

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Indonesia is a country with diverse culture that is known as emerald at the Equator (Marktanner & Wilson, 2014). There are over 300 ethnic groups in Indonesia, for example Javanese, Sundanese, and the minorities, Chinese Indonesians. Each of them has its own culture. Each culture is colored with different cultural and religious expressions. On the religion, Chinese and Western scholars often regard Confucianism as Chinese religion although in fact there are three recognized religions in China: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism (Tang, 1995).

With regard to Chinese Indonesians' traditions, Chinese's tradition in Indonesia has been passing through generations from the great ancestors until today's generation including every ritual. The Ghost Festival, also known as the Hungry Ghost Festival, *Zhongyuan Jie*, *Djit Gwee* or *Yulan* Festival is a traditional Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucius festival held in certain Asian countries. In Chinese tradition, the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar is called Ghost Day, in which ghosts and spirits, including those of the deceased ancestors, come out from the lower realm. According to Hackley & Hackley (2015) hungry ghost festivals and rituals take place in many Asian countries, including China, Tibet, Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia and Hong Kong, usually around the 15th day of the 7th lunar month in the Chinese calendar. At this propitious time, the gates of the Hell

realm are opened and, for a time, the hungry ghosts are able to escape to roam the physical world.

Capitanio (1993) explains that the *Djit Gwee* ritual has existed since Shang Dynasty. A story of Mu-lian (Sanskrit: Maudgalyayana) invoked in this passage provides the origin of the festival of "yii-lan-p'en" myth, yii-lan-p'en is popularly understood to mean "the bowl (p'en) filled with offerings to save ancestors from hanging upside-down (yii-lan) in purgatory." Sim's journal (2020) tells the complete story of Mu-lian. The *Yu Lan Pen* Festival is originated from the attempt done by Mu Lian, a disciple of Buddha, to save his mother from the torture in hell. It was told that his mother, who was a vegetarian, had consumed meat soup unknowingly, and was punished to hell for denying her action. Mu Lian tried to locate his deceased mother in the netherworld and found her among the hungry ghosts. In one version of the story, Mu Lian tried to feed his starving mother, but the food was grabbed by other hungry ghosts. In another version, he sent her a bowl of rice as an offering, but the food turned into flaming coals before it could enter her mouth. Mu Lian sought help from Buddha who taught Mu Lian to make offerings of special prayers and food. Only then was Mu Lian's mother relieved from her sufferings as a hungry ghost.

The events and themes described in this myth were recounted and embellished in several literary forms during the T'ang dynasty (618-906) (Teiser, 1986). From both the *Djit Gwee* Festival and Double Ninth Festival in which living descendants pay homage to their deceased ancestors, during Ghost Festival the deceased are believed to visit the living (Hutchings, 2004). In religious life the *yii-lan-p'en* festival

had, by T'ang times, become part of the cycle of ancestral sacrifices, assuming an important place in family religion and ritual of the dead. On the fifteenth day the realms of Heaven, Hell, and the realm of the living are open. Both Taoists and Buddhists would perform rituals to change and relieve the sufferings of the deceased.

Basically the Ghost Month ritual is homage of the dead, where traditionally the loyalty of descendants extends to their ancestors even after their deaths. Activities during the month would include preparing ritualistic food offerings, burning incense, and burning paper money as well as, material items made from paper formed into items such as clothes, gold and other fine goods. Those items are for the visiting spirits of the ancestors. Many kinds of foods, especially vegetarian food will be served in front of empty seats for each of the ancestors. The family treats the ancestors as if they are still living. Other festivities may include buying and releasing miniature paper boats and lanterns on water, which are believed to give directions to the lost ghosts and spirits of the ancestors and other deities. Throughout the seventh lunar month, many Chinese observe the festival by making offerings of food, joss sticks, candles, paper money and other paper statues such as houses, cars and clothes to the dead (Sim, 2020).

Djit Gwee is popularly known as *Sembahyang Rebutan* (scrambling prayer) in Indonesia, including in Semarang. From her own experience, the writer learns that there are two types of the ritual: ritual for the ancestors and that for those who are dead of unnatural causes. For those who died unnaturally, people will gather around

temples and bring offerings, including offering prayer and foods, to those spirits, and after that, the foods are distributed to the poor. The way the spirit fights to get their share of the offerings is the origin of the festival name. The second type of the ritual is praying for the ancestors that are usually held in the house of the oldest child in the family. What makes *Djit Gwee* ritual in Semarang unique from other town is because in Semarang (some families) they light the Chinese lantern (*lampion*) with fire inside and put it in front of the house, especially in the main door. It aims for the ancestors to easily find the right way by following the light that comes from the *lampion* and arrive straight to the house (not get lost somewhere). In the writer's own experience of celebrating *Djit Gwee* with the big family, the ritual of giving food as a symbol of respect for the ancestors is still done; a very interesting act. Therefore, in this study, the writer will focus on the second type of the ritual.

In this research, the writer is planning to carry out a research on the *Djit Gwee* ritual because the writer is wondering why her family and other Chinese people in Semarang still practice the ritual. As long as the writer remembers, the ritual has been regularly performed since her childhood. To help study the ritual, the writer is supported by other scholars' research. A research on the ritual was done by (Chan, 2009). She emphasizes the procedure of ritual of Chinese New Year in West Kalimantan and tells the history of the ritual. As a result, this present research will focus on the procedure, the functions, and the reasons the Chinese in Semarang still performs the ritual. The purpose of this research is to introduce Confucianism's *Djit Gwee* ritual procedure to ordinary people. The writer expects that people will know

and understand the way Confucians do the ritual and the functions of doing that ritual until now. The informants will be taken particularly from the Chinese Indonesian families who are embracing Confucianism religion as well as performing the ritual.

1.2 Field of the Study

The field of study is a ritual study that is part of folklore studies.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study will analyze Ghost Month ritual performed by the Chinese in Semarang that covers ritual procedure, ritual function and especially the reasons for its existence.

1.4 Problem Formulations

The research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. How is the procedure of the *Djit Gwee* ritual done by the Chinese Semarang's people?
2. What are the functions of *Djit Gwee* ritual in Semarang?
3. Why does Chinese Semarang still perform and keep the ritual as a part of their life?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study can be stated as follow:

1. To know the procedure of the ritual of *Djit Gwee* in Chinese Semarang ethnic group.
2. To find out the functions of the *Djit Gwee* ritual in Semarang.

3. To exhibit the reasons the Chinese Semarang practices the *Djit Gwee* ritual.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is important because it will help people to understand the reasons of the Chinese Semarang for doing the ritual of *Djit Gwee*. This study is also to inspire other students of the Faculty of Language and Arts to be interested in learning their own culture through Folklore and Cultural criticism approach.

1.7 Definition of Terms

a. Chinese Indonesian People

Chinese Indonesians are descended from various ethnic groups settled in China, primarily the Han Chinese. The Chinese people came to Indonesia as economic migrants in Maritime Southeast Asia. The Chinese immigrants came to Indonesia in several waves. Some date the earliest immigration of the Chinese immigrants to the archipelago (island) as far back as the fourth century. It is divided into five major communities which are Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, and Hainan (Lim & Mead, 2011, p.10).

b. Ritual procedure

Ritual procedure is an important part of doing a ritual. It leads us to do the correct steps of a ritual. Every ritual has its own procedure to practice the ritual correctly. According to Bell (1953, p.77) ritual procedure is done to mediate consciousness and social being, or structure and act, which in turn are said to exist only in and through practice and it is a part of tradition.