

## **The Interpersonal Communication of the Chinese Ethnic Families in Cheng Beng Ceremony in Medan, Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** Cheng Beng ceremony is one of the death and honor ceremonies of the deceased ancestors by visiting and cleaning the ancestral graves. At this event, all the big families gathered together and went to the cemetery to pray. Based on the above description, the author examines the form, effectiveness and classification of interpersonal communication in Chinese ethnic families in Medan at the Cheng Beng ceremony. This research examines the Cheng Beng's linkage, kinship and meaning to the Chinese ethnic families in Medan in performing the ceremony which is held once a year in April. The aim of this research is to get information about the heterogeneity Chinese ethnic in Medan City. In addition, it can also provide the input to the government to manage the ethnic diversity, so that it will not to cause horizontal conflict. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method, by conducting direct interviews with the informant. It is intended to obtain the appropriate information data to be justified.

**Keywords:** interpersonal communication; family of ethnic Chinese; Cheng Beng Ceremony; kinship.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Medan is a heterogeneous and plural city which is characterized by 8 local ethnic groups namely Batak Toba, Karo, Angkola, Mandailing, Pak-Pak, Nias, Malay, and Simalungun, and immigrants ethnic such as Aceh, India, Arab, Java, Minang and Tionghoa. Bruner argues that Medan is a city that has no dominant culture. As a city with a society that has no dominant, heterogeneous and plural culture, the cultural elements of each ethnic group have diverse and significant properties. Such diversity or ethnic diversity refers to many ethnicities in which one is no lower than the other.

The Chinese ethnic as one ethnic in Medan is unique in the ethnic diversity ethnic that is not less unique with other ethnic groups. Judging from the form of residential houses, it appears different from other ethnic groups. The store house shapes (*Rumah Toko*) are multilevel, clustered with ethnic sesame and separate with Ethnic. The construction of the house was so protective, tightly sealed with iron-streaked doors and windows.

The separate settlements with other ethnic groups according to Usman Pelly tend to strengthen the segregation with other groups. Usman Pelly further adds that the settlement made it an ethnic bastion against their norms and social networks. It can be said that Chinese ethnic in Medan are the ethnic groups that are covered with other ethnic in one region. Their closeness makes it difficult to establish communication and social interaction with other ethnicities. And conversely there are difficulties and psychological barriers to approach one of the other ethnic groups (Usman Pelly: 1991).

The use of hokkien language as a communicative language of inter-family and trade business can be found in Chinese ethnic settlement centers and trading areas in some areas of Medan. For example, in Asia Mega Mas, Petisah and Suka Ramai. Like other ethnic groups in Medan who still use their own ethnic language, they are also still attached to the hokkien language which is used daily in communicating.

The way of worship is still referring to their ancestors originating from the mainland of China. There are buildings of worship that cursory is located in the country of origin. The buildings of worship are seen in several areas in Medan, such as the Great Vihara and large and majestic monastery as well as united like the houses inhabitants in their residential area. Chinese ethnic homes in Medan can also be marked by a red offering place in front over the left door of the house to worship the sky deity (Thian Kong). Once inside the house, there is also a red altar straight straight left or right facing the front door of the house, destined for the Land God (Te Cu Kong). In the living room there is another altar of prayer for the spirits of their deceased family.

Their activities are not only limited to the ritual of worship only, but their business and lifestyles are also so striking. Shopping centers like Sun Plaza and Cambridge for example, will appear to be milling about a group of ethnic Chinese. Besides shopping, sightseeing, watching the cinema, they also work out in the fitness venues. Their activities will look even more intense as they approach the Lunar New Year (Spring/Xin Cia), with Chinese ornaments even Chinese songs. On this Chinese New Year, they are happy to gather together among families, both in Medan and outside the city.

It is not only on the Lunar New Year they gather, but at the time of pilgrimage to the grave of parents or ancestors are also all gathered. They call it *Cheng Beng* which a concrete meaning is to cleanse, weed the graves. *Cheng Beng* derived from the Qing Ming word is one of the rituals that Confucianism teachings (Kong Hu Chu's teachings). They strongly believe in this teaching which is actually the service of the ancestors (respect for the parents). Devotion (virtue for parents) to the ancestors is very important (including great respect for ancestral spirits). At this event, all the big families gather in the same ancestral bond, will go to the cemetery to pray.

