



Adaptation of Cheng Beng Tradition in Chinese Confucian Society at the Surakarta Confucian Religious Assembly (MAKIN)

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to determine the process of adaptation of the Cheng Beng tradition of the Chinese Confucian community at the Surakarta Confucian Religious Assembly (MAKIN). This tradition is one of the pillars of their spiritual cultural identity. Their history has an impact on the Cheng Beng cultural tradition which faces challenges in maintaining its position in a pluralistic environment. This tradition has important meanings and values that are passed down from generation to generation. The novelty of this study raises the issue of pluralism and involves the Confucian Religious Assembly community in Surakarta. This study uses a qualitative method with in-depth interviews and observations. The results found that the adaptation of the Cheng Beng tradition involves driving factors that include local cultural interaction factors, regional geography, family preferences, and modernization. These four factors give rise to a concrete form of the adaptation process in the form of flexibility in the use of offerings and their implementation. Bikhu Parekh's theory regarding the concept of multiculturalism is used to analyze that the adaptation process shows the existence of dynamic cultural pluralism. Because of the interaction between cultures, intercultural dialogue, and recognition of the existence of minority community traditions in the midst of a pluralistic society. This effort is made to create an inclusive society. So that this tradition is relevant and maintained even though there are cultural differences.

Keywords: Adaptation of Tradition, Cheng Beng, Cultural Pluralism, Multiculturalism



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INTRODUCTION

Past history shows that the Chinese people mostly came to the archipelago since the fifth century BC (Apdelmi et al., 2022). This group brought with them their cultural identity and beliefs, including the teachings of Confucianism which began to take root in the country. This teaching continued to develop until it was finally made official as one of the religions in Indonesia (Yang, 2005). Meanwhile during the

New Order era, there was a policy that all forms of activities related to Chinese tradition and culture were prohibited. This was proven by Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 which stipulated that all forms of Chinese culture and beliefs were prohibited from being practiced ([Aryani, 2022](#)). Therefore, this caused the elimination of Confucianism from the list of six official religions in Indonesia. In addition, it also caused many adherents of this belief to convert to other recognized religions, of course to avoid the political problems that were happening in Indonesia at that time ([Imron, 2023](#)). This event also had an impact on Confucian traditions and culture, because the assimilation policy could suppress the expression of Chinese cultural identity. Many of them practiced the tradition privately and in secret, even stopping it temporarily ([Chessiagi et al., 2018](#)).

One of these traditional practices is Cheng Beng, which is a form of respect for deceased ancestors. In the Chinese Confucian community, the Cheng Beng tradition is a form of worship to pray for ancestors as a form of their devotion and respect. This traditional practice reflects good moral values according to Confucian teachings. So that these values are passed on to descendants who are still alive ([FeriYanti et al., 2022](#)). The Cheng Beng tradition is believed to be one of the pillars of cultural and spiritual identity for the Chinese Confucian community. After the end of the New Order and over time, this tradition has experienced new challenges. Their position as a minority in Indonesia requires them to live side by side with other cultures ([Suryadinata, 2023](#)). This shows the existence of diversity, which often causes fragmentation. Conditions that lead to society not being integrated with each other ([Lee, 2009](#)). As with field research from ([Weng, 2019](#)) shows that many of the “native” Indonesians developed negative judgments about Chinese Indonesians. Stereotypes that view Chinese people as living exclusively and exploiting Indonesian resources. This data is supported by research from ([Nufus et al., 2024](#)) that Chinese society until now still often gets negative stereotypes that give rise to narrow and inaccurate views. This view is what gives rise to discrimination, conflict, miss communication, and the creation of segregation between communities. Conditions like this give rise to inequality, and illustrate the fragmentation of pluralism in Indonesia that is so real ([Adam et al., 2023](#)).

