

The 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw Procession: Cultural Heritage, Community Identity, and the Dynamics of Multiculturalism in Tangerang

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Abstract

This study examines the historical, spiritual, and social dimensions of the Kwan Im Hud Couw Procession at Boen Tek Bio Temple ritual, exploring how it has endured and adapted to modernization while preserving its essence. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, this research integrates participatory observation, in-depth interviews and document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the procession's evolving role. Findings of this study reveal that the ritual plays a crucial role in preserving community identity and reinforcing social solidarity. While maintaining its traditional structure, the procession has become increasingly inclusive, fostering broader participation from diverse communities. This study underscores that intangible cultural heritage can persist through community-driven innovations without compromising its traditional roots, offering valuable insights for cultural preservation policies and social integration in multicultural societies.

Keywords: *12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw Procession; Benteng Chinese; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural Identity; Multiculturalism.*

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji dimensi historis, spiritual, dan sosial dari Prosesi Kwan Im Hud Couw di Vihara Boen Tek Bio. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana ritual tersebut bertahan dan beradaptasi dengan modernisasi sambil tetap melestarikan esensinya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan etnografi kualitatif, riset ini mengintegrasikan observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen untuk memberikan pemahaman komprehensif tentang peran prosesi yang terus berkembang. Temuan studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa ritual tersebut memainkan peran krusial dalam melestarikan identitas komunitas dan memperkuat solidaritas sosial. Meskipun mempertahankan struktur tradisionalnya, prosesi ini menjadi semakin inklusif, mendorong partisipasi yang lebih luas dari beragam komunitas. Studi ini menggarisbawahi bahwa warisan budaya takbenda dapat bertahan melalui inovasi berbasis komunitas tanpa mengkompromikan akar tradisionalnya, menawarkan wawasan berharga bagi kebijakan pelestarian budaya dan integrasi sosial dalam masyarakat multikultural.

Kata Kunci: *Prosesi 12 Tahun Kwan Im Hud Couw; Cina Benteng; Warisan Budaya Tak Benda; Identitas Budaya; Multikulturalisme.*

Introduction

Religious rituals and cultural traditions have become critical elements in the formation of ethnic identity, particularly within diasporic communities dispersed across various countries (Habibullah et al. 2021). These traditions are not merely expressions of religious devotion, but also function as mechanisms of social cohesion that reinforce communal solidarity in the face of sociopolitical change (Waelaruno et al, 2022). Within the Chinese diaspora, numerous religious ceremonies continue to be practiced, albeit in forms that have adapted to local cultures and state policies of host countries (Haryani, 2020). One such ritual that has been preserved in its original form is the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession held at Boen Tek Bio (文德庙) Temple in Tangerang, Indonesia. Conducted once every twelve years, this

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procession honors the deity Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨), who is venerated in Chinese belief as a protector of humanity and a granter of prosperity (Rahman, Rahyono, and Suratminto 2024). Yet, in the midst of rapid modernization and dynamic social transformations, fundamental questions arise as to how the Benteng Chinese community maintains the authenticity of this ritual and how it adapts to evolving sociocultural dynamics.

Academic discourse has extensively examined the transformation of religious practices among Chinese diasporic communities, especially in the context of modernization and state policy. For example, Hidayat (2014) emphasizes that Chinese ethnic identity in Aceh is preserved through the use of the Hakka (客家) language, religious rituals, and the consolidation of business networks. Similarly, research by Rahmawati, Rustamana, and Fauzan (2024) illustrates that the Cio Tao (蕉柑) tradition in Tangerang persisted despite restrictions during the New Order era, owing to kinship ties and cultural adaptability—demonstrating the resilience of Chinese cultural identity amid assimilationist policies. Furthermore, Siregar and Sinar (2018) reveal that the Cio Tao (蕉柑) tradition in Teluknaga, Tangerang, represents a syncretic fusion of Malay, Betawi, Sundanese, and Chinese cultural elements, reflecting cultural hybridity and harmonious interethnic relations. However, this tradition is gradually being abandoned by younger generations, who perceive it as outdated and resource-intensive.

