

# Belief System of Chinese Community toward *Tatung* in the Celebration of *Cap Go Meh* in Singkawang City

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Abstract: The objectives of this research are: 1) to describe Chinese belief system toward *Tatung* at *Cap Go Meh* celebration in Singkawang city, and 2) to describe some factors that underlie Chinese society belief towards *Tatung* at *Cap Go Meh* celebration in Singkawang city. This research uses qualitative method with in-depth interview for the data collection technique. The subjects in this study are three *Tatung* men and seven Chinese people. The data analysis techniques include data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. Meanwhile, the test data validity uses source triangulation. The result of the research shows that: 1) the belief system of Chinese society towards *Tatung* means the existence of great religious value toward *Tatung*, the existence of strong belief on *Tatung*, intrinsic-religious oriented, and a perspective which emphasizes on obedience and loyalty toward the teachings of the ancestors, 2) the factors that underlie the Chinese society in believing *Tatung* are their past experiences, belief to God, and hereditary culture.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Culture is a uniqueness that lies within a group of human and very influential on the human behavior itself in living their life. Culture is any kind of idea, belief, technology, custom, or practice gained through learning from others (Heine, 2016). This opinion provides a description that culture is a result of human creativity believed by others and then inherited from generation to generation deeply rooted in certain groups of people.

Indonesia is one of the countries having rich culture. One of the most multicultural and multiethnic areas is Singkawang city, West Kalimantan. The community is dominated by Chinese, Malay, Dayak, and other ethnic groups. There are many unique cultures that exist in this city; one of them is *Cap Go Meh*, which is a culture of Chinese ethnic. *Cap Go Meh* is initially started in 17th century, when there was a great migration of people from Southern China. During Han dynasty, on the night of *Cap Go Meh*, the king went out of the palace to celebrate it along with his people. The word *Cap Go Meh* is taken from the dialect of TioCiu and Hokkian, meaning 15<sup>th</sup> night. While in the Hakka dialect, it is called CangNyiat Pan, which means middle of the first month. In China itself it is

called 元宵节 (yuánxiāojié), meaning a festival held on each 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month according to Chinese calendar (Andriani, 2013).

The farmers set up lanterns called ChauTian Can around their fields to ward off pests and scare away the plant-destructive animals, and also to create beautiful scenes at the 15th day of the first month. As well as to scare or expel the plants-destroying animal, they also play music and perform *barongsai* to make it more crowded and beneficial to the farmers. Cultural beliefs and traditions are inherited from generation to generation, both in China and throughout the world. This is one version of the original stories of *Cap Go Meh* (Andriani, 2013).

In the Western countries, *Cap Go Meh* is considered a carnival party of Chinese ethnic because there is a long march that generally starts from *Kelenteng* (temple). *Kelenteng* is a general term for the place of worship of three religions/"Tri Dharma" (Buddhism, Taoism and Confuciusm). The name of *Kelenteng* is now converted into *Vihara* which is actually a term for Buddhist monasteries (Andriani, 2013).

*Cap Go Meh*, in *Imlek* (Lunar New Year), comes from the Chinese tradition which is regarded as an expression of gratitude to the God over good

harvest, and at the same time, it is also a form of hope for the better result next season. *Imlek* is always celebrated for 15 days in a row and the 15th day is called *Cap Go Meh*. So, in Chinese tradition, it means that the fifteenth day is the peak of Chinese New Year and *Cap Go Meh* celebrations. The peak of *Imlek* or *Cap Go Meh* event is also intended to ward off disturbance or misfortune in the future. The expulsion of evil spirits and the abandonment of misfortune in *Cap Go Meh* are symbolized in the "*Tatung*" show (Harningsih, 2014).

The term "*Tatung*" has been familiar to the public. *Tatung*, in Hakka language, means a person possessed by a spirit, a god, an ancestor, or a supernatural power (Sirojudin, 2018). Keep in mind that *Tatung* is not only held at the peak of Lunar New Year or *Cap Go Meh*. But on a normal day, *Tatung* can also be performed by people who have become experts with a specific purpose, such as to help healing the sick, and so forth. *Tatung* is the main medium of *Cap Go Meh*. *Tatung* attractions are filled with mystic and tense, because many people will be "possessed" by spirits believed as Chinese gods. *Tatung* calling ceremony is led by a *Tatung* chairman who deliberately brings the spirits of the gods to possess the chosen people. The spirits are believed to be good ones which are capable of warding off evil spirits that are going to interfere with the harmony of life and are believed to be the heroes of Chinese legends, such as warlords, judges, writers, princes, and other saints (Sirojudin, 2018).

The invited spirits will only possess the chosen ones, who in this case are the descendants of the family who pass on knowledge to be possessed by the gods, and those who have gone through various rituals and have qualified in the stages required to master that knowledge. *Tatung* people are required to fast and become vegetarian for three days and three nights before the celebration day, and this is intended to make them in a holy state before the event is held (Harningsih, 2014).