This issue makes the Chinese Confucian community try to adapt to this pluralistic environment. As in Surakarta which is a city of culture and high tolerance. The Chinese community who are classified as a minority community must live side by side with the very strong Javanese culture, this makes them try to adapt their cultural identity to the local culture ([Hartanti & Ardhana, 2022](#)). As in the implementation of the Cheng Beng tradition which is an ancestral heritage must maintain its existence amidst the plurality of Surakarta. Especially for the Chinese Confucian community who are under the auspices of formal institutions such as the Surakarta Confucian Religious Council. MAKIN or Chinese Confucian community at the Surakarta Confucian Religious Assembly is the only religious institution that houses all Confucian people in Surakarta. This institution is tasked with facilitating Confucian people in preserving their cultural and spiritual identity, including the Cheng Beng tradition ([Falah & Suharjianto, 2012](#)).

The purpose of this study is to determine the adaptation process of the Cheng Beng tradition with local culture in Surakarta. Of course, this study has novelty compared to previous studies that have discussed the practice of this tradition. Such as research conducted by ([Jatmiko, 2019](#)) which discusses the adaptation of Chinese society in the Lasem area to the local environment. This study shows that Chinese society integrates itself into the local society through cultural acculturation. This form of acculturation is in the form of the use of Javanese and Indonesian in daily activities. In addition, acculturation is also seen in the Kauman Islamic Boarding School which has Chinese architectural characteristics. This combination is a form of adaptation of the two societies in the area. In line with research conducted by ([Ibnu Walid, 2020](#)) which explains that the Chinese community tries to negotiate their cultural identity with the environment in which they live. This study was conducted in the Cirebon area, which illustrates that the Chinese community of Cirebon tries to negotiate their identity through the practice of pilgrimage to the tomb of Ong Tien. This

tomb pilgrimage means that there is diversity and harmonious relations between Cirebon and China to fight stigma and discrimination. Both of these studies provide an overview of the process of cultural adaptation to the social environment. Therefore, this study focuses on the adaptation of the Cheng Beng tradition as a cultural and spiritual identity of the Chinese Confucian community in the Confucian Religious Assembly community in Surakarta. Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in studying more deeply the process of adaptation of the Cheng Beng tradition in Surakarta, especially in the Chinese Confucian community in the Surakarta Confucian Religious Assembly or MAKIN amidst pluralism. The theory used in this study from Bikhu Parekh emphasizes the understanding that different cultures can coexist through the process of adaptation, intercultural dialogue, and respect for each other ([Rachmat Panca Putera, 2024](#)). Although Bikhu Parekh's theory has been widely used in studies on cultural diversity, this research emphasizes a unique contribution by relating it to the context of a plural society in Surakarta. It also involves the minority community in the city, namely the Indonesian Confucian Religion Assembly in Surakarta, which has not been studied in depth. Additionally, this research focuses on a more specific perspective, namely how the Confucian Religion Assembly (MAKIN) negotiates their spiritual and cultural identity with the social dynamics in Surakarta to maintain the Cheng Beng tradition.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, by exploring the perceptions of the Chinese Confucian community in MAKIN Surakarta regarding the adaptation of their cultural identity to local culture. Qualitative research is chosen because it aims to deeply understand the meaning and values of the Cheng Beng tradition. Additionally, this approach allows researchers to explore various experiences and perspectives of the practitioners of the tradition regarding the adaptation process that involves interaction and negotiation of identity ([Qodir et al., 2021](#)).

Data collection techniques in this study were carried out in three ways, namely in-depth interviews with selected informants. The interview lasted for 3 months to obtain accurate data. Continued with direct observation during the implementation of the tradition. The researcher directly followed the tradition carried out by the Chinese Religion Community in the city of Surakarta.

Then, reinforced with literature studies from reading materials in the form of journals, books, and websites. Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling techniques and continued with snowball sampling. The criteria for research informants are as follows; MAKIN member families, MAKIN administrators, and clergy. These three informant criteria are believed to provide in-depth and varied perspectives on research problems. This research obtained 6 informants who were able to provide answers and in-depth understanding regarding the context of this study.

The data in this study are primary data and secondary data. Primary data are the results of interviews and observations of researchers, while secondary data are the results of literature studies. The collected data were tested for validity with triangulation of data sources and triangulation of methods to obtain data credibility and reliability ([Creswell, 2010](#)). Data source triangulation is carried out by comparing the answers from the six informants to obtain a valid and in-depth understanding. This is followed by method triangulation, which is done by comparing the results of field interviews, field observations, and document studies.