Despite extensive scholarship on the Chinese diaspora, a critical gap remains in the literature regarding how specific communities sustain their religious traditions amid the pressures of modernization and

globalization. The 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession stands out as a distinctive phenomenon, preserving its traditional form without substantial state intervention or cultural commodification—unlike similar rituals in other countries that have undergone modifications or commercialization (Rahman et al., 2024). However, few studies have explicitly examined the social mechanisms that enable its continuity or how the Benteng Chinese navigate its endurance within urbanizing and multicultural environments. Furthermore, no research to date has explored this ritual from a phenomenological and symbolic interactionist perspective, which could offer a more nuanced understanding of participants' subjective experiences and their negotiation of cultural identity in an evolving social context.

To address this research gap, this study investigates how the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw Procession has managed to sustain its authentic form and cultural significance despite modern challenges—an issue insufficiently explored in existing literature. It introduces an innovative analytical framework, integrating phenomenology to examine participants' lived experiences, symbolic interactionism to explore the social construction of meaning within the ritual, and functionalist theory to highlight its role in fostering solidarity and social stability within the diasporic community. In contrast to prior studies focusing on assimilation and ethnic identity shifts (Rangsikul, 2019), this research aims to uncover the specific cultural and social mechanisms that enable the preservation of this tradition with minimal alteration, positioning it as a sustainable model of intangible cultural heritage amid societal transformations.

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This study seeks to illuminate the historical and phenomenological significance of the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw Procession at Boen Tek Bio (文德庙) Temple, analyzing how the Benteng Chinese community sustains this tradition within evolving sociocultural dynamics. By explicitly addressing these questions, the research fills a critical gap in the literature on religious rituals within the Chinese diaspora, offering broader insights into the interrelationship between religious practice, community identity, and cultural heritage preservation. The findings are expected to contribute to theoretical advancements in religious and cultural studies and inform heritage preservation policies in Indonesia and Southeast Asia more broadly.

Literature Review

Scholarly inquiry into religious rituals among Chinese diasporic communities has been extensively pursued across multiple disciplines, particularly in cultural anthropology and the sociology of religion. Such rituals function not only as expressions of spirituality but also as social mechanisms that enable communities to preserve their ethnic identity amidst shifting sociopolitical landscapes. Contemporary studies such as that by Siregar and Sinar (2018) and Hidayat (2014) have laid important groundwork in this regard. However, these studies primarily emphasize the persistence of ethnic identity through ritual continuity and language preservation, with limited exploration of how these rituals dynamically adapt or negotiate meaning in response to changing social and political contexts. This leaves a critical gap in understanding the interplay between tradition and innovation within diasporic religious practices. Recent scholarship urges an analysis of how ritual practices themselves become sites of negotiation—

between tradition and innovation, seclusion and public visibility, especially in post-authoritarian and urbanizing contexts. Furthermore, Makmur et al. (2019) provide a sociopolitical lens by revealing the latent forms of exclusion that continue to affect Chinese-Indonesian communities, suggesting that ritual practices must be viewed not merely as cultural preservers, but as strategic responses to ongoing challenges of social integration. Yet, while highlighting sociopolitical challenges, Makmur et al. (2019) do not sufficiently address how ritual participation may actively contribute to intercultural dialogue and mitigate social exclusion..

Sari and Adhi (2019) offer further insights into cultural identity formation among the Peranakan Chinese in Glodok by examining musical preferences. Their findings reveal that musical taste can serve as an indicator of both cultural identity and the processes of assimilation and hybridization within diasporic communities. Nonetheless, their focus on musical expression may overlook the multifaceted nature of ritual practices as embodied and communal performances that contribute to identity beyond symbolic consumption. While existing literature predominantly emphasizes the impact of state policy on Chinese identity formation, there remains a paucity of research that critically examines how local communities preserve their religious rituals in largely unaltered forms amidst external pressures.

