"Culture of Living"

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Implementation Of The Concept Of Balance
At Kelenteng Shrine In Lasem

by T. Yoyok Wahyu Subroto, Dyah S. Pradnya, Affah Harisah Hussein

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Abstract

This research aims to explore and to identify all about the kelenteng (shrine) of Cu An Kiong, Poo An Bio and Gie Yong Bio in Lasem, Central Java. Based on empirical study, it is known that Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism cannot be apart from their culture and life where kelenteng becomes the place for conducting ritual activities. A fixed orientation of four cardinal directions such as east, west, south and north together with five basic elements of Taoism: water, fire, wood, metal and earth were harmonizing to set the building of kelenteng. It was becoming the basic cosmological concept consideration where the kelentengs have to be set.

1. Introduction

Lasem represents the old coastal town in north Central-Java where its initial residents almost entirely ethnic Chinese who came from mainland China and the major occupation were merchants. It is located at about 60 kilometers east of Semarang. As similar to other Chinese town, Lasem owns some shrines (or kelenteng in local-word) where Chinese residents usually use it for ritual activities. These kelentengs crossed for centuries at least more than 400 years which those buildings relatively still similar to their initial archaic building shapes.
and setting. Hence it is possible to explore historical background of those keletengs. Regarding the exploration and implementation of the spatial structure pattern of those keletengs in Lasem as the aims of the study, it is noted that there are some basic reasons that can be related to the context in which they originated. By observing the setting of keleteng to include its spatial organization will lead this study to see the concept and its implementation as well.

2. Historical Review of Keleteng in Lasem

There are fascinated stories to describe Lasem as coastal Chinese town in Central-Java during more than 400 years. Within 15th AD Century, Lasem Kingdom was under Majapahit Kingdom where the people in Lasem have encountered two major cultural influences such as Hinduism and Buddhism whereas in between 15th –17th AD century Lasem was becoming one of kadipaten (regency) under Mataram Kingdom which rose to power in the early 16th century and kept control of almost the whole island of Java to include Lasem where Javanese culture become predominated. Meanwhile in between 17th-20th AD century, Lasem was used by the Dutch and the Japanase colonial government to be the important place for shipyard in Java. Nevertheless, during lengthy time some parts of Chinese settlement in Lasem still survive which is represented by such three keletengs as Cu An Kiong at Dasun, Poo An Bio at Karangturi and Gie Yong Bio at Babagan.

Talking about Chinese settlement in Lasem, it cannot be apart from their religion as Taoism, Confusionism, and Buddhism. These religions also cannot be apart from their culture and life where keleteng becomes the place for conducting ritual activities. As mentioned above, in Lasem there are three keleteng which have their own stories related to their construction. The keleteng of Cu An Kiong was founded for respecting Tiang Shang Sheng Mu as a spirit of shipmen whereas keleteng of Poo An Bio was founded for respecting Guo Zhong Fu as a spirit of overseas. Meanwhile the keleteng of Gie Yong Bio was founded for respecting of three heroes namely Tian Pan Tjiang, Oei Ing Kiat and Raden Panji Margono (the Javanese) who have a spirit as a heroes of Lasem. It seems that all
3. Religion of Chinese Focal Point in the Setting

As mentioned above, the original ancestors of the Chinese have three traditional main streams of religion such as Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Taoism has some sacred spaces and rules to present special ritual activity in related to bring the Taoism adherents relationship to the Goddess closer. Meanwhile Confucianism have not own a sacred space to provide an opportunity for the adherents to take an interaction to their ancestors, whereas Buddhism have own a simple sacred space to provide an opportunity for the adherents to take an interaction to Siddharta Gautama. In summary, the Chinese in Lasem have preferred to accept, incorporate, absorb and integrate the influences of those religions to be applied into their livelihood.

