

God's Birthday Festival as a Temple Festival Variation in Chinese Indonesian Tradition

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This research is to describe Chinese belief. God's worship (*baishen* 拜神) is one form of Chinese belief. God's worship tradition can be seen in god's birthday festival. By using Xuan Tian Shangdi's (Hian Thian Siang Tee 玄天上帝) birthday Festival in Hok Lay Kiong Temple, Bekasi West Java and Xuan Tian Shangdi Temple in Welahan, Jepara Central Java as unit analysis. The author will describe the variations in Chinese Indonesian tradition. The festival is on the 3rd day of the third month of Chinese lunar year. Xuan Tian Shangdi's birthday festival shows the similarities and differences in variations of tradition. The festival of god's birthday is also a temple festival involving various groups which are aimed to integrate. This research is qualitative research conducted by field research. Data collection methods are interview, observations, and participant observations to gain an understanding of Chinese belief.

Keywords: tradition, belief, god's birthday festival, Xuan Tian Shangdi, variation, integration

Introduction

The tradition of god worship is very visible on the temple's main god's birthday festival which is known by Chinese Indonesian especially in Bekasi as *sejit* (*shengri* 生日). Every temple has a main god who annually is celebrated with a great fanfare. People generally say this festival as a temple birthday. Usually, when festival of god's birthday is celebrated there are many rituals and performances such as the recitation, the mantra of the main god, the amulet writing, fire walking, the goods auction, and parade. During the festival a lot of entertainment also are held such as gambang kromong orchestra, puppet show, liong and barongsai. This celebration also becomes one of the temple festivals because this is always filled with visitors both to pray and enjoy the event. Along the way to the temple there is a crowd with merchants who sell items such as praying supplies, souvenirs, toys, food, drinks, and others.

This temple festival was stopped and prohibited because of Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 which prohibited all Chinese traditions. When there is a ban on Chinese cultural traditions, the implementation of *sejit* is done secretly, one of the informants said when he planned to hold a fire walking tradition and this plan was known by authorities, the police suddenly came and they closed the place that would be a place of fire walking. Nowadays Chinese tradition in public space can be hold freely, the celebration of god's birthday is held with a festive function as a religion, social, culture, and art function. When celebrating temple's main god's birthday,

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people came to the temple and brought fruit offerings, pastries, salutes and prayed to the gods. This tradition is still maintained in modernity with many variations depending on place.

This research will describe the differences and similarities in Xuan Tian Shangdi's birthday festival in two temples: Hok Lay Kiong Bekasi, West Java and Welahan, Jepara, Central Java.

Literature Review

Popular religion or folk religion is a very important component of the Chinese religious landscape. Chinese religion is often interpreted by the syncretic features between Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism as defined by Jesuit missionaries who came to China in the early 1600s (Soothill, 1913) and also defined as a variety of superstitious activities carried out by the masses (De Groot, 1910; Granet, 1922). In addition, popular religion is also defined as the overall element of Chinese culture (Freedman, 1974) and also as an arbitrary process of meaning formation (Bell, 1989; Clart, 2007; Weller, 1987).

Chinese religion can be defined in two concepts as follows:

1. A form of religion practiced by almost all Chinese, regardless of social and economic status, level of education, territory, or identification of a particular religion.
2. Lower class religion as opposed to the elite and also called common religion.

There are already various studies on Chinese religion which have been conducted in China as by Chau (2006), Dean (1998; 2009), Feuchtwang (2001), Lu (2012), Overmyer (2009), and Yang and Hu (2012). Dean (2009) based his research on Southeastern China showing people's religion forming communal religious identity that strengthens communal solidarity. Tsai (2007) stresses people's religion in local communities to form a moral framework for local officials in their performance. Based on Yang and Hu's (2012) research in both mainland China and Taiwan, the number of people who deal with Chinese religion exceeds the number of religious adherents of the institution. People's religion as a spiritual element spreads to various types of religious institutions.