In comparative perspective, Chinese religious rituals in Malaysia and Singapore have undergone markedly different adaptive trajectories. In Malaysia, the Chingay Parade in Johor Bahru originated as a Taoist religious procession but has since been commodified into a vibrant cultural attraction aimed at both

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domestic and international tourism (Xinhua and Chung 2023). Supported by local government as part of the creative economy, Chingay has expanded beyond its spiritual origins. In Singapore, the Nine Emperor Gods Festival has been modified due to urban planning policies that restrict space for traditional religious celebrations (Soh and Keng 2024; Tong 1996). Although officially recognized as part of the nation's cultural heritage, the spiritual dimensions of this ritual are increasingly overshadowed by its function as a tool for tourism and urban cultural promotion. These examples illustrate the tension between cultural commodification and heritage preservation, yet existing studies often stop short of interrogating the implications of such transformations on community agency and ritual authenticity.

In contrast to these developments, the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession in Tangerang stands out for its sustained adherence to traditional forms, resisting large-scale commodification. Unlike the Chingay Parade or the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, this procession remains centered on spiritual devotion and communal participation, despite a growing openness to broader public involvement. This suggests that the Benteng Chinese community possesses unique socio-cultural mechanisms that enable them to preserve their traditions, diverging from the adaptive models observed in other Southeast Asian Chinese diasporas. However, with increasing interaction with non-Chinese communities and evolving ritual practices, there remains the possibility that this procession will eventually undergo similar transformations.

This research contributes to the scholarly conversation by elucidating the underlying mechanisms that have enabled the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession to maintain its authentic form over more than a century, despite persistent social and modernization pressures. Moving beyond prior emphases on ritual change and adaptation, this study positions the procession as a dynamic expression of cultural resilience, where tradition is actively negotiated rather than passively preserved. It highlights how the ritual functions as a strategic medium for identity construction and intercultural engagement within Tangerang's multicultural environment, thereby expanding theoretical frameworks on diasporic religious practices as sites of both continuity and transformation. By addressing these understudied aspects, this study fills critical gaps and advances a more nuanced understanding of ritual persistence amid modernity and multiculturalism.

Phenomenological theory, developed by Edmund Husserl and continued by Alfred Schutz, emphasizes the importance of understanding human experiences as they are experienced by the subject (Hasbiansyah, 2015; Nindito, 2013; Wita & Mursal, 2022). In the context of religious rituals, phenomenology provides insight into how individuals involved in the procession experience and internalize the spiritual and cultural meanings contained within the ritual. In the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩) Procession, these meanings are not only communicated through material aspects such as the procession, deity statues, and ceremonies but are fundamentally shaped by the personal and collective lived experiences of the participants. These experiences include a sense of spiritual connection with Dewi Kwan Im (观音), belief in the

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protection afforded by the ritual, and the emotions that arise during participation. Studies by AS and Rustandi (2022) and Maulida, Turistiati, and Sari (2025) underscore that religious rituals often act as mediums for transcendent experiences that reinforce individuals' commitment to their community.

Complementing phenomenology, symbolic interactionism theory, developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, focuses on how individuals form meanings through social interactions and the use of symbols (Dadi 1998; Derung 2017). The 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession is not just a physical activity but also a symbolic system that communicates identity and social relations within the community (Rahman et al. 2024). The sacred statues (Khim-sin) carried using the joli 神轿 (shénjiào) are not merely material objects, but also spiritual symbols representing the presence of Dewi Kwan Im in the community. This symbolism is reinforced by ritual elements such as the lion dance (*barongsai*), *liong*, *gambang kromong*, and others, which serve as expressions of the cultural and religious identity of the Benteng Chinese community (Syahid et al. 2023). Additionally, this theory explains how participants negotiate their identities through interactions with fellow worshippers, the general public, and local authorities. The involvement of non-Chinese communities in this procession can be seen as a strategy of cultural adaptation, where the Benteng Chinese community not only preserves their tradition but also opens up space for inclusivity in social interactions. This approach aligns with research by (Saputra and Muhiroh 2020) examining intercultural communication between the Chinese and Muslim communities in Pantai Tanjung Kait, Tangerang. The study shows that the

interactions between the two communities are complex, involving tolerance, participation, and mutual support in various religious, cultural, social, and economic activities. Furthermore, research by Saputri (2021) highlights intercultural communication practices between the Chinese and Javanese Muslim ethnicities in the Hok Tek Bio Temple area, Brebes. The results of this study show that both communities respect cultural differences and actively participate in various joint social and cultural activities, such as celebrating major holidays and community events, which strengthen social solidarity among them.