At the *Cheng Beng* ceremony, the number in one ancestral lineage becomes more families in it. As a social phenomenon in human activity, of course this communication happens to establish the kinship of several large families that is in a tradition *Cheng Beng* ceremony. Based on the above description, the writer will examine how interpersonal communication in Chinese ethnic family in Medan, during *Cheng Beng* ceremony which takes place once a year in April. What does *Cheng Beng* mean to the Chinese ethnic in Medan and their relation to the social conditions of their lives, so it remains to this day, even though they are far from their ancestral lands in mainland China.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

In accordance with the title of research and problems proposed in this research proposal, then the implementation is done in Medan. This research is a qualitative descriptive research that is a method used to investigate and solve problems that are not limited to the collection and compilation of data. This descriptive method is used to describe facts relating to the problem under study as it is. It is also used ethnographic research because the tendency is still ongoing, those is, *Cheng Beng* still they maintain even though they are outside the city of Medan and have been away from their origin China.

The data collection instrument is divided into two, namely the primary data by using direct interviews to Chinese ethnic families in Medan. This interview was conducted with indepth interview that is a data collection method through direct interview which is conducted in depth to the data source. Meanwhile, the secondary data are from the study of various literatures that are relevant to the research.

The data collection is conducted through Participant observation that is direct observation to the location to know more closely with the selected research subjects, observation of the subject under study and follow and attend events conducted research subjects related to research focus, for example at the time of the implementation of *Cheng Beng*. The results of this observational study will be used as a reference data in analyzing the research data. The literature study is conducted by reviewing various literature relevant to the research and comparing some writings or other research results that have been done with research subjects almost the same. The interviews were conducted with a number of informants consisting of ethnic Chinese community in Medan and some figures and communities who know/understand the issues to be studied and the documentation to be additional information for the author and display the event documentation that took place.

All the data collected from the participant observation, literature study, interviews and documentation are sorted on the basis of their reliability and validity. Furthermore, data reduction is done, where at this stage the researcher focuses on the field data that has been collected. The selected data will be simplified in the sense of classifying the data and abstracting the crude data into brief or summary descriptions. This is to clarify and integrate the data so it makes it easier in analyzing the data.

The data analysis in this research is through descriptive analysis technique with qualitative approach. The use of this qualitative approach is to consider: 1) Qualitative analysis techniques easier when dealing with the double reality, 2) This technique presents directly the nature of the relationship between researchers with respondents, and 3) This method is more sensitive and more able to adjust to a lot of sharpening mutual influence and on the pattern of encountered values (Moleong, 2004: 5).

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Cheng Beng* which aims to honor the ancestors as well as a form of one's devotion to the dead can also provide a social function. In this event, gather the whole family from a distance to gather and pray together to strengthen the bond between the family together, let go of the longing. The social solidarity will naturally form into a harmony that can strengthen the tie of brotherhood especially Chinese ethnic who go far and return to the hometown to perform the *Cheng Beng* prayer once a year. Those who gather in one family with the same ancestors are important things in interpersonal communication between them.

The forms of communication that can be used in conducting the interpersonal communication process including dialog, sharing and interview. Dialogue comes from the Greek word *dia* which means 'between, together'. Meanwhile *legein* means 'talking, conversing, brainstorming, and shared ideas' (Hardjana, 2007: 104-120). In this study, the dialogue was carried out by the Chinese ethnic families in Medan, both of which occurred in their residence, before leaving for the cemetery to pray, and on the way to the location. This intimacy they do with a continuous dialogue at the site and even until they go home and after continued to eat together in the restaurant.

In the dialogue, there is a mutual understanding, exchanging of ideas and able to create peace among them in working together to fulfill curiosity information among the other brothers. They asked each other and gave news of the other brothers who sometimes had no time and opportunity to go home in the event of *Cheng Beng*. They are obviously still brothers with the same ancestors, who engage in a dialogue full of consideration, understanding and acceptance.

Sharing or exchanging opinions, sharing experiences are conversations between two or more people, in which communicators communicate with each other what they have been experiencing over the year to talk about. So, they have shared experiences, insights, and information surrounding family news. After a year has passed, and then *Cheng Beng's* ceremony has come, there must be some experience that has grown over the course of a year. What they did a year ago, they shared with families who gathered in a joint cemetery. All of them can not be separated from the hope of exchanging their respective life experiences to enrich the personal experience of life among them in one ancestor.