Yang and Hu (2012) distinguish three types of folk religion, namely individual, communal, and sectarian. Individual religion for example in everyday life, the Chinese respect the ancestors such as Tian/Thian Tee Kong (天地公), gods, and spirits. Communal religion refers to religious or ritual and spiritual activities based on the community, for example, the worship of local gods serving the interests of the local community. Sectarian religion is not much different from institutional religion, which has relatively stable organizational structure, its members are based on the local community, and its belief system tends to be more systematic.

Many Chinese Indonesian follow the teaching of Tridharma/Samkau (三教: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) that merge with shamanism/*wujiao* 巫教. In some places there can be interaction or diffusion with local beliefs. This is reasonable because the basic belief of Chinese is polytheism, respect for ancestors, and pragmatic. Shenism or diffused religion is what is called Chinese people believe or *baishen*. Most Chinese who the author observed call shenism in terms of *paipai* 拜拜 (which means literally praying, worship ancestors and gods), and some call it with the term "our religion".

Research Methods

This research is qualitative research conducted by field research. It was conducted during the celebration of Hian Thian Siang Tee birthday festival in Hok Lay Kiong Temple, Bekasi West Java in 2016 and 2017 and Hian Thian Siang Tee Temple, Welahan Jepara, Central Java in 2017. Data collection methods are done by

interviewing the board of temples, people's work in temple. In addition, the interviews also conducted the observations and participant observations to gain an understanding of a tradition that exists in society.

Results

The largest and oldest temple in Bekasi City is Hok Lay Kiong Temple (福来宫) located on Kenari I Street No. 1. This temple is managed by Pancaran Tri Dharma Foundation. The main god in this temple is Hian Thian Siang Tee (玄天上帝). Everyday, there are a lot of people who come and pray to this temple especially before Chinese New Year (Imlek), Lantern Festival (Cap Gomeh), on the the main god's birthday festival, and Hungry Ghost Festival (Cioko). The age of this temple is estimated to be approximately 250 to 300 years. According to the informant, the renovation of the temple was done in the roof of the temple (*tióngcit*) written with 1,818 figures that become an estimation to think out the age of the temple. Hian Thian Siang Tee's birthday festival in Bekasi was held for three days. The first day was held an goods auction. The items auctioned are rabbit statue, lion statues, fruits such as grapefruit, pineapple, canned drinks, wrapped red eggs. All these items were wrapped in plastic and were taped by amulet paper (*hu* 符) of Hian Thian Siang Tee.

The altar table of the god Hian Thian Siang Tee is filled with flowers, red candles, birthday cakes, moon cakes, parcels of fruit, bananas, red eggs, bowls filled with pork chops, fried chicken, noodles, prawns, rice. Besides the altar table of Kongco Hian Thian Siang Tee, at the front of the large incense burner (*hiolo*) which is dedicated to Thian, there is an altar table which is dedicated to Thien Ti Kong, fruits such as bananas, apples, srikaya, oranges, longan, dragon fruit, pears, vegetables such as cabbage, tomatoes, tofu, beancurd, mushrooms, celery, peas, and cakes .

On the first day there are several performances and attractions, such as barongsai, lion dance, and medium spirit (*tatung/tangsin/通神*) attraction. The *tatung* attraction in the Hok lay Kiong Temple during the celebration of the birthday of the god Hian Thian Siang Tee is a form of acculturation with another culture, which is Dayak. There are many kinds of medium spirit which perform a ritual in Hok Lay Kiong, which is Dayak mediumship, and Chinese mediumship both from Hokkian and Hakka mediumship. Before they perform, they enter the temple, respect the god, and then start doing attractions such as jabbing with swords, jabbing cheeks with long needles. Some medium spirit make amulet (*hu/符/paper*) by using his blood.