Right on the day of *Cap Go Meh*, *Tatung* players who have been possessed by the spirit of god will behave beyond the normal human capabilities in general; like trampling a blade of a sword or knife, and plugging steel wires pointed to the right cheek to penetrate the left cheek. Strangely, they are not even scratched or injured when the sharp objects are stuck in their bodies. Some of other *Tatung* players voraciously eat animals or chickens alive and then drink their fresh and raw blood. (Harningsih, 2014). Another unique thing in the celebration of *Cap Go Meh* in Singkawang is that *Tatung*

procession is not only done by Chinese ethnic, but also they come from Dayak who participate in *Tatung* show. They are encouraged to participate because the ritual ceremony "*Kesurupan*" is a *Tatung*-like ceremony held by Dayak people (Harningsih, 2014).

The *Cap Go Meh* celebration, which is held at the peak of the Lunar New Year celebration on the 15th day, is performed with a *Tatung* players' parade that perform their play along the highway and become a good show for the local people. This culture will continue to be preserved and it is the responsibility of all Indonesians to preserve the richness of indigenous, traditional, and cultural affairs in the country. This tradition is inherited from generation to generation (Harningsih, 2014).

For people beyond the Chinese ethnic, this will be seen as something abnormal because in *Tatung*, it is believed that the players have been controlled by the gods or other mystical spirits. For other cultures, it may be seen as a strange or unnatural custom. However, for Chinese people, this has become a common tradition for every year in the celebration of Lunar New Year. In the contemporary perspective of abnormal psychology based on a socio-cultural perspective, we cannot judge that a person is abnormal, if the things he has done are according to his own culture/belief, because every culture has its own characteristics (Nevid, dkk, 2005).

The uniqueness of *Tatung* is very interesting to be investigated more deeply, particularly related to the psychological aspects of community groups that implement and believe it. One of the most important psychological aspects of is the belief system that exists in that community groups. In the cognitive theory, the belief system is a basis of one's attitude and behavior in living his life. The belief system is an interrelated and varied structure of norms, especially at a systemic level. The meaning of systemic in the belief system is an interrelation between some beliefs (DoménechdanSelva, 2016). This opinion implies that the belief system is motivated by pre-existing beliefs in the individual and then becomes a unity in his strong belief system.

*Tatung* in the *Cap Go Meh* celebration has become a culture inherent in Chinese society. The culture prevailing in a society must be carried out consistently due to the strong belief in the culture. For a person who holds a particular culture, the ultimate goal is to fulfill the culture itself and to gain salvation now and in the future. Culture itself is specifically consisted of cultural values, knowledge and beliefs that are used as guidance or reference in the pattern of community life. *Tatung* culture for the

Chinese community has been believed for generations so that there is no more debate on it. This belief has led the Chinese people to celebrate *Cap Go Meh* with *Tatung* play in order to gain salvation in current and following years.

The individual belief system will have effects on his/her perceptions, cognitions and actions, and will affect his/her psychological processes and behaviors (George E. Belch, 1978). It is likely that the actions of individuals involved in some types of decision process will be influenced by their own belief systems and concepts. Thus, individuals of each system must manifest variations relative to their perceptions, beliefs, and actions. The belief system can be understood more by exploring deeper into the elements embedded in it. There are seven important elements in the belief system, i.e. values, basic beliefs, orientation, language, perspective, commands and prohibitions, and ideological technology (DoménechdanSelva, 2016). Because this research is related to sub culture, then it only takes some elements, value, basic belief, orientation and perspective.

Values are highly esteemed in human life. Values become the basis for a person to act by determining what is good or valuable. Substantive beliefs are all things that underlie a person's belief so that his faith is getting stronger to uphold it, as God exists with all His creations. Orientation is the center of attention or the tendency of a person in carrying out everything that becomes his belief. Perspective is a person's view of the culture that exists in his social environment and affects his belief system to the culture around him.

Every human being has a belief system that they use to represent a set of tendencies to comprehend, interpret, and translate stimuli or events consistently, so that through this mechanism, individuals can interact well with the world around them. The context of understanding, interpreting and translating the stimuli or events must have deep meaning, harmony and peace created between human beings due to these attitudes which are always applied in everyday life to honor and respect another belief system.

*Tatung* in the celebration of *Cap Go Meh*, has become an inherent culture in the Chinese society that is consistently implemented due to strong belief in the culture. For a person who holds a particular culture, the ultimate goal is to fulfill the culture itself and to gain salvation for now and in the future (Hadikusumo, 1990). Culture itself is specifically consisted of cultural values, knowledge and beliefs that are used as the guidance or reference in the

pattern of community life. *Tatung*, for the Chinese community, has been believed for generations so that there is no more debate on it. This belief has led the Chinese people to celebrate *Cap Go Meh* with *Tatung* play in order to gain salvation in current and following years.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative method in phenomenological perspective. Husserl's phenomenological perspective (Moleong, 2014) means "a way of approaching to acquire knowledge on something (object) just the way it is and becomes the experience of human consciousness." The phenomenological qualitative method in this research, is used to reveal the Chinese society's belief pattern on *Tatung* at *Cap Go Meh* celebration. The subjects were three *Tatung* players and seven Chinese people. The data collecting technique used was in-depth interview analyzed in three stages, namely data reduction, data display and conclusion (Miles dan Huberman, 2013). The data validity test used source triangulation by comparing or checking the data obtained from different sources.