In interpersonal communication, interview is a form of communication that aims to achieve something. Families who gather and communicate, individuals per individual are actively involved in the exchange of information. During the interview the interviewees and interviewees were both involved in the communication process by talking to each other, listening, and also answering. By using the form of interview communication in interpersonal communication able to provide wider insight, inspire and also encourage the spirit of life and have high motivation to become human better. The interviews with other family members, make them familiar and unlike the old and the young. Similarly, when these families are gathered, at the funerals or when they eat together in a restaurant, it seems so familiar. The classification in interpersonal communication is conducted with intimate interaction, the social conversation and interview. The intimate interaction is communication with good friends, family members, and people who have strong emotional ties including intimate interactions. The power of the relationship determines the interaction climate that occurs. In this *Cheng Beng* prayer show, the relationship between families in one ancestor is developed in an informal communication system.

All the Chinese ethnics should worship the elderly (the elder) who are still alive and to the deceased ancestors. They believe that if not devoted then the fortune will not come. Parents-parents always teach their children to worship the elderly and respect the ancestors. This value of devotion is most important in the ethnic Chinese community. Because they believe that the glory of a child can be seen from his devotion to the living parent and the deceased ancestor in a pious way because if they do not filial then fortune does not come. The social conversation is an interaction to please a person simply by speaking little. Conversations are usually not so deeply involved. If associated with this research, then what happens is the communication not only about the family, but about personal pleasure, business partners, construction of monasteries, or come to the home nursing. Thus the social conversations that took place around the *Cheng Beng* ceremony are not only about ancestral worship, but also about other matters concerning the problems beyond that.

Interview is a form of interpersonal communication in which two people engage in a question-and-answer conversation. One asks questions to get information and the other listens well and then gives the desired answer until the goal of the interview is reached. These chats are common when the families are mingling. The effectiveness in interpersonal communication is openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity and equality. The quality of openness refers to at least three aspects of interpersonal communication. First, an effective interpersonal communicator must be open to the person he or she is interacting with. This openness is like willingness to respond with pleasure of information received in the face of interpersonal relationships. Openness or open attitude is very influential in fostering effective interpersonal communication. Openness is the disclosure of our reactions or responses to the current situation and provides information about the relevant past to provide our response in the present. Johnson Supraktinya (Hidayat, 2012: 46) means self-disclosure is to share with others our feelings about something that has been said or done or our feelings towards the events that have just been witnessed.

In this study, one family with another family in one ancestor must be open in prayer. With the openness between them, the process of praying together can run smoothly. After the worship of the ancestors, the head of the clan presided over a large deliberation meeting in the clan, giving appreciation and words of encouragement, finally a friendly drinking meal together, with the intention of jointly enjoying the fortune of the ancestors and strengthen unity. This is where there is openness between their families by eating together after performing the *Cheng Beng* prayer ritual.

Empathy, as proposed by Henry Backrack (1976) is as a person's ability to know what a person is experiencing at a certain moment, from the other person's point of view, through the eyes of the other person. Chinese ethnic community in Medan, when worshipping ancestors on the day of *Cheng Beng* other than pilgrimage or worship to the grave if buried in the grave or in the temple if the ashes are cremated and kept in the temple.

When the activity takes place, of course, in a family gathered in an ancestral line, experiencing various processes both likes and, times of pleasure and gloom. In the course of everyday life, of course, all parties understand and understand what is felt. In the atmosphere of *Cheng Beng*, there is certainly a problem in each family. Of course, from one family to another, in a chat that goes, of course, other families will try to understand the problem. This is what is done among them to maintain a harmonious family with an attitude of mutual care with each other in *Cheng Beng*'s event and continued by eating together. An effective interpersonal relationship is a relationship where there is a supportiveness, that open and empathic communication cannot take place in an atmosphere of mutual support. Demonstrating the supportive attitudes through (1) descriptive, not evaluative, (2) spontaneous, not strategic, and (3) provisional, not very sure. In practice, among these Tionghoa ethnic families, it does have a very close relationship among them. They understand each other and support each other. What to do in the *Cheng Beng* ceremony, sneak into the ancestral burial ground, until then return to the gathering house and then eat with the family. The relationship that arises is not only limited to the family and relatives, even more than that, the brotherhood of one ancestor who understand each other that not only just accept the message and run away. Events gathered in a line of this ancestor can then become a clan of one clan, there are areas that call it "Kumpul *Cheng Beng*" or "*Cheng Beng* Dinner Party", so still show empathy one with the other family individually.