To bridge micro-level experiences and social meanings with broader social functions, functionalism theory, developed by Émile Durkheim, emphasizes that each element in society has a specific function in maintaining social stability (Arif 2020). In the context of religious rituals, Durkheim explains that collective ceremonies strengthen shared consciousness, build social solidarity, and consolidate group identity. The 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession serves as a mechanism of social cohesion within the Benteng Chinese community, not only as a binding force for cultural and religious identity but also as a means for the younger generation to stay connected to their ancestral heritage. Furthermore, this procession has an integrative function within the multicultural society of Tangerang, involving various ethnic groups in its execution. In this study, functionalism theory is used to analyze how this procession not only serves as a religious expression but also functions as a tool for social reconstruction and a mechanism for resistance to changes that could threaten the sustainability of the tradition.

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By integrating phenomenology's focus on individual experience, symbolic interactionism's exploration of social meaning, and functionalism's analysis of social stability, this study offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the multifaceted role of the procession as both a deeply personal spiritual event and a collective social practice within a multicultural context.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods to examine how the Benteng Chinese community preserves the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession at the Boen Tek Bio (文德庙) Temple. The ethnographic method was selected for its capacity to facilitate in-depth exploration of lived experiences, symbolic meanings, and social interactions embedded within the ritual practice. As noted by Mounw Erland (2020), qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a phenomenon from their own subjective perspectives.

Data for this study were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Direct observation was conducted during the procession to examine social interactions, religious expressions, and cultural elements embedded in the ritual parade. The researcher was taking on an active role as a member of the event organizing committee. This involvement provided the researcher with an insider perspective on the event's social dynamics and ritual significance, while maintaining critical

reflexivity about the potential impact of their dual role as both organizer and observer.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 key informants, including religious leaders, temple administrators, procession participants, and local community members involved in the celebration. Informant selection was based on variation in experiences and perspectives, with inclusion criteria focusing on individuals who had participated in the procession more than twice, played an active role in the ritual's organization or execution, and demonstrated a deep understanding of the historical and spiritual significance of the event. Additionally, document analysis was employed by reviewing temple archives, audiovisual recordings of past processions, and related reports or publications. This triangulation of sources was used to verify data obtained through interviews and observations and to provide a historical perspective on the development and continuity of the ritual.

The data collected were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach as developed by Braun and Clarke (2012). This analysis followed several key stages: transcription of interview data and observation notes, initial coding based on thematic patterns that emerged from the interviews and observations, identification and categorization of main themes related to the meaning of the ritual, symbolism, and social cohesion, and interpretation of findings within the frameworks of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and functionalism.

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To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study employs a triangulation strategy, which includes method triangulation, source triangulation, and researcher triangulation (Luthfiyani and Murhayati 2024). Method triangulation was employed by comparing the results from observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the procession. Source triangulation was used to compare information from religious leaders, lay participants, and the general public to ensure that the perspectives gathered reflect the experiences of various layers of the community.

Result and Discussion

The 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession at Boen Tek Bio 文德庙 Temple is a cultural and religious phenomenon that has endured for over a century within the Benteng Chinese community in Tangerang. Based on interviews with various informants and document analysis, it was found that this procession originated from the renovation of Boen Tek Bio (文德庙) Temple (Figure 2) in 1844, which required the temporary relocation of four Kim Sin 金身 (Jīnshēn) statues of Dewi Kwan Im Po Sat, Kongco Ka Lam Ya, Kongco Kwan Seng Tee Kun, and Hok Tek Ceng Sin to Boen San Bio Temple. After the renovation was completed in 1856, the sacred statues were returned through a procession, which eventually evolved into a tradition held once every 12 years. According to an interview with Oey Tjin Eng (March 16, 2024), the primary purpose of this procession is to ritually cleanse the temple every 12 years, maintain spiritual balance, and reaffirm the community's religious practices. This tradition is also viewed as an

effort to clear negative energy from the surrounding environment, reflecting the concept of feng shui within Chinese belief.

