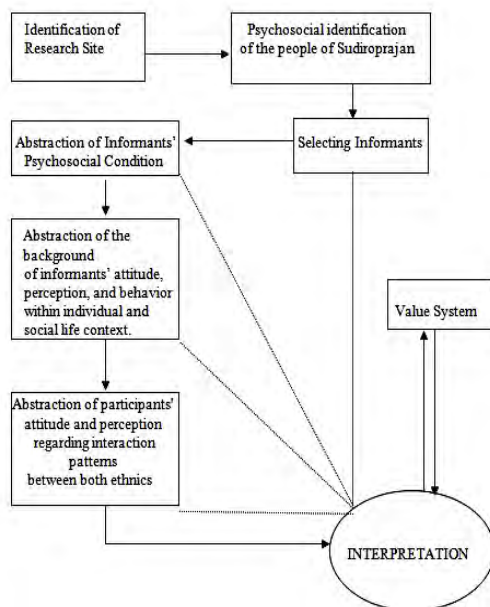


Figure 1. Data exploration processes.

groups was built on similar perceptual foundation that *kampung* Sudiroprajan was their ancestral homeland. AL said that “my grandfather was born here, my parents were born here, me and my children were born here” (AL/T/26). AL’s explanation was supported by SH, which stated that the similarity of history and origin made them, as Tionghoa, felt no difference with their Javanese counterparts. For them, Sudiroprajan is their home. They are no longer affiliating themselves with the homeland of their ancestors; even they are no longer be able to speak the language of their forefathers.

Furthermore, according to AL, the one aspect which influences the interethnic harmony was “similarity of common fate” (*persamaan nasib*). According to AL, both the Javanese and Tionghoa at Sudiroprajan suffered from the same circumstance, namely the low socioeconomic status. They were all living behind Pasar Gede and were actively involved at the economic activity. SM stated that the Tionghoa at Sudiroprajan were accustomed to all kinds of jobs, such as common merchants, small-scale shop owners, factory workers, *becak* (tricycle) drivers, HIK vendors, street vendors, and even coolies. Such phenomenon was in stark contrast with the common profession of Tionghoa who lived in another places in Surakarta, who have higher socioeconomic status compared to the Javanese. In one study conducted by Greer & van Kleef (2010) which explores the influence of power dispersion toward intergroup harmony, it was found that whenever both groups possessed weak power, power dispersion might positively increased the harmony of the relationship. Meanwhile, whenever both groups displayed equal strength, power dispersion might increase the potentiality of conflict. This finding indicated that low socioeconomic status made both the Javanese and the Tionghoa to develop comradely feelings for each other. Therefore, intergroup conflicts were no longer became priorities.

M, who during the interview was the chief of RT (*Rukun Tetangga*), stated that equality of socioeconomic status enabled members of both ethnics to understand each other and gained empathy. The willingness to understand each other provide the impetus for the spirit of togetherness. In effect, suspicion and prejudice—which often befell Javanese and Tionghoa at the other regions—were virtually absent in Sudiroprajan. Members of both ethnic groups were involved during social events, including instructional (formal) events such as *kerja bakti* (mass charitable work), meetings of RT / RW, and celebration of national holidays. They were also involved at routine informal activities. This finding showed that intergroup understanding might: reduce suspicion between groups (Maoz, 2000), reduce pre-

judge level and facilitate members of both groups to disclose their feelings and conditions with members from another group (Stephan & Finlay, 1999), facilitate understanding and empathy, which in turn lead to increased altruism or helping behavior (Maner et al., 2002; Batson & Ahmad, 2009).

Besides similarity of socioeconomic status, which subsequently leads to mutual understanding, Javanese and Tionghoa at Sudiroprajan have mutually developed interdependence of each other. During their daily activities, members of both ethnics intermingled very harmoniously; one could hardly spot any social differences. In one corner of *kelurahan* Sudiroprajan, for example, a female Tionghoa sells cooked rice and side dishes; most of her customers are Javanese. This phenomena is highly unusual in Solo. In Sudiroprajan, there are also Tionghoa who utilize the service of their Javanese neighbors to transport their goods to the market, using *becak* or using the more robust way—carrying goods on their backs. According to Herek & Capitanios (1996), Pettigrew (1997), and Vescio et.al (2003), interdependence was an important factor during intergroup contact. In contrast, suspiciousness—when members from each group refused to work with or to trust members from “another side”—will hinder the blossoming of intergroup relationship.

