

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Indonesia is one of the countries in the world which is inhabited by a large number of residents. According to Minister of Home Affairs of Republic of Indonesia, Tjahjokumolo, the population of Indonesia reached 257.912.349 people (Setiawan, 2016). It makes Indonesia the fourth largest country in the world after China, India, and The United States (Suryadinata, Nurvidya Arifin, & Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape*, 2003, p. 1). As the fourth largest country in the world as well as a multicultural country, Indonesia definitely has many ethnic groups with their own cultures. Besides those facts, Indonesia has six acknowledge religions with its own belief. Those facts bring Indonesia as one of the most diverse countries in the worldwide (Raihani, 2014, p. 1). Based on a book edited by *Nam-Kook Kim*, Indonesia inhabited by 300 diverse ethnics (Kim & Contributors, 2016, p. 187) and Javanese tribe sits on the first rank as the most widely ethnic that spreads throughout Indonesia. Some other ethnics are Melanesians, Sundanese, Chinese, Malay, Madurese, Bataknese, Minankabau, Betawi, Bantenese, Banjarese, Balinese, and Makasserese.

Based on Suryadinata's book titled, *Ethnic Chinese in Contemporary Indonesia*, Chinese is three until five per cent of the total population in Indonesia. Although the number of Chinese-Indonesians is not as many as other ethnics, they

play a quite important role in several areas such as economic, social, cultural, and political fields (Suryadinata, Ethnic Chinese in Contemporary Indonesia, 2008).

Some Chinese-Indonesians adhere to a belief, which is called Confucianism. Actually, they tend to call it a belief rather than a religion. However, the government has been specified Confucianism as one of the religions that is freely adhered by Indonesia's residents. In the West, Confucianism has been decided as a religion belongs to Chinese (Jensen, 1997). Zhaojiang in 1995 stated that Confucian culture is full of useful and significant contents taught by forebears of Chinese. Confucian culture is about the thinking, culture and political life of ancient China massive influences, unmatched by any other school of thought or culture (Zhaojiang, 1995).

According to an article titled *5 Unusual Chinese Superstitions*, China and Chinese people strongly believe in superstition, although the government tries to break them off from believing such thing (Hurwitz, 2014). Nevertheless, superstition is deeply rooted in the Chinese customs and Chinese history. Some Confucians Chinese's cultures are still going on, such as *Sembahyang Cioko*, *Tangce Day*, and *Cheng Beng*. During *Sembahyang Cioko*, the Confucians Chinese-Indonesian prepares rice, noodle, fruits, and other crops to be given to their ancestral spirits. They believe that the ancestors come down to the earth to visit their descendent, so their families have to provide crops in the house or distribute it in temple, monastery, or in the house of ash. It is all done as a sign of homage to the ancestors.

There are a lot of beliefs in Chinese cultures that still are held at this time, the interesting one is superstition. A previous study by an alumna, Tania Putri in 2016, inspires the writer to take a deep look into one part of her research. In her study, she discussed all Chinese superstitions, but not in detail. Therefore, this study will be focused on one of superstition areas, death superstition. Superstitions are basically passed down from generation to generation, and gradually become a tradition. It is taught by the leaders or governments, elders, cultures, imaginative stories, scholars and myths. Superstition as defined by Vyse (2000) is “the natural result of several well-understood psychological processes, including our human sensitivity to coincidence, a penchant for developing rituals to fill time, a fear of failure, our efforts to cope with uncertainty, the need for control, and more” (Vyse, 2000). Lauren Block and Thomas Kramer in their original empirical research stated that superstition can be personal or cultural; it is to protect people from bad luck and to bring good luck (Block & Kramer, 2008).

Superstition itself is a part of folklore. According to Alan Dundes (1980), who was known as a psychoanalytic folklorist, in 1965, folklore is a wide field of study. It can be music, traditional food, verbal art belief, and even cultures. Moreover, superstition could come from modern people, not only the peasants. Superstition covers many areas such as folktales, legends, myths, ballads, festivals, music, traditional food, verbal art belief, and even cultures (Dundes, 1980).

The writer is from Chinese Indonesian family who still follows some Chinese cultures, rituals, and superstitious beliefs since she was young. The writer

believed in superstitions such as washing face after the death events, or in the prohibitions while eating, sleeping, building a house, or in misfortune, or even in *sembayangan*. Beside the writer, her family also believes in some superstitions though they have embraced their own religion. Yet, like Dundes said in his book titled “Interpreting Folklore”, superstition, which is one of the folklore genres, can be related to religion too (Dundes, 1980). So, this research will focus on the Confucianism religion and its death rituals including the process, the ritual objects and their superstitious meanings. The purpose of this research is to acquaint Confucianism’s death rituals and ritual objects for ordinary people. The writer expects that people will know and understand the way Confucians do some rituals and the superstitious meaning behind the ritual objects. The informants will be taken particularly from the Chinese-Indonesian families who are embracing Confucianism religion as well as following the rituals.

## **1.2. FIELD OF THE STUDY**

The field of the study is superstition and it is focused on death rituals and death ritual objects.

## **1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study will analyse superstitions found in Confucian Chinese-Indonesian’s death rituals covering ritual processes, ritual objects, and their superstitious meanings. Furthermore, it will be focused on the rituals which is done in the funeral home.

#### **1.4. PROBLEM FORMULATION**

The research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the death rituals and how are they practiced by Confucian Chinese Indonesians?
2. Why do Confucian Chinese Indonesians practice their death rituals?
3. What are the ritual objects used in the rituals and their superstitious meanings?

#### **1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study can be stated as follows:

1. To find out the way Confucian Chinese Indonesians carry out the death rituals.
2. To reveal the reason Confucian Chinese Indonesian family practice the death rituals.
3. To find out the ritual objects used in the rituals and their superstitious meanings.

#### **1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is important because it will help people tounderstand Confucian ChineseIndonesians's death rituals and superstitions. It is expected that this study will make students of Faculty of Language and Arts interested in studying their own culture in the framework of Folklore Study.

## 1.7. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Chinese Indonesians are immigrants who came to Indonesia in several waves. The earliest wave of Chinese Immigration comes to Indonesia in the fourth century. They are divided into fourteen major varieties and the five major communities are Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, and Hainan (Lim & Mead, 2011).

2. Folklore is a wide field of study. It covers many subjects in life such as folktales, legends, myths, ballads, festivals, folk dance and song.

3. Superstition is a natural result from good understanding of psychological processes, including human sensitivity about unpredictable cases, human tendency about rituals to fill time, human efforts to make sure uncertainty, and many more.

4. Confucianism is one of the official religions that has been recognized by Indonesia's Government. It comes in 1700's. Allegedly, in Indonesia, Confucianism firstly appeared in Pontianak. Based on a journal titled *Agama Khonghucu : Sejarah, Ajaran, dan Keorganisasiannya di Pontianak Kalimantan Barat*, many Chinese-Indonesian adhered this belief (Sulaiman, 2009).