On the second day, the preparation for the peak celebration is praying together and continued as the highlight of the celebration of the god at 24:00. During the festive celebrations in the evening there is a *gambang kromong* orchestra musical entertainment. Many people come to watch the *gambang kromong* because *gambang kromong* is the art that many Bekasi people like to enjoy. In addition to *gambang kromong* musical performances, there are also puppet show performances so that the area around the temple becomes very crowded. Before the pray starts, people joint meal together (*chi pingan/cia pengan/吃平安*). This has the meaning of a blessing for everyone. On the temple courtyard it was also filled with a lot of birthday congratulations from another temple, shops, companies that wish Hian Thian Siang Tee a happy birthday and congratulation to Hok Lay Kiong Temple. The pray is held by Tridharma and exactly at 24:00, people do worship and burn three sticks of incense on god Hian Thian Siang Tee altar. After that the birthday cake was distributed to all guests, the people who were present were also given the blessing water of Hok Lay Kiong Temple.

On the third day which is the last day, the temple carried out the ritual of making amulet paper. In Bekasi, people called it *hu hoat* or *hu pengan*. Besides the making of amulet paper, the fire walking was also conducted.

The ritual performed by medium spirit to make amulet paper was carried out during the day. The atmosphere became festive when the medium spirit alternately was accompanied by a music that comes from drums and cymbals show attraction by injuring his tongue with a sword and writing amulet paper with his blood. This paper was written by the tangsin with his blood using a brush that has a spell and became sacred. A lot of people come to enjoy the performances held by the temple such as fire walking, gambang keromong orchestra, and puppet show. With the attractions shown, the temple showed the prestige. The temple festival shows there is acculturation between Chinese culture and local culture which can be seen in art performance such as gambang kromong and puppet show.

The temple with the main god Hian Thian Siang Tee in Indonesia is not much. Besides Hok Lay Kiong, Bekasi, one of them is Hian Thian Siang Tee Temple in Welahan, Jepara Central Java. This temple is also one of the oldest temples in Indonesia. This temple is located 24 km to the south from the center of Jepara, in the village of Welahan, Welahan district, Jepara district, at Jalan Gang Pinggir No. 4, Welahan, Jepara, Central Java. This temple is located in Welahan market, a historical heritage of Tionghoa in Jepara and becomes the icon of Jepara. Welahan temple consists of two temples: the north is a place of Hian Thian Siang Tee and the south is a place of God Earth (Hok Tek Tjeng Sin). Hian Thian Siang Tee Temple has two dragons and two fish ornaments on its roof as a symbol of prosperity. This temple was established since 1600 so it is said to be one of the oldest temples in Indonesia and in Java island.

This temple is different from the temples in general which usually become crowded at the Chinese New Year. In the new year, this temple does not hold a special event. The special celebration of this temple is Hian Thian Siang Tee god's birthday festival. The celebration of Hian Thian Siang Tee, Welahan is different from other places because of the place. The celebration is not in the temple of Hian Thian Siang Tee, but in the temple of the god of Earth (Hok Tek Tjeng Sin). The statue of Hian Thian Siang Tee is brought by sedan chair together with Hian Thian Siang Tee statues from other temples and moved to temple God of Earth. The reason for organizing the festival in the temple of the god of Earth is that the God of Earth is older than Hian Thian Siang Tee. Celebrating it by moving to Hok Tek Tjeng Sin temple shows respect to the elder. The other temples which have Hian Thian Siang Tee as a main god or not a main god, send a statue of Hian Thian Siang Tee to the parade together with the Hian Thian Siang. The statues of Hian Thian Siang Tee are brought by sedan chair around the temple for two km. This tradition was performed on the first day, after the night before the statues are glorified in the ritual of pray in Hian Thian Siang Tee Temple with the main deity Hian Thian Siang Tee. The next day then paraded around the temple complex. This activity is aimed to appeal to the God to provide abundance of wealth, peace, and reject the reinforcements of all disasters to the people of Welahan, Jepara, and the Indonesian people in general.