After that, the data were analyzed using interactive model analysis techniques from Miles and Huberman in the form of data collection, data reduction, and drawing conclusions ([Denzin & Lincoln, 2009](#)).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cheng Beng prayer is often also called grave prayer or tilik kubur. This is because the implementation of Cheng Beng prayer is carried out by making a pilgrimage to the graves of ancestors ([Ivory & Tondok, 2024](#)). This tradition is an annual cultural practice carried out by all Confucian people in MAKIN Surakarta. Surakarta is one of the cities with a very diverse society. They consist of various tribes, religions, cultures, and traditions, one of which is the Chinese Confucian community ([Alam et al., 2024](#)). Cheng Beng or Qing Ming ancestral prayer falls on April 4 or 5 every year. This implementation is calculated 104 days after the Tangcik holiday. Cheng beng is an important moment to remember and honor ancestors just like other ancestral prayers in the Confucian tradition ([Oktavianus, 2016](#)). However, the difference in this tradition lies in the date and place of implementation. Cheng Beng can be performed at ancestral graves or at Tiong Ting. If in the past ancestors were buried when they died, then the family was required to perform a grave visit at the ancestral grave. However, over time, many Chinese Confucian families chose to cremate their deceased ancestors. This is based on the recognition of informants in this study that the decreasing land factor in Surakarta has caused Confucian Chinese families to choose Thiong Thing as the final resting place of their ancestors.

On Javanese tradition, Cheng Beng is also known as sadranan, which is the cleaning of ancestral graves. This tradition is also a hereditary heritage that has become a habit and custom ([Rosydiana, 2023](#)). Cheng Beng means Bright and Brilliant. This means that the Cheng Beng tradition is also called a holy day celebration to make a pilgrimage to the graves of ancestors. This tradition has actually been embedded for a long time because it is included in the old history long before the birth of the Prophet Confucius. The history of this tradition is depicted in the legend that tells of events that occurred before the Prophet Confucius was born. This story is the background to the birth of the Cheng Beng celebration ([Yeremia & Andayani, 2020](#)). In addition to being a form of respect for deceased ancestors, Cheng Beng has values contained in it. Values that reflect the close relationship between living family members and their ancestors. So that the celebration of this tradition does not symbolize feelings of grief, but rather symbolizes happiness ([Ajmer, 1978](#)).

Like the purpose of the Cheng Beng tradition, the implementation process contains many communication symbols related to the moral values of Confucian teachings. One of them is the values of virtue, namely good behavior by being devoted to ancestors or parents who have died. These values of virtue are ultimately passed down from generation to generation to continue and carry out this tradition from generation to generation ([Tanaka, 2024](#)). This is evident until now, the Chinese Confucian community in Surakarta, which is a member of MAKIN Surakarta, still maintains the continuity of this tradition. However, it cannot be denied that the socio-cultural changes that have occurred have made this tradition have to be able to adapt. Moreover, with the situation and conditions of a pluralistic society, in Surakarta they live side by side with a very strong

Javanese culture. This brings challenges for the Chinese Confucian community in MAKIN Surakarta in maintaining and preserving the traditions inherited from their ancestors.

The implementation of the Cheng Beng tradition can be said to be unique. This is reflected in everything used to welcome the Cheng Beng celebration. This tradition is identical to the typical offerings used for offerings to their ancestors. Such as the main food in the form of rice and side dishes, meat (three types of meat), cakes, fruits, tea and water. In addition to offerings in terms of food and drink. The uniqueness of this tradition lies in their cultural symbols in the form of prayer paper (go sek cua), afterlife money (Gincua and Kimcua), items such as clothes, cell phones, shoes made of paper, candles, and incense. All of these offerings are considered symbols of their respect for their ancestors. Because the Confucian Chinese community believes that these offerings will be used by the ancestors to meet their needs in the afterlife ([Kristin, 2017](#)).