Communicating a positive attitude in interpersonal communication has at least two ways: (1) expressing a positive attitude and (2) positively encouraging the person we are friends to interact with. A positive attitude refers to at least two aspects of interpersonal communication. This attitude is shown in the communication done by those who are in one ancestor to always be positive, especially in a tradition ceremony for ancestor *Cheng Beng*. Although when there is an error or badness, it is all held to remain concentrated to the ancestors. All gather and maintain each other's positive feelings and togetherness among families. This is probably one of the reasons why Chinese ethnic family graves tend to be wide in front. Has an altar and can for a place to gather together, although now they can no longer mingle again and even tend to rush home. Hio smoke and burning paper money soaring and billowing make the eyes sore and chest difficult to breathe.

In every situation, there may be inequality. One might be smarter. Richer, more handsome or beautiful, or more athletic than others. There are never two people who are truly equal in every way. Regardless of this inequality, interpersonal communication will be more effective when the atmosphere is equal. This authors see in Medan as the location of research, that ethnic Chinese who perform the *Cheng Beng* tradition are not only Buddhists but also performed by ethnic Chinese who are other religions. However, despite the differences, it does not change the purpose of *Cheng Beng* tradition itself as a form of respect, devotion, affectionate appreciation and pray for the ancestors to be calm in an already different nature. This difference also does not close the solidarity of Chinese ethnics who are still one family but different religions. Social function as Smith said it is still done. For example, if the ethnic Chinese family is living far away, they will gather in their hometown (Medan) once a year to perform the *Cheng Beng* worship. This meeting became a warm meeting to release the longing, adding warmth and solidarity between the families to love each other. Because they believe they are born from one common ancestor, therefore the differences do not hinder them from meeting relatives in performing the *Cheng Beng* worship.

*Cheng Beng* tradition is actually almost the same as the pilgrimage tradition in various cultures in Indonesia. *Cheng Beng* ceremony itself, related to the customs of Chinese culture that is ancestral worship, kinship, harmony and harmony, loyal, filial, and also togetherness. Those who want to attend *Cheng Beng* where all the relatives gather to clean the grave while bringing together family relationships that may be due to distance are stretched. *Cheng Beng* activities also become a means of inter-family gatherings that are mostly dispersed because of their respective activities. This is because the implementation of this activity is usually done crowded in a big family. At that time familiarity re-established.

*Cheng Beng* is a sacred ritual for Chinese society that is carried out from generation to generation every year. Tradition in the form of "pilgrimage" to the tomb of parents and the ancestors always has the uniqueness for certain areas as a "return home" to place the grave of his ancestors. the tradition is going home for relatives who are domiciled abroad is maintained each year to honor the ancestors, as well as carrying out a series of separate family reunion activities.

Ko Achien, said that the ceremony of worship or commonly called the tomb prayer was held since three days before the peak of the event. The long journey will be done by the ethnic Chinese people in Medan to make a pilgrimage to their ancestral graves. Especially for those who have no parents anymore. This is quite

unique, because at other big day celebrations, such as the Lunar New Year, there is no need to gather with siblings of one parent. It is often that the annual *Cheng Beng* ritual is regarded as a means of ancestor worship because for them, what they do in *Cheng Beng* will not be comparable with the services of parents who have given birth and raise them. There is no act that can replace or repay the services of parents whether it's the father of the mother, or grandparents because, without of them, now there is no us.

At this *Cheng Beng* celebration, the distant relatives will meet, greet and mingle together again after 1 year of not meeting among their relatives and relatives. In addition, the atmosphere at *Cheng Beng* celebration became very crowded. Usually every year, the family home is visited enough to be shared. Some family members, who come from all corners of the country, sometimes have to sleep in your close relative's house.

This once-a-year ritual re-familiarizes the family relationships. At this moment there is be a high sense of brotherhood. Realize that all present come from one descendant. And the Chinese ethnic families in Medan, far away today are preparing for this moment. They will go together to get to where their parents and their ancestors are buried.

In front of the parent's tomb they usually express all their problems for a year among the fellow family members that finally are revealed one by one. Then it continues in the house of the oldest member that the kinship is important to be maintained, no matter how terrible, evil, anything wrong, they must forgive one another. The cemetery pilgrimage tradition of *Cheng Beng* is commemorated by ethnic Chinese, of course, as from the above opinion, will be able to make a positive contribution to the life of society, because *Cheng Beng* awakens human to honor the ancestors by keeping the behavior that is not shame the ancestors. *Cheng Beng* is a tradition for his family to pray and honor as a devotion to the ancestors. Not only to the ancestors but also to the relatives, and family.