In the temple of Hok Tek Tjeng Sin as the place of the anniversary of the god Hian Thian Siang Tee, for three days there is an entertainment in the form of gamelan orchestra that presents Javanese songs and wayang potehi. Group of gamelan music is played in the temple courtyard. Potehi puppet stage is built on the street in front of the temple. The performance of wayang potehi in this temple is held with the aim that god worship process becomes more sacred. Same with other puppets, wayang potehi also requires a dalang. They play puppets which are made of cloth. The dolls dressed in Chinese style with customized facial make up resemble most Chinese people. The language used in Indonesian is sometimes Hokkien. Welahan Temple displays wayang potehi as a form of gods and also to preserve this tradition so as not to extinct along with the times. The peak of the celebration of the year on the third day is a pray. The temple is filled with large candles like during the Lunar

New Year celebration. The altar table began to be arranged. After entering the temple yard, at the front of the altar table, there are two tables on the left and right, a pig is placed on each table. On the altar table to the left arranged in the form of fruits such as plantains, oranges, pears, cakes. At the altar table Hian Thian Siang Tee it is located in the middle and composed of red and white rice cone shaped, candles, bowls containing vegetables which mainly are bamboo sprouts. All the bowls of the offerings contained bamboo sprouts, leeks, celery, and peanuts, and pork, fruits like pear, apples, bananas, and pineapple which are cut and stabbed with sticks like satay, and cakes. In the courtyard side of the temple there are already available food and drinks so that guests can eat before the pray begins. Exactly at 12:00 people start praying together. Pray accompanied by gamelan music, is different from other temples that when performing pray is accompanied by sounds of drums and cymbals. The pray ended at 3:15 p.m., the attendees got a big box of fruit, pears, apples, oranges, cupcakes, and pia cake.

The celebration of the Hian Thian Siang Tee birthday which is celebrated both in Bekasi and Jepara has similarities and differences. The similarity is the celebration of the god's birthday which is the culmination of the god worship tradition. The celebration is marked with: pray, joint meal together (*cia pengan*) which is not just a meal together but implies that in the celebration of the year, people hope to get the blessing and salvation through the celebration. Celebration of the gods can be said a temple festival because in the implementation it always shows the performances. This temple festival becomes a form of Chinese expression. Most of the temples have enough large courtyards to make stage perform puppet show, orchestra. The purpose of the entertainment is to entertain the gods like the puppet potehi in Welahan but and gambang keromong and wayang golek in Bekasi.

Besides the similarities, there are variations in this festival, such as:

Parade

One of the many activities done by the temple is the parade. Parade is usually performed during the Lantern Festival, but it becomes different in Welahan, Jepara. Welahan Temple held a parade at Hian Thian Siang Tee god's birthday festival by moving the god Hian Thian Siang Tee from his temple to the temple of the god of Earth. At the time of this parade, the god statue was paraded out on a stretcher and toured around the temple city. The parade is accompanied by music and various attributes and also accompanied by barongsai and lion dance. Parade with sedan chairs carries statues of gods that were brought by many people and shaken, usually for most of the temple performed in Lantern Festival not on the god's birthday festival. The meaning of the parade is for purification or cleaning. The celebration of Capgomeh which is usually characterized by a parade or joli parade is not held in Welahan. In Welahan the tradition of parade carrying a sedan chair containing a statue of a god like this is done on the main god's birthday festival, and this is the culmination of the celebration each year. On this occasion, sometimes there is also a group of medium spirit showing attraction like cutting their tongue and so on. Local culture and art also accompanied the procession of parade.

In Hok Lay Kiong, Bekasi, the parade was accompanied by lion dance, barongsai, reog Ponorogo. This parade became a form of integration because the elements of this tradition come from Chinese culture but in its implementation in various places in Indonesia, both in Bekasi and Welahan, many people who involved are not Chinese. Art that accompanies it was adapted from the local culture. This tradition becomes cross-ethnic. Many people who are not Chinese are involved in this event either as a spectator, as an art participant or participating in getting a blessing as well. In Hok Lay Kiong Temple, Bekasi, when the god's birthday festival does not carry out this parade, the parade was carried out in Lantern Festival which is the hallmark of the New Year

celebration. In the celebration of Lantern Festival, the main god together with other statues is brought in sedan chair around the city of Bekasi.