## 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Speaking about *Tatung*, there is certainly an underlying thing so that emerges the Chinese society's belief about it. In this case, the researcher tries to collect the data through in-depth interviews on *Tatung* players and some Chinese people related to their belief system on *Tatung*, which includes four elements: values, basic belief, orientation and perspective.

*Tatung* has a very high religious value because there is a religious ritual that comes from ancient Taoism. Such religious rituals as fasting and rituals incorporate the spirit of god into the human body. *Tatung* is a proof that the Gods can save people from the disorder of evil spirits. All good or bad, pleasure or misery, and wealth or poverty found in humans can be controlled by the Gods. *Tatung* expresses the goodness of the Gods who can give happiness, pleasure and wealth and keep away from all disasters. This is in accordance with the opinion of Djojasantoso which reveals that religion means bonding and attachment to God, or more precisely, the human accepts the bond of God as a source of tranquillity and happiness (Hariyani, 2008:15).

The basic Chinese belief in *Tatung* is that everything *Tatung* has predicted would happen, the miraculous healing of the gods, the guidance to earn the right living according to the instructions of *Tatung*, the existence of appropriate names for the stores to influence their development and benefits, the existence of a belief that *Tatung* can ward off disruptive evil spirits, then only *Tatung* can master the spells for the burial of every Chinese who has passed away. In the Chinese community, *Tatung* is the embodiment of the God in the sense in which the person who becomes *Tatung* player is controlled by God so that he has a power beyond the ability of ordinary people. *Tatung* is a must-have attraction in the celebration of Cap Go Meh, so it becomes an inherent culture in Chinese society. *Tatung*, in *Cap Go Meh* celebration, is held to anticipate undesirable things, such as poverty, disaster, illness and other ugliness. Because of this, the people believe in *Tatung* and use it in the celebration of *Cap Go Meh*.

The orientation of the Chinese community on *Tatung* is a form of obedience and loyalty toward the religious teachings that have been inherited by their ancestors. The Chinese community believe that the religious teachings left by the ancestors need to be preserved and always carried out without criticizing them. This orientation belongs to the intrinsic religious orientation (Allport dan Ross, 1967). Intrinsic Religious Orientation is a religious way of thinking about commitment toward the religion thoroughly and treats that commitment sincerely as the ultimate goal (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991). In individuals with religious intrinsic, the teachings of religion are internalized and followed as a whole part, because religion serves as a framework in life. More specifically, an Intrinsic Religious Orientation is someone who makes an earnest effort to live his teachings and follow religious instructions without any question.

Next, the Chinese community's perspective on *Tatung* is that *Tatung* is a culture that must always be preserved and implemented every year, because there is a very strong religious ritual inside which can maintain the balance in the concept of religious teachings. If it is not implemented well, it will violate the teachings that have been handed down by the ancestors and will invite a major disaster against a country. This shows that *Tatung* has a connection with the world beyond this (not only on the present experience of the individuals, but also on the overall experience). A belief can be considered as a collection states of an organism bound together by attachment to the external world, entirely or partially (Suriasumantri, 2001:72).

The Chinese community's belief in *Tatung* is built by several factors: previous experiences, belief

in God, and hereditary cultures. According to some informants, the belief in *Tatung* does not emerge without any reason, because something is believed to be true. Many of the sick people then gradually recovered because of a spell given by *Tatung*, the people who have sought sustenance according to *Tatung's* guidance are then getting rich, the shops whose names are given by *Tatung* become the bestsellers and have many loyal customers, and someone who is often possessed by evil spirits could be cured and the evil spirits never come back. These past experiences become a factor that mostly influence the Chinese community's belief in *Tatung* in the celebration of Cap Go Meh. The previous experiences which become the main factors of the Chinese community's belief in *Tatung* is similar to Plato's explanation that a belief should be supported by three conditions, they are: true and based on the facts, believing that it is true, and evidence to support the belief (Plato dalam Sjamsuri, 1989).

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the discussion, it can be formulated the research conclusions as follows: The belief of the Chinese community toward *Tatung* in the celebration of Cap Go Meh is based on: 1) high religious values in *Tatung*, 2) the existence of a strong belief base on *Tatung*, as they can drive out evil spirits, 3) intrinsically religious oriented, and 4) a perspective that emphasizes adherence and obedience to the teachings of the ancestors. Meanwhile, the factors influencing the Chinese belief on *Tatung* in Cap Go Meh celebration are as follows: 1) previous experiences, 2) belief in Gods, and 3) hereditary culture. Of the three factors, the most dominant factor that encourages people to believe in *Tatung* on Cap Go Meh celebration is the previous experiences. The Chinese people believe in *Tatung* in the Cap Go Meh celebration because they already have the proofs in their everyday life.

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