Furthermore, FE stated that besides the interdependence, members from both groups consider each other as brothers and sisters. Tionghoa consider Javanese as ‘brethren’, and vice versa. The family like relationship can be seen from one of quote from TH. “We here are similar, we did not care whether we can enjoy daily meals as long as we can commune with each other; when we were in need of spices, we ask the Javanese. Even, the words ‘Javanese’ and ‘Tionghoa’ have long been removed from our vocabulary; there is only “we” and “us” (TH/T/88). (“*Kami di sini sudah tidak ada bedanya, mangan ora mangan yang penting ngumpul, kalau kami kurang bumbu masakan ya minta orang Jawa. Bahkan kata-kata Jawa dan Tionghoa sudah lama kami hilangkan yang ada hanya kita dan kami*” –TH/T/88). This quote showed that ethnic identity, which often aggravate “us” (*ingroup*) and “they” (*outgroup*) dichotomy has began to vanish (Doosje et.al., (1998). In contrast, they use the word “us” which signifies the integration of “us” and “we” into a new identity—a new oneness. Findings of this study were supported by findings by several experts: that the interdependence was need to improve the quality of social relationship and interpersonal relationship (Lew et al, 1986), and interdependent relationship might increase positive attitudes (Brewer & Klein, 2006).

Social interdependence theory stated that *positive interdependence* among individuals who shared the same goals would push them to work together (Stanne et al, 1999). This statement leads to the question, how can mutual interdependence improves social harmony? Rusbult et al (2003) offered three explanations: *first*, interdependence molded behavior in daily basis; *second*, interdependence molded mental dynamics, in which individual gained insight of the interdependence itself so that the he/she might identify the proper behavior for certain situations; *third*, interdependence improved quality of relationship, commitment, trust, and the power to grow; and *fourth*, interdependence built personal qualities, in which individual might experience positive growth especially in preference, motivation, and adaptation tendencies.

Gordon Wang (2011) in his book "On the Culture of Harmony: Where Are Human Beings Headed?" underlined that "harmony with differences is the ultimate key to solve problems between ethnic groups". According to this author, harmony between nature and man will create ecological balance. Harmony in the family will foster the occurrence of good things. Harmony between ethnic groups will strengthen national security. Harmony between religious adherents will promote global peace. Lastly, harmony between nations may produce world peace.

Sherif et al (1998) concluded that effective intergroup interaction must be built on three premises: 1) both groups must share equal status, 2) successful intergroup social relationship will foster better interpersonal relationship, and 3) effective social relationship requires cooperative interdependence where each group members work cooperatively to reach common goals.

Forms of Assimilation

Despite the characteristical differences between Tionghoa and Javanese in Sudiropajan, there existed no enmity between the two ethnics. In contrast, members from both ethnics were able to manage differences into brotherhood. They were interacting one another as if they came from similar ethnicity. Ethnic boundaries between the two ethnics could hardly be spotted; in the other words, assimilation already took place. Keefe & Padilla (Shaull & Gramann, 1998) defines assimilation as social, economical, and political integration enacted by minority ethnic groups toward the larger community in general.

Gordon (Mukherji, 2005) explained that ethnic assimilation tends to be multidimensional. This author classified assimilation processes into seven subprocesses, namely *acculturation*, *structural assimilation*, *amalgamation*

assimilation, *identificational assimilation*, *attitude receptional assimilation*, *behaviour receptional assimilation*, *civic assimilation*. Williams & Ortega (1990) tested the findings of Gordon's classic study of the seven forms of assimilation. These researchers stated that the seven forms of assimilation can be classified into three wider, more generic forms of assimilation, namely structural, cultural, and receptional. *Structural assimilation* refers to the assimilation of culture from one ethnic group to another group, through primary agents such as close friends, family, and neighbors. *Cultural assimilation* refers to the assimilation of values, beliefs, ideologies, languages from a single ethnic group (or multiple ethnic groups) to values, belief, ideology, and language of a new ethnic group. *Receptional assimilation* (marriage) refers to assimilation process created by mixed marriage between two members of different ethnic groups, which produced a mixed race.