The Place of Festival

The main god's birthday festival usually is held in the temple itself. But in Welahan there have two temples managed by one foundation, the Pusaka foundation, Hian Thian Siang Tee's birthday festival is not held in Hian Siang Tee temple but in Hok Tek Tjeng Sin (God Earth) temple as a form of honor the older. Hian Thian Siang Tee is considered younger than Hok Tek Tjeng Sin, so when celebrating the festival, it also becomes a very unique and special thing because it does not happen anywhere else. Many temples are owned and managed by the same foundation but still in the implementation of main god's birthday it is held in the temple itself without moving it to another temple because of the status, hierarchy, or seniority of the god.

Performance

Performances are held at that time, in Bekasi a special performance was not held for the gods like in Welahan by performing wayang potehi (potehi puppet). Performances in Bekasi are more dedicated to entertaining visitors, guests who come both to pray and enjoy the performances, such as gambang kromong, puppet show, fire walking, medium spirit attraction. The performances showed very clear differences between Bekasi and Welahan. In Bekasi, it is more concerned with the aspect of public entertainment. In contrast to Welahan, the show is more devoted to entertaining the gods with potehi puppet show. Even gamelan music as entertainment, is also used to accompany the pray. The feel of sacredness is felt and seen in Welahan as one of the oldest temples in Indonesia. There can be seen the intent and purpose of people who come in this festival. People in Bekasi both come to pray and enjoy the performances during this festival. The atmosphere of the temple festival can be felt in Bekasi because of the many events that are displayed, the number of people who sell around the temple. The atmosphere of the night market was very festive with the accompaniment of gambang keromong orchestra. Young people seem to get together and this time often becomes a time reunion.

Participants

The festival always involves many participants. Many people take part in this festival. Every temple that will hold celebration of god's birthday makes an invitation and distributed to the temples, the foundation of the temple management, Tridarma associations, and others. For Hok Lay Kiong Temple, Bekasi, participants and guests mostly come from West Java region such as Bekasi, Karawang, Cikarang, Cilengsi, Tonjong, Jonggol, Bogor. While in Welahan due to a carnival or parade of Hian Thian Siang Tee, participants who came apart from the Central Java region, also came from outside of the Java region such as Jakarta, Padang, Tangerang. These participants come from temples that have the god Hian Thian Siang Tee either as main god or guest. By holding a parade together and bringing statue of the Hian Thian Siang Tee on sedan chair, they believe the pray will come true and get a blessing. For those who are not strong enough to lift the sedan chair, they still believe that touching the sedan chair will get blessings from Hian Thian Siang Tee and his prayer is granted.

The Name of the God

The same god but in his mention or known by the people is different. This difference can be due to different places. Hian Thian Siang Tee in the Java area is better known as the god of medicine. Temple with the main god Hian Thian Siang Tee in Java is in Semarang, namely Grajen and Welahan. The temple of Grajen is

known as the temple of medicine. In Welahan there is a special recipe to heal. In Bekasi, Hian Thian Siang Tee is known by the ruler of the northern sky god, some are considered as a god of fortune and luck because it is associated with the name of the temple itself that is Hok Lay Kiong (Fu Lai Gong) which means the palace brings the fortune.

Acculturation

In the festival of Hian Than Siang Tee's birthday celebration both in Bekasi and Welahan, cultural acculturation takes place. In Bekasi, acculturation occurs and exists between the traditions of Hokkien and Hakka. The fundamental difference between Hakka and Hokkien people is language. The language of the Hokkien is Minnanhua while the Hakka language is Kejiahua. These two languages differ far enough, so that Hakka people can not understand the Hokkien language, and vice versa. The Chinese Bekasi are generally Hokkien but many Hakka now live in Bekasi. Especially in the management of Hok lay Kiong temple today there are Hakka people, so in god's birthday festival now there is the tradition—Hakka people like the auction of goods. This tradition is known in Hakka. The acculturation also occurs in the performance of medium spirit, both Hakka and Hokkien medium spirit performance attraction. In Welahan there is no tradition of auction which is a Hakka tradition. In sejit in Welahan, the acculturation that happened was Chinese culture in this case of Hokkien and Javanese tradition. Welahan area is one of the areas in the coast of Java Island which is the beginning of the arrival of Chinese people who came from Hokkien. Acculturation also occurs because of power, which is powerful and influential. As in Hok Lay Kiong, which is jointly owned by Hokkien and Hakka, the tradition is also a combination between the two, while in Welahan the acculturation is not from within the Chinese culture itself but between Java and Chinese.

