

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The fifteenth day of the first month of the Chinese New Year is an important celebration for the Chinese as it is the day of the first full moon in the new year (nationsonline.org, 2020). In Indonesia, the day is well-known as *Cap Go Meh*, which means the fifteenth day of the first month. Like many other Chinese in the world, Chinese Indonesians have a feast together on this day because they believe that *Cap Go Meh* is the day when they have to cultivate good relationships with families and other people as well as nature and God (nationsonline.org, 2020).

Chinese Indonesians living in Ketapang are no different. As a Chinese Indonesian from Ketapang, the writer is aware that Ketapang people consider *Cap Go Meh* a special day to celebrate. One of the events that highlight the significance of *Cap Go Meh* among Chinese Indonesian people in Ketapang is the *Cap Go Meh* Festival. This festival is organized as an addition to the usual practices of *Cap Go Meh* known to people such as dining together with the family and praying in the Chinese temple. This particular festival in Ketapang is unique because it involves a parade of what the locals called *Tatung*.

Tatung is an ordinary human who is used as media to be possessed by Gods, or ancestral spirits that they believe, *Tatung* also known as a character that is believed to be the medium for the spirits (spirit-medium) of either the ancestors, ancient Chinese knights (mostly the ancient Chinese General), or the Chinese gods (Chan, 2009). During the festival, the *Tatung* is possessed by the spirit of the aforementioned and is believed to “communicate” with the designated people who will help to relay the message from the *Tatung* to the audience. In the writer’s experience of witnessing how “the communication” works, the spirits usually ask

for offerings that can avert people from evil. In short, *Tatung* is believed to be possessed by the good spirits that can protect people from the bad spirits.

Tatung's role in the festival does not stop at their role as the mediator between the realm of the lives and the spirit one, it goes further to the role of an entertainer (Chan, 2009 cited in Sai & Hoon (2012)) The involvement of *Tatung* in the *Cap Go Meh* Festival in Ketapang as entertainers thrives the celebration. During the festival, the *Tatung* does self-mortifications, starting from the mild one like eating the broken glass until the dangerous one like standing on a sharp sword or stabbing oneself with a traditional weapon of West Kalimantan, Mandau. In the writer's observation, *Tatung*'s attraction aims to show their "supernatural power".

The discussion above shows that *Tatung* indeed plays a major role in the celebration of *Cap Go Meh* in Ketapang, West Kalimantan. Yet, there is hardly any academic source regarding *Tatung* and its meaning for the people of Ketapang, especially for the Chinese Indonesians of Ketapang. As a Chinese Indonesian of Ketapang, the writer is compelled to know more about the local tradition of Ketapang including *Tatung* in the *Cap Go Meh* celebration. Therefore, the writer decides to take *Tatung* in Ketapang as the focus of the study.

Studies on *Tatung* have already been done by several scholars who take *Tatung* in Singkawang as their object of study. Chan, 2009 cited in Sai & Hoon (2012), discusses that *Tatung* in Singkawang concerning their religion, history, and inter-ethnic context of Singkawang society. Using a performance analysis method, Chan (2009) explained how the parade of *Tatung* got tangled in the inter-ethnic politics in West Kalimantan that is resided by three major ethnic groups, Dayak, Malay, and Chinese. Chan (2009) also revealed that the *Tatung* was

adapted in a way to show their commitment to the Indonesian homeland. In her later discussion of Singkawang *Tatung*, Chan (2012) argues that the *Tatung* of Singkawang is the creation of the local heroes based on the three pillars of Singkawang society namely Dayak, Malay, and Chinese. Instead of national heroes like Kartini or Diponegoro, Singkawang society presents its local tutelary spirits. Another study is done by Purmintasari dan Yulita (2017) who stated that the parade of *Tatung* is an expression of harmony through the acculturation of the three different ethnic groups' cultures living in West Kalimantan. Interestingly, in their study, Purmintasari and Yulita (2017) quoted a member of Singkawang society who claimed that *Tatung* only exists in Singkawang so that other places in West Kalimantan would "import" *Tatung* from Singkawang whenever they want to do their parade of *Tatung*.

The previous studies mentioned above become the foundation of the writer's study of the *Tatung* in Ketapang. The writer intends to describe the *Tatung* in Ketapang and their meanings for the Ketapang society. Additionally, regarding the import of *Tatung* from Singkawang, as far as the writer knows, the parade of *Tatung* in Singkawang and Ketapang is done at the same time, on the fifteenth day of the new year, the Cap Go Meh. Therefore, the idea of importing the *Tatung* from Singkawang is worth examining further since *Tatung*, as explained by Chan, 2009 cited in Sai & Hoon (2012) is related to the existence of the local Chinese temple and the local society.

1.2. Field of the Study

The field of study is folklore, especially folk belief.

1.3. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the existence of *Tatung* in Chinese Indonesian communities in Ketapang during the celebration of *Chiu It- Cap Go Meh* celebration.

1.4. Problem Formulation

1. What are the descriptions of the *Cap Go Meh's Tatung* existing in the Chinese Indonesian community in Ketapang?
2. What are the meanings of the *Cap Go Meh's Tatung* for the Chinese Indonesian community in Ketapang?

1.5. Objective of the Study

1. To describe *Cap Go Meh's Tatung* existing in the Chinese Indonesian community in Ketapang.
2. To reveal the meaning of *Cap Go Meh's Tatung* for the Chinese Indonesian community in Ketapang.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide information to the readers about *Tatung* in the *Cap Go Meh* celebration in Ketapang in terms of the descriptions and the meanings for the Chinese Indonesian community living in Ketapang. Hopefully, this study will help students to understand more about folklore theories and superstition aspects analyzed by the author.

1.7. Definition of Terms

1. *Tatung*

Tatung or *Lao ya* is the spirit-mediums of West Kalimantan. It means “old grandfather” [老爷 Lao ye], but as this is the double honorific it is more appropriately translated as “eminent lord” (Chan, 2009, p. 126).

2. Cap Go Meh

Cap Go Meh is the fifteenth day of the Chinese New Year celebration. Cap Go Meh celebrations originated in age-old traditional Chinese folk religiosity, and even in this era of tourist-oriented commodification of such events, its ritual elements, like exorcisms, can still be understood as expressions of popular religious impulses. (Chan, 2009)

3. Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year is an annual event celebrated by Chinese people in the world to symbolize the beginning of a new life. Chinese New Year is about new beginnings. It is a chance for everyone to wish for good luck in the year ahead. People visit with friends and family (Marsico, Katie 1980). Most Chinese people must celebrate it because this is their tradition and they must celebrate it for 15 days.