Assimilation which took place in Sudiropajan encompassed three classifications as described by Williams and Ortega. Examples of structural assimilation were Tionghoa who preferred to wear Javanese traditional *lurik* clothes or Javanese *batik* instead of their own traditional garments. In similar vein, there were many Javanese who became *barongsai* players. "Here, Chinese wore Javanese clothes, they also liked Javanese food. Javanese played *barongsai*. During the celebration of Independence Day, some Javanese played *barongsai*" ("Di sini orang Cina memakai pakaian Jawa, mereka juga suka masakan Jawa. Orang Jawa tertarik memainkan *barongsai*. Pas acara tujuh belasan beberapa orang Jawa ikut memainkannya") (SH/J/273). The occurrence of cultural assimilation can also be seen from the conversion of Tionghoa, from Confucianism to Catholic, Protestantism, or Islam. "In the past times, most Tionghoa were Confucianists, however nowadays only few Confucianists remain, most are Catholics or Christians, and some Tionghoa are Moslems" (SM/T/147) "*Dulu sebagian besar orang Tionghoa itu Confucianism, tapi sekarang yang Confucianism sudah sedikit, kebanyakan Catholic atau Christian, beberapa orang Tionghoa juga masuk Islam*" (SM/T/147). Receptional assimilation can be seen from many interethnic marriages between Javanese and Tionghoa. Many respondents underlined this fact: "Usually Tionghoa consider themselves to be of higher status compared to Javanese so that they refused to marry Javanese, but here in Sudiropajan, we are all equal" (AS/J/218). ["Biasanya orang Tionghoa menganggap awune luwih dhuwur daripada orang Jawa sehingga orang-orang Tionghoa tidak mau menikah dengan orang Jawa, tapi di sini (Sudiropajan) kami semua sederajat"] (AS/J/218).

“There is no distance between us so that many Javanese male married Tionghoa female, and also many Tionghoa male married Javanese female” (M/J/323). (“*Kami gak ada jarak, sehingga banyak male Jawa menikah dengan female Tionghoa dan tidak sedikit pula male Tionghoa menikah dengan female Jawa*”) (M/J/323). These phenomenon rarely occurred in the other parts of Surakarta or in Indonesia in general; the most common is interethnic marriage between Tionghoa male and Javanese female. However, in Sudiroprajan, many Tionghoa female married Javanese male.

Interaction Patterns between Javanese and Tionghoa

According to the patterns of interaction, interethnic interaction between Tionghoa and Javanese at Sudiroprajan can be divided into two kinds, namely interaction inside the *kampung* and interaction outside the *kampung*. As have been mentioned previously, interaction inside the *kampung* was harmonious; meanwhile interaction outside the *kampung* was still marked by hostility. In a number of cases, residential segregation was one source of bad feelings, distrust, suspiciousness, unhealthy competition, and hatred (Odoemene & Olaoba, 2010).

According to the Javanese, Tionghoa who lived at the side of the road relatively withdrawn from interaction with their Javanese and Tionghoa neighbors who lived inside the *kampung*. This can be implied from the fact that they rarely attended *rapat kampung* (communal meetings) or events enacted by the people of Sudiroprajan. “They rarely attend community events. If ever, only their maids came. Their children were behaving similarly” (AS/J/232). (“*Mereka jarang sekali mengikuti kegiatan kampung, kalau ikut paling-paling hanya pembantunya saja. Anak-anak mereka juga sama*”) (AS/J/232). “They did not mingle well, we did not know them all” (JS/J/389). (“*Mereka kurang membaur, kami tidak mengenal mereka*”) (JS/J/389). The inactivity of Tionghoa parents were modeled by their children so that Tionghoa children gained no familiarity with their own *kampung*. The primary reason of their inactivity was the perception that the events offered less benefit for them so they had less respect for programs conducted inside the *kampung*.

Furthermore, a lot of Tionghoa parents sent their children to schools outside Sudiroprajan. These parents considered quality of the school as an important factor, however the decision to sent the children to schools outside Sudiroprajan has inhibited the intermingling of the children with their peers who lived inside the

kampung. These same parents were also focused more on work and domestic activities, instead of immersing themselves in the community and social activities. This phenomenon broke the link of communication between them and their neighbors who lived inside the *kampung*. The absence of communication and the lack of communal activities caused social gap (Stephan & Finlay, 1999).