The acculturation of Chinese culture and local culture is seen in the performances shown in the celebration. In Hok Lay Kiong, Bekasi gambang kromong orchestra, wayang golek, puppet show express Chinese culture mingles with local culture. Likewise in Welahan, gamelan music that is displayed in the temple to accompany a pray shows a acculturation of Javanese and Chinese cultures.

Offerings

The celebration of the god of Hian Thian Siang Tee's birthday, in Bekasi and Welahan appears different in offerings placed on the altar table. The offerings that appear to be different from one another are: tarts, rice cone shaped, pork. In Bekasi the altar table is filled with tarts and birthday cakes which are not found in Welahan. The red cone rice shaped which is served in Welahan is not available in Bekasi. This kind of rice is a sign of Javanese cultural influences that are apparent in the festival at Welahan. For offerings in the bowls on the altar table, if in Bekasi it is in the form of being cooked and in Welahan all bowls containing bamboo sprouts that are not in Bekasi. The bowls are filled with bamboo sprouts, spring onions, peanuts, celery. Pork offerings in Bekasi are in the form of pork dishes. While at Welahan, the offerings of pork are two raw pigs placed in front of the entrance of the temple.

Medium Spirit

During the Hian Thian Siang Tee god's birthday festival in Bekasi, there are medium spirit attraction both Hakka medium spirit, Hokkien medium spirit, and also Dayak medium spirit. On the third day the temple's medium spirit makes amulet paper by using his blood. While in Welahan there is no such as medium spirit attraction.

The Auction

At first, there is no such as tradition. The auction during the god's birthday festival comes from Hakka tradition. In the early, mostly Bekasi Chinese are Hokkian. Nowadays there are many Hakka Bekasi Chinese and this brings influence to the temple festival. Such as auction tradition is not held in Welahan, Jepara.

Art Performances

The god's birthday celebration appears to be a temple festival due to the art or entertainment performances. Hok Lay Kiong Temple Bekasi becomes very crowded with various performances such as lion dance, barongsai, gambang keromong orchestra, wayang golek (puppet show) and people very enjoy this event. While in Welahan, Central Java the performances which are shown are gamelan and wayang potehi (potehi puppet).

Conclusion

Despite having the same main god, Hian Thian Siang Tee, Hok Lay Kiong Temple of Bekasi and the temple of Hian Thian Siang Tee Welahan have no ash relationship divide ashes tradition from one temple to another temple (*fenxiang*). There is a variation between the two places that are not only influenced by locality or local culture but also because of other influences. Variations occur in the celebration of god's birthday or tradition of honoring this god occurs because there are no standard rules in the the Chinese belief. This flexibility leads to easy variations. Variations also occur in an attempt to gain interest or attract the attention of the people in their goal of becoming more popular in society. The celebration of god's birthday in addition to honoring the gods also aims to create solidarity and integrity among Chinese groups, and other groups as seen in Bekasi, West Java and Welahan, Jepara, Central Java.



Hok Lay Kiong Temple, Bekasi



Preparation for the auction



Hian Thian Siang Tee



The offerings



Praying to Hian Thian Siang Tee
at *Sejit* Festival



The medium spirit perform
amulet paper making



Preparation for fire walking



Hian Thian Siang Tee Temple Welahan



Pray at *sejit* in Welahan



Temple of Hok Tek Tjeng Sin (Earth God) Welahan

All the pictures are personal documentation.

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