This tradition is carried out by all family members and gather together at the ancestral graves or Thiong Thing. The day before carrying out the grave visit, the Confucian Chinese community needs to prepare food offerings. Therefore, at night they must cook the offerings that will be presented to the ancestors. Because the offerings that will be presented should not be warm, but rather cold. Before praying, they are required to clean the grave. After the grave is cleaned, they prepare all the equipment for prayer. Such as food and drink offerings, candles, incense, prayer paper, and other equipment. Then continued with the process of praying to the ancestors, each family member prays for their ancestors. The end of this prayer is to offer duplicate items made of paper. The offering of these items is done by burning them, and the meaning of this burning is so that all the offerings will later reach the ancestors to be used as provisions for the ancestors in the afterlife ([Kriswanto, 2023](#)).

A long development of this time, many descendants of Chinese Confucianism actually began to leave Confucianism. In addition to the New Order factor, marriage was also a reason for them to change their beliefs. So some of them no longer carry out this Cheng Beng tradition, but there are also people who still carry it out even though they have changed their beliefs. As one of the informants of this study stated that currently even though many of the next generation choose to leave Confucianism, they often still care about their ancestors. Therefore, when the Cheng Beng tradition is carried out, they still do it by visiting graves and praying for their parents and ancestors. This indicates that the values of virtue that are deeply embedded are still rooted in the individual. In addition, the social and cultural changes that follow are also the reason that many changes have occurred in the Cheng Beng tradition. Such as changes in the offerings used for offerings and prayers to ancestors. The various offerings that are offered have their own meanings, and over time the offerings have undergone slight changes and innovations. As stated by the informant of this study, that offerings in the past had to be standard and seemed traditional. But nowadays, offerings are more flexible in their use. The results of this study found several driving factors that made offerings experience innovation and more flexible.

Factors Driving the Adaptation of Cheng Beng Tradition

1. Local Cultural Factor

Living side by side with the diverse traditions, cultures, and beliefs in Surakarta has led to the identity of the Confucian Chinese undergoing a process of adaptation. This process is partly due

to the interaction with the local Javanese culture. Surakarta, which is so thick with local culture, has an influence on the implementation of Cheng Beng. In relation to the food offerings offered, Surakarta is identical with their traditional food. Traditional Javanese cakes are local elements adapted by the Confucian Chinese community. Like the traditional glutinous rice cake made from sticky rice, this cake is often offered during the Cheng Beng prayer. The Confucian Chinese community believes that glutinous rice cake is made from sticky rice, so they hope that it will maintain intimacy and attachment to family and ancestors. In addition to glutinous rice cake, there are other traditional Javanese cakes, namely cupcake or fairy cake. Cupcake or fairy cake are also often offered to ancestors, this cake symbolizes the hope for continued fortune that continues to bloom like the shape of this cake which has a crack on top. In addition, Javanese people are also famous for betel quid, which is like a food or snack from ancient Indonesian cultural heritage. Usually betel quid is often eaten by Javanese grandmothers. Even today, many parents still eat betel quid, especially in Surakarta. Betel quid consists of betel leaves, areca nuts, gambier, lime, and tobacco. Betel quid is also often used to be served with cigarettes to add offerings to ancestors. Some of these adaptations indicate that plurality in Surakarta is a driving factor for flexibility in offerings for the Cheng Beng tradition. However, interaction with local culture can also pose new challenges. The dominant local culture allows the original meaning of the Cheng Beng tradition to shift, which can undermine the purity of the Confucian Chinese cultural identity itself. Therefore, a critical understanding is needed to perceive the interaction in a balanced way.