According to Tionghoa who lived inside the *kampung*, they perceived inequality between themselves and the Tionghoa who lived outside the *kampung* so that they felt no urge to befriend the Tionghoa who lived outside the *kampung*. In contrast, they felt closer and easier to socialize with the Javanese. Again, this finding showed that similar socioeconomic status bred interethnic assimilation; meanwhile different socioeconomic status hampered the assimilation. This harmonious interethnic relationship was in accordance with social contact theory, which proposed that interethnic positive attitudes will rise significantly in the presence of equal environmental support and equal socioeconomic status (Berryman-Fink, 2006). Furthermore, contact with one member of the outgroup was related to attitude toward the outgroup as a whole, meanwhile contact with one member of the outgroup may significantly affect attitude toward intergroup relationship, particularly when the member was viewed as a representative of the outgroup (Brown et al., 2006). Deindividuation of ethnic identity and of residence (Javanese vs Tionghoa, Tionghoa who lived inside the *kampung* vs Tionghoa who lived outside the *kampung*) in one contact social may increase the frequency of intergroup relationships, and the sharpening of intergroup differences may result in increasing hostility (Gaertner et al. 1999; Tamam, 2009).

According to the explanation in the paragraph above, it can be surmised that harmonious interethnic relationship between Javanese and Tionghoa at Sudiroprajan was formed due to the existence of three forms of assimilation, namely structural, cultural, and receptional assimilation. These three assimilations formed a solid relationship between the two ethnic groups, which—in the other parts of the country—often clashed against each other. Furthermore, harmonious interethnic relationship was supported by equality of socioeconomic status, in which both ethnic groups shared low socioeconomic statuses. Being “stuck” at similarly low socioeconomic status enabled members of both ethnic to value similarities more than differences. For them, the fulfillment of economic needs and survival matters more than dabbling over petty differences. For that reason, the three assimilations and the equality of socioeconomic status have facilitated the development of a new society which focuses on harmony.

Research on interethnic harmony has attracted researchers from the field of psychology, sociology, anthropology, who shared similar concern on exploring interethnic harmony. Subsequent researchers who share interest in conducting studies of interethnic harmony may focus on the possibilities of developing the interethnic harmony model at Sudiroprajan to other parts of Surakarta, or even to other parts of Indonesia. Of course, such concern requires active effort from the government to help the researchers to observe, learn, and explore the characteristics of both ethnic at Sudiroprajan so that the model of intergroup harmony may be formed.

Sudiroprajan: Two Colors One Taste

Sudiroprajan is a unique region amidst the conflict between Javanese and Tionghoa communities at Surakarta. It is located in *kampung* Balong, which during the days of colonialism was known as *pecinan* ("China-town"). This *kampung* was intentionally found by Dutch colonial government to divide, thus weaken, sources of conflict between community members. The Tionghoa were placed at *kampung* Balong, just behind Pasar Gedhe, the Arabs were placed at Pasar Kliwon, and the Javanese were placed at Laweyan, near Pasar Jongke. At present, the population of Sudiroprajan consists of equal number of Javanese (60% of the entire population) and Tionghoa (40%). It can be said that there is no exact 'majority' or 'minority' at Sudiroprajan.

This *kampung*, which located at the side of Kali Pepe, has undisputedly represented itself as the only *kampung* in Surakarta, in which Javanese and Tionghoa have lived harmoniously for decades. This harmonious relationship was caused by several factors; the primary one was socioeconomic factor. While at the other parts of the city the Tionghoa hold higher socioeconomic position compared to the Javanese, at Sudiroprajan both the Tionghoa and the Javanese hold equal socioeconomic position that is low socioeconomic status. In effect, the gap between the rich and the poor—which often widen the social distance—did not occur. Javanese and Tionghoa were living in harmony (*guyub*) whether they were engaging at community or economic activities.

At any other places, robust or manual works usually were done by the Javanese, but at Sudiroprajan, the Tionghoa seemed to be at ease to do robust or manual works, such as being street vendors, *becak* (tricycle) drivers, merchants at the traditional market (*pasar*), and even coolies. They showed no hesitation at serving the Javanese, and the Javanese seemed to be familiar with the phenomenon, which was considered unusual by some observers.