The philosophy that is no less important than the celebration of *Cheng Beng* is to respect the ancestors and service abundance, for the living. *Cheng Beng* can also strengthens the ropes of brotherhood. Thus, *Cheng Beng* is also a reunion event for all the family members. When *Cheng Beng*, members who travel abroad, they will return home together with the whole family to pray to the graves of their ancestors. Although there have been in different religions or beliefs, it does not mean there is no need to come to just forgiving or just look to the grave of parents and the purpose of this celebration *Cheng Beng* itself is so that all the close relatives, siblings, children, can gather together. The close relationships can be started from the simplest, such as those done by Ci Ayung and Ko Tomin, her husband. When it is finished, then the family cleans and prays in the grave. They take care of the offerings, and began to distribute the food to relatives. Usually, they will open supplies and gather in shelters to eat together, or go to the restaurant to be hospitable. However, there is also because of the burial site is filled with smoke from *Hio* and the paper burned, then they go home earlier. They continue eating and gathering at the restaurant in Medan. Ci Lina, said, "Usually we choose an old restaurant in Medan, such as Ria Restaurant on Jalan Palangkaraya, Delima Restaurant on Hindu Street or a restaurant in Benteng Wisma at Jalan Kapten Maulana Lubis. The old diner is indeed a regular visit every *Cheng Beng*. Not infrequently in the house, meet also distant family and old friends who accidentally also eat and gather together.

The purpose of the cemetery pilgrimage tradition is that the family, and relatives can know each other and gather together, nothing else except strengthening the relationship rope among the other family relatives. This tradition is often done although there has been a different religion in one family. This is the beauty of ethnic Chinese traditions that are able to maintain great family relationships in a tradition. Not a few ethnic Chinese descendants who have converted, embracing Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. However, the tradition of *Cheng Beng* is still carried out as a form of honor to an old people who died. Many Medan citizens migrated to various parts of Indonesia including abroad. As a tribute to the ancestors, they will faithfully return to celebrate the *Cheng Beng* tradition. In addition to being a worship ritual, this tradition seems to be reuniting some relatives who have not met for a long time. This is what makes the *Cheng Beng* Festival always crowded because there is a longing to meet their own brothers who have gone far.

The pilgrimage tradition in Chinese culture is so important that the nomads prefer to return home in this time of pilgrimage rather than return home to celebrate the Lunar New Year. The devotion to the ancestors embodied in the custom of pilgrimage and cleansing of their tombs occupies the first order of duty to be performed each year. In *Cheng Beng* moment, all the relatives both from outside the city or abroad returned to Medan and used to gather and eat together. *Cheng Beng* can be interpreted as bright and light fall in the spring full of life, ethnic Chinese people on grateful for the inherited derived fortune, they make the way of fortune by renovating the graves, hanging and burning paper money and others showing to the generation successor of the derived livelihood. It is said that the ancestors rest quietly in the grave, can protect their offspring continue to be fertile, and the fertility of their offspring can instead guarantee the tranquility of the ancestors in the grave, as illustrated with uninterrupted fire hio. Thus, the ancestral grave is not only the source of the soul of life, but also the point of contact touch of feeling, in the traditional society, wherever a person is, always yearns for the hometown and ancestral graveyard.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of celebrating the *Cheng Beng* tradition to Chinese Ethnic in Medan besides cleaning the grave and respecting for the ancestors, it is also as a place of solidarity to the whole family. Overall, this tradition has a social function of encouraging solidarity among the members of a close family as well as a distant family. This tradition reminds them that they are actually relatives of the same ancestors who must worship by performing the *Cheng Beng* prayers every year.

The social solidarity naturally forms into a harmony that can strengthen the tie of brotherhood especially the Chinese ethnic people who go far and return to the hometown to perform the *Cheng Beng* prayer once a year. Those who come together in one family with the same ancestors will form a harmony in interpersonal communication between them, 1) Form of interpersonal communication: dialogue, sharing, interview; 2) Classification of interpersonal communication: interaction intimate, social conversation, interrogation or examination, interview; 3) Interpersonal communication effectiveness: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality. The purpose of performing the *Cheng Beng* tradition to Chinese Ethnic in Medan, besides cleaning the grave and respecting for the ancestors, it is also as a place of solidarity to the whole family. Overall, this tradition has a social function of encouraging solidarity among members of a close family as well as a distant family. This tradition reminds them that they are actually relatives of the same ancestor who must worship by performing *Cheng Beng's* prayers each year.

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