2. Geographical Factors of the Region

The location of an area is also a driving factor for changes and adaptations of the Cheng Beng tradition. Surakarta City is one of the cultural cities that is very thick with Javanese traditions. So that it provides enough dynamic space for the Cheng Beng tradition to develop with a touch of local culture. This is related to the habits formed as a result of interaction with local culture. As stated by one of the informants in this study who said that regional factors influence the implementation of traditions. If in other areas, the implementation of Cheng Beng is carried out at ancestral graves. However, in Surakarta there has been a shift due to the limited empty land for graves, so often their family members choose to cremate their deceased ancestors in Thiong Thing. In some cases, many Confucian Chinese communities in MAKIN also choose to hold Cheng Beng by praying at their respective homes. Of course, by preparing all forms of cultural elements that are also used, such as altars, incense, candles, photos of ancestors, offerings, and paper money. This description shows that the implementation of the Cheng Beng tradition over time is increasingly accessible without having to come to ancestral graves. In addition, in terms of offerings, the Surakarta Confucian Chinese community claims to be very flexible and adapts to the area where they live. Like the availability of food in an area, it varies according to the season in each area. So they try to combine and innovate in terms of these offerings. On the other hand, the geographical conditions of the region can present challenges for the cultural adaptation of Cheng Beng. The limitations in each area related to land availability can lead to internal conflicts within the community. This can create tensions between the younger and older generations regarding the adjustment of ancestral graves to their cultural heritage handed down through generations. In short, it is a tension between maintaining old traditions or accepting changes due to the ever-changing geographical factors of the region.

3. Family Factors

The third factor in the change of offerings is because of family preferences. Families have a role in determining the offerings they will present during the Cheng Beng tradition. This is related to family preferences that tend to choose offerings according to the preferences of their ancestors when they were alive. So that the food, drinks, and items their ancestors liked are chosen to be offered. For example, when the ancestor was a vegetarian, what they served was vegetarian food. So there is no need to offer things like meat or sweet cakes, but vegetables and side dishes that the ancestors liked. This illustrates the close relationship between the family and their ancestors. In addition to family preferences, the offerings that are offered also depend on the family's economic condition. The financial capabilities of families certainly vary and for families who are considered capable, they will provide complete offerings. However, for families who are limited in financial ability, they will simplify the offerings. It should be emphasized that the simplicity of these offerings does not reduce their respect and devotion to their ancestors. Because an important factor in this tradition is their intention to carry out devotional practices according to Confucian teachings.

4. Modernization Factors

Along with the development of the increasingly modern era, it is certainly one of the important aspects that influences the adaptation of the Cheng Beng tradition in the Confucian Chinese community in MAKIN Surakarta. The emergence of technology cannot be separated from the existence of modernization factors. This is what drives the adaptation to the phenomenon of modernization. The use of technology such as social media and mass media to introduce the cultural heritage of the Confucian Chinese community is the right choice. With social media and mass media, they can show the general public and the younger generation of Confucian Chinese about the importance of the Cheng Beng tradition. It is undeniable that along with the development of this time, the younger generation of Confucian Chinese may be less attached to traditional culture like this. For the younger generation, social media and mass media are a space for them to practically learn and explore this tradition. Because of various factors such as time to orientation towards global culture that make them limited in learning the Cheng Beng tradition. So it is hoped that the use of social media such as Instagram, and mass media such as online newspapers and the Youtube platform will make it easier and more efficient for the younger generation to deepen their knowledge of the Cheng Beng tradition in the midst of modernization. Although this factor is important, modernization also presents risk opportunities in the process of adapting traditions. The ease of access today allows everything to be done instantly, even with uncertain accuracy. This raises concerns about the dilution of the sacred meaning of Cheng Beng. The depth of its spiritual meaning and educational value may be displaced. Therefore, knowledge and understanding are also needed so that we are not too far swept away by the currents of modernization.

Forms of Adaptation of Cheng Beng Tradition

Some of the driving factors above, namely interaction with local culture, geographical factors of the region, family factors, and modernization factors are important aspects that indicate the process of adaptation to local culture in Surakarta. Therefore, the form of adaptation can be seen

in the following table.

Concrete Forms of Adaptation	Explanation/Meaning
More flexible offerings	The types of offerings presented are no longer tied to certain traditional foods. However, they can be family preferences and adjustments to regional factors.
Carrying out traditions at home or at Thiong Thing	The availability of land for graves in Surakarta is increasingly limited and families prefer to keep things simple, so often the tradition is carried out without having to come to the grave, but can be done at home or at Thiong Thing.
Use of digital media	The process of introducing and learning to the younger generation tends to utilize media as a more practical and efficient digital space.
Offerings according to local culture	Offerings such as fruits and cakes are replaced with traditional Javanese cakes. Such as wajik, kueku, and kue mankok which mean that fortune will continue to come. In addition, other offerings have also undergone changes to be more simple and practical.