The justification for the continuity of this tradition for over a century highlights the crucial role of rituals in preserving the cultural identity of diasporic communities, as emphasized in studies on religious practices among minorities. Further, an interview with Ersa Novia Sena (June 8, 2024) stressed that the 12-year cycle in this tradition is rooted in the Chinese zodiac system, symbolizing the flow of energy and spiritual renewal within the life cycle. This indicates that the procession is not only a commemoration of historical events but also part of a broader belief system within Chinese cosmology, which continues to be upheld within the local context of Tangerang.



Figure 1. Kelenteng Boen Tek Bio 文德庙 (Procession Organizer)

In addition to its spiritual and historical value, the findings of this study show that the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession has become an integral part of the cultural identity of the Benteng Chinese community. Amidst social and political changes in

Indonesia, this ritual has persisted as a cultural expression that distinguishes this community from other Chinese diasporas in the region. According to an interview with Dhammacari (Lim Kok Hoh) on July 6, 2024, since 2012, this procession has expanded into a larger parade, involving more participants and showcasing various artistic and cultural attractions. This indicates that the Benteng Chinese community has been able to adapt to modernity without altering the essence of the ritual. The procession also plays a role in strengthening social solidarity by attracting participation not only from Buddhists and Confucians but also from people of various ethnicities and religions in Tangerang. Figure 3 shows the procession of lifting the joli (神轿), one of the most sacred moments in this ritual. The joli (神轿), which contains the Kim Sin statues, is carried by the youth of the community, where the act of lifting and shaking the joli (神轿) is believed to strengthen spiritual energy and signify the deity's blessing. In addition to its religious aspects, this ritual also reflects cooperation and solidarity within the community, as each participant lifting the joli (神轿) must move in unison to maintain balance and ensure the smoothness of the procession.



Figure 2. Joli 神轿 (shénjiào) Lifting Procession

Figure 2 above was taken by a photographer who participated in the event. The joli-lifting (神轿) procession not only strengthens spiritual values, but also strengthens relationships between people in welcoming the new year with hope and happiness. In the context of symbolic interactionism theory, this procession serves as a symbolic communication tool that shapes social relationships between individuals and the community. The symbols used, such as the joli (神轿) carried in the procession (Figure 3), are not only visual aspects of the ritual but also collective expressions that reinforce the group's identity. Moreover, the involvement of the younger generation in lifting the joli (神轿) demonstrates how this ritual is passed down and remains relevant in the lives of the Benteng Chinese community to this day, making it a form of cultural resilience amidst the ever-evolving social dynamics.



Figure 3. The enthusiasm of the community in welcoming the Gotong Toapekong (大伯公) Procession

Figure 4 is real evidence that the local community is very enthusiastic about welcoming the Gotong Toapekong 大伯公 (Dàbógōng) procession which is held every 12 years. The image was taken by a photographer who had been on standby since D-1 before the event took place. This research found that this procession is not only religious in nature but also serves as a symbol of multiculturalism and diversity in Tangerang. Figure 4 shows the enthusiasm of the community in welcoming the procession, where not only the Chinese community but also people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds were present to watch and participate. The presence of a diverse crowd reflects how this procession has evolved from an internal community ritual into an inclusive cultural celebration. Based on an interview with Friska Ong (July 13, 2024), the Chairperson of the Procession Committee, it was explained that this procession strengthens the brotherhood between the Chinese community and other communities in Tangerang, creating a space for interaction and intercultural dialogue. The recognition of Gotong Toapekong (大伯公) as an Intangible Cultural Heritage on August 22, 2024, serves as concrete evidence that this procession has gained legitimacy as part of the national cultural heritage. Figure 4 also shows how community participation is not limited to being spectators, but also includes various roles, such as ensuring the smoothness of the procession, providing logistical support, and participating in the art and cultural performances that accompany the parade. This supports the perspective in the study of intangible cultural heritage (Tangerang 2025) which emphasizes that rituals and religious practices are not only part of tradition but also serve to strengthen identity and social solidarity.