4. Discussions

4.1. The Setting of Three Kelenteng in Lasem

From the aerial view, it is noted that the three kelentengs of Cu An Kiong. Poo An Bio and Gie Yong Bio were considerably a fixed orientation of four cardinal directions such as east, west, south and north. These cardinal directions then become one basic order to set the kelenteng. On the other hand according to the such indigenous Taoism as the five basic elements: water, fire, wood, metal and earth also become the other basic cosmological concept consideration which play an important role in setting the kelenteng. In macrocosmos point of view seems that the two former basic elements of Taoism as water and fire are clearly be implemented in the setting of kelenteng in Lasem synchronizing with the cardinal direction of south-north and east-west. The water that comes from the rivers which empties into the sea in the north where the sea of Java is located symbolizing the water. It establishes the cardinal axis direction of south-north.

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18 The indigenous Taoism is different from the four elements of the ancient world (Greece) philosophy: water, fire, earth and air.
Meanwhile the mount of *Puro (Argopuro)* in the east (which also constitutes the point where the sun arises) symbolized the fire which is provided by the intense volcanic activity establish the cardinal axis direction of east-west (see Figure 1).

![Map of Lasem showing the location of Puro (Argopuro), Gie Yong Bio, Cun An Kiong, Argopuro Mountain, and the Kriyan Palace.](image)

**Figure 1: Setting of the Three Kelenteng in Lasem and the Kriyan Palace**

*Source: Survey, 2004*

### 4.2. The Orientation of the Three Kelentengs in Lasem

Exploration of the orientation and position of the three *kelenteng* in mezz-level indicated that there is a consistency of the consideration of fixed orientation of four cardinal directions such as east, west, south and north to include the five basic elements of Taoism. Data in Table 1 indicated that the east direction as in Lasem represented of orientation to fire (mount or sun) is implemented. On the other side, water seems to be dependent element which makes the *kelenteng* faces to it. Even though the water where in mezzo level is represented by the river of Lasem are located different from place to place of *kelenteng*, there is an order of position to which the cardinal points of south, north, east or west constitutes the only right direction to be faced by the *kelenteng*.
Table 1. The Implementation of Cardinal Direction Axis in the Setting of Kelenteng in Lasem

<table>
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<th>Position &amp; Orientation of Kelenteng</th>
<th>Describers</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cu An Kiong</td>
<td>West orientation to Lasem river, the river is a representation of water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U/L Jawa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S/Lasem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S/S Kemendung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Poo An Bio</td>
<td>South orientation to Kemendung river, the river is a representation of water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U/L Jawa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S/Lasem</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S/S Kemendung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gie Yong Bio</td>
<td>The past: east orientation in East.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U/L Jawa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S/Lasem</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, 2004

4.3. The Micro Spatial of Lasem

In the micro spatial level of Lasem which is represented by the building of kelenteng, it was found that a fixed orientation of four cardinal directions such as east, west, south and north, was implemented. Figure 2 represents that the front of all kelentengs which refer to the orientation of kelenteng have a dissimilar orientation of the main altar where the ancestor-statues exist. It is directed to the east symbolizing the orientation of fire which is aimed to gain safety of Chinese
inhabitants. Accordingly the axial line of west-east and south-north are implemented symbolizing the concept of balance to gain harmonization of the livelihood.

the three kelenteng in Lasem. This condition could describe as:

![Diagram of Cun An Kiong, Gie Yong Bio, and Poo An Bio showing the direction of Kelenteng's Orientation in Lasem]

Figure 2: The Direction of Kelenteng's Orientation in Lasem

*Source: Survey, 2004*

5. Conclusion

It is concluded that the axial line which represents the four cardinal directions is directed to harmonize nature and it is to be used for guiding the setting of kelenteng in Lasem. The axial lines are also established based on the Taoism concept which consist the five basic elements: water, fire, wood, metal and earth which is synchronized with four cardinal points such as east, west, south
and north. The Taoism concept constitutes the basic cosmological concept consideration which plays an important role in setting the kelemteng.

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