Based on the results and discussion above, this can provide an understanding of the theory of Bikhu Parekh which focuses on the concept of multiculturalism. This theory emphasizes that pluralism and multiculturalism are interrelated by emphasizing the recognition of differences that arise in a pluralistic society. Parekh stated that in a pluralistic society in Indonesia, it is classified as a moderate multicultural pattern (Sahfutra et al., 2024). Conditions that illustrate that currently Indonesia still has obstacles in the process of integration between communities (Parekh, 2010). This is reflected in the context of this study, namely that although there is ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, the majority culture often gets a wider space. This is what can ultimately create tension between the dominant and majority cultures, such as the Confucian Chinese culture that faces this challenge. Therefore, in a pluralistic society, there needs to be continuous dialogue between community groups. This is to ensure that cultural diversity is accommodated and maintained. In relation to the results of this study, Bikhu Parekh's theory provides an understanding that in a pluralistic society such as in Surakarta, the Cheng Beng tradition, which is a culture from a minority community, has adapted to the local culture. This adaptation reflects that there is a dialogue between cultures to be able to live side by side without eliminating the essential meaning of the two cultures. Adaptation in symbols and offerings that are more flexible and make adjustments to the situation and conditions of local culture shows that there is a mutually beneficial dialogue. So this theory provides insight that differences and diversity in culture, ethnicity, customs, and religion can be mutually appreciated and respected so that culture and traditions continue to experience sustainability and create a more inclusive plural society. The results of this study are in accordance with the research conducted by (Soeyiwo Meliala, 2024) which describes that there is interaction between the Chinese Confucian community and the Muslim community in Tebing Tinggi Village due to the process of cultural adaptation. The participation of the Muslim community in Tebing Tinggi Village during the Cheng Beng celebration to help the Chinese Confucian community clean the graves of their ancestors provides an understanding that these two communities are trying to form a good relationship. This positive response is a picture that in the midst of this pluralistic environment, we must respect each other for the differences that each community group has.

CONCLUSION

The Cheng Beng tradition is one of the traditional cultures inherited from the ancestors of the Confucian Chinese community. This tradition has a very deep meaning and cultural and spiritual values. Therefore, it is very important for this tradition to be carried out and passed down from generation to generation. Along with the development of time, the Surakarta Confucian Chinese community who must live side by side with the local culture requires them to adapt to the tradition. This adaptation is supported by factors of interaction with local culture, geographical factors, family preference factors, and modernization factors. These four factors give rise to forms of adaptation of the Cheng Beng tradition which are generally in the form of flexible offerings, offerings present with adjustments to local culture, flexible implementation of traditions, and the use of digital media. This adaptation process illustrates the existence of cultural pluralism in Surakarta as a form of a moderate multicultural society. Parekh argues that this adaptation shows the existence of intercultural dialogue, namely Confucian Chinese culture with Javanese culture in Surakarta. So that with this dialogue and interaction, diversity and differences can encourage the sustainability of the ancestral cultural heritage of minority communities amidst pluralism in Surakarta. The findings of this research can provide insights into the important role of religious institutions such as the Surakarta Konghucu Religious Council, or MAKIN, in providing a space for discussion and dialogue across generations as well as with the broader community. This is useful for strengthening their cultural and spiritual identities to withstand the challenges of a pluralistic society. This research has limitations regarding the perspectives of the younger generation, thus it has not provided an understanding of how the youth perceive and adapt the Cheng Beng tradition. Therefore, further studies are strongly recommended to explore the involvement of the younger generation in preserving their culture, as well as to compare the roles of religious institutions in other regions within different contexts of pluralism. Thus, the findings of this research provide an understanding for the Indonesian society at large to preserve cultural heritage while promoting tolerance and intercultural dialogue. This means that diversity should be a collective strength, not differences maintained in social barriers.

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