During several ceremonies, such as Indonesian Independence Day, anniversary of Solo, and Chinese New Year, members from both dominant ethnic at Sudiroprajan performed interesting works of art. The Javanese played Chinese arts, such as Barongsai and traditional Chinese music. A Javanese respondent even stated that he was the only person capable of playing Chinese traditional instrument (he called it "Chinese gamelan"). In contrast, there were no less Tionghoa who prefer to perform Javanese arts and play Javanese musical instruments. Hence, during many festivals, the people of Sudiroprajan were not only adept at displaying attractive performances, but also mesmerizing audiences with interethnic harmony embedded in each performance.

In several locations at Sudiroprajan, including one particular public elementary school, the author of this study was somewhat confused by the schoolchildren's physical condition. Some of the children have brown skin with slanted eyes; other children have fair skin, similar to Tionghoa in general, but with wide eyes. According to a teacher, such children were offsprings of mixed marriages. The author also found interesting findings related to the children's self-concept. A female children, who was physically indiscernible from a Javanese children—even her skin were darker than the skin of many Javanese girls—admitted that she was Tionghoa because her mother was a Tionghoa, and her father was a Javanese. In contrast, there was a male child, product of another interethnic marriage, who has facial features commonly associated with those of the Tionghoa, however this particular child admitted that he was a Javanese. According to information obtained by the author, ethnic identity was primarily related to religious affiliation. The female child admitted that she was Tionghoa because her parents were Christians (most Tionghoa at Sudiroprajan were Christians), meanwhile the male child admitted that he was Javanese because his parents were Moslems (most Javanese were Moslems⁵).

Another interesting finding relates to language usage. Although physically Javanese and Tionghoa are easily discernible, they communicate using one language, namely Javanese language (*bahasa Jawa*). Older Tionghoa are capable of speaking the most refined form of Javanese language (*kromo inggil*) and they are using it during daily conversations with their Javanese neighbors. Furthermore, besides adopting similar attitude and way of speaking, Tionghoa also adopted Javanese values. Acculturation can be seen also in the field of culinary, where many Tionghoa have affinity for Javanese food, such as *gudeg*, *oseng-oseng*, *sambel tumpang*, *pecel*, and many else. In similar vein, the

Javanese were accustomed to eat Tionghoa delicacies, such as *kue ranjang*, *jenggelut*, *bakpao*, and many else.

One ultimate form of assimilation found in Sudiroprajan is interethnic marriage. Tionghoa outside Sudiroprajan usually consider themselves to be of higher status than the Javanese (*awune lebih dhuwur*). Therefore Tionghoa were often reluctant to “stand in the same height” as the Javanese (*berdiri sama tinggi dan duduk sama rendah*—whether standing or sitting, we are of the same height). Usually, Tionghoa only marries another Tionghoa. In rarer cases, usually Tionghoa males married Javanese females (but not vice versa). However, in Sudiroprajan, the author identified Tionghoa males who married Javanese females, and—no fewer in numbers—Tionghoa females who married to Javanese males. This finding indicates that the prejudice (that Tionghoa are of higher status than Javanese) found no place in Sudiroprajan. Interethnic marriages resulted in the varieties of religious adherents among both ethnic groups. A number of Javanese are Christians, and a number of Tionghoa are Moslems. (It must be noted, however, that religious conversion in Sudiroprajan did not occur exclusively due to interethnic marriage).

To summarize, both ethnic have physical and cultural differences, but they have harmonious way forward. The differences did not become obstacles to maintain harmony. They developed a new identity, namely the mixed identity which accommodates each cultural and ethnic identities. Similarities in socioeconomic status became starting points to develop intergroup harmony between the two ethnic groups. Differences between the rich (upper level) and the poor (lower level), which at the past became sources of hostility between Javanese and Chinese in another places, no longer became a focus of interest in Sudiroprajan. Their physical strengths and their mind powers were synchronized to fulfill their needs. The obvious socioeconomic similarity has put them in the same position that is to help each other.

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(End Note follows)

End Note:

¹ In this article, the author used the terminology “Chinese” and “Tionghoa” respectively. Both has same meaning (Tionghoa is a local word for “Chinese”, albeit in a somewhat disparaging sense).

² Notable examples are: 1) “Chinatown Riot” (*Geger Pecinan*) or “Kartosuro Dissection” (*Bedah Kartosuro*) which happened at June 30th 1745. During this conflict, Chinese paramilitary and riotous crowds breached the wall of the fortress of Kartasura palace, looting and taking over the palace; 2) “Ngawi Incident” (*Peristiwa Ngawi*), occurred at September 23rd 1825. This event encompassed a massacre of Chinese people in the city of Ngawi. The conflict spreaded to the entire region of Mataram, including Surakarta. It was said to be triggered by the Chinese overdomination and exploitation of toll taxes (including road taxes, market taxes, and river taxes) which made life difficult for the local Javanese; 3) “Incident before the founding of Syarekat Islam (SI)” in Solo, which occurred at 1911. Shortly before the founding of SI in Surakarta, the city saw boycotts, labor strikes, street brawls, and anti-Chinese riots; 4) “Clash between Mangkunegaran Legionnaire and the Chinese”; this event occurred at the end of 1912, when the Governor of Surakarta G.F. Van Wijk visited the Chinatown to stop ninety members of Mangkunegaran Legionnaire who beat the Chinese; 5) “Violent Reports from the Governor of Surakarta G. F. van Wijk” narrated that between 1905 and 1913, 615 violent robberies and 4977 cattle thieving occurred. The victims were *Cina Klontong* (Chinese traders or salespeople) and *Cina Mindring* (tax collector who lend money with inflated rates); 6) “Jatinom Riot” (*Geger Jatinom*) which occurred between 1947-1948, in which the People’s Army (*Laskar Rakyat*) attack the Chinese. At least 60 Chinese were killed; many took refuge in Surakarta and the other cities; 7) Events post-G30S/PKI which consist of tension between communist and anticommunist factions. At October 22nd 1965, RPKAD entered Surakarta, anticommunist crowd pillaged and burned Chinese’s homes and shops; “Riot at Nonongan and Coyudan” which occurred at November 6th 1966, in which crowd of people pillaged and burned shops owned by the Chinese at Coyudan Street. The crowds moved to Nonongan Street and performed similar pillaging; 9) “Anti Chinese incident” which occurred at November 20th 1980. This was a major scale riot occurred in Surakarta, triggered by an incident in which a bicycle (drove by an SGO student) bumped into a Chinese pedestrian. The riot spreaded to other cities, such as Semarang, Kudus, Purwodadi, Pati, and even to East Java; 10) “Dark May” (Mei Kelabu), which occurred between May 14th and 15th 1998. This was the biggest conflict in the social history of Surakarta. Pillaging actions, arson, thievery, vandalism, and physical abuse all occurred during this riot.

³ HIK is an abbreviation for *Hidangan Istimewa Kampung* (Kampung Special Culinary Stall). This is a street stall that sells unique culinary dishes of Solo (Javanese traditional food and beverage). Usually, a HIK stall opens at the afternoon until midnight or post midnight. It has bluish or orange rooftop. Another unique characteristic is a wagon and a bench. There is usually three kettles above a charcoal stove. Its primary dish is “nasi kucing” (*cat rice*) supplemented by fried foods, satay, fish and crackers (*kerupuk*). It was named ‘cat rice’ because the actual size of the food (a handful of rice) and its primary side dish—a thin slice of salted fish and *sambal* (chilly sauce)—reminded the people of the type of food that cats usually eat. Residents of Yogyakarta called this stall “angkriangan” due to the habit of the customers who often lift one of the legs up to the bench (called “nangkriang” in Javanese). Hence, the name *angkriangan*. The residents of Semarang called it “*kafe meong*” (*meong* is Indonesian equivalent of *miaw*—sound of a cat—in English) because its primary dish is “cat rice”.

⁴ During those times, Kartasura was the capital of the Kingdom of Mataram, meanwhile Surakarta has not yet been formed. Pakubuwono II, who ruled over Kartasura Hadinigrat Palace, received the Tionghoa refugees with open arms. However, these same refugees later helped the rebellion lead by Mas Garendi. They stormed and took over Kartasura Palace (1742), meanwhile Pakubuwono II and his families escaped to Ponorogo. At the year of 1743, Pakubuwono II returned to Kartasura because the flame of rebellion has been extinguished. Still, the messy condition of the palace forced him to move the Palace of Kartasura to Sala village (which is now known as Surakarta).

⁵ The author intentionally avoided further exploration of the relationship of ethnic identity affiliation and interethnic marriage, because such exploration would divert the primary focus of this study. Of course, such interesting exploration can be conducted at subsequent studies.