Additionally, an interview with Tedy (July 19, 2024) shows that this procession has another dimension as a ritual to ward off misfortune and spiritual cleansing, which in Chinese tradition is known as "cleaning the earth". This ritual is believed to cleanse the negative energy that has accumulated over a 12-year cycle, as well as serve as a form of respect to ancestors and protective deities. Justification for this concept can be found in Durkheim's functionalism theory (1912), which explains that collective rituals strengthen collective consciousness and create solidarity within the community. Thus, this procession is not just a celebration, but also a social mechanism that strengthens the relationships among community members as well as between the Benteng Chinese community and the wider society. The table below summarizes the key points extracted from participants' interviews.

Table 1.
Key Findings in the 12-Year Procession of Kwan Im Hud Cow

Themes	Research Findings	Data Source
History of the Procession	The procession was first held in 1856 after the renovation of the Boen Tek Bio 文德庙 Temple (1844–1856). The four Kim Sins were temporarily moved to the Boen San Bio Temple and returned through a procession which has now become a tradition every 12 years.	Interview with Oey Tjin Eng (March 16, 2024), Ersya Novia Sena (June 8, 2024); Documentation study of Boen Tek Bio 文德庙 Temple
Spiritual Meaning	This procession is considered a ritual to ward off misfortune and cleanse negative energy in a 12-year cycle. In Chinese belief, this cycle symbolizes harmony with nature and cosmic balance.	Interview with Ersya Novia Sena (June 8, 2024), Tedy (July 19, 2024); Study on the zodiac calendar system

Cultural Identity	This procession has become an integral part of the identity of the Benteng Chinese, distinguishing them from the Chinese diaspora in other regions. This ritual is maintained in its authentic form without significant modifications.	Interview with Dhammacari (Lim Kok Hoh, July 6, 2024), Friska Ong (July 13, 2024)
Social Cohesion	Since 2012, the procession has evolved into a larger parade, involving more participation from various community groups in Tangerang, creating a space for cross-cultural interaction.	Interview with Friska Ong (July 13, 2024), Dhammacari (Lim Kok Hoh, July 6, 2024); Observation of community participation
Cultural Preservation	On August 22, 2024, Gotong Toapekong 大伯公 (Dàbógōng) was recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), reinforcing its status as part of Indonesia's national culture.	Interview with Friska Ong (July 13, 2024), (Tangerang 2025)

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩薩) Procession has complex dimensions, encompassing aspects of history, spirituality, cultural identity, social cohesion, and cultural preservation. Historically, this procession originated from the relocation of Kim Sin due to the renovation of the Boen Tek Bio (文德庙) Temple in 1844, which then evolved into a 12-yearly ritual since 1856. Its spiritual significance is not only related to honoring the gods but also serves as a ritual to ward off misfortune and cleanse negative energy in harmony with the zodiac cycle in Chinese astrology. In terms of cultural identity, this ritual has become a distinctive marker of the Benteng Chinese community, setting it apart from other Chinese diasporas that have undergone more cultural modifications. Moreover, this procession

has evolved into a means of social cohesion, especially since 2012, when the parade began to involve more elements of the community in Tangerang, reflecting cross-ethnic and religious cultural interactions. The recognition of Gotong Toapekong (大伯公) as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) on August 22, 2024, further emphasizes that this procession not only holds spiritual and social value for the Benteng Chinese community (Tangerang 2025) but also constitutes a part of Indonesia's national cultural identity that must be preserved.

Based on the research findings, the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession not only serves as a religious ritual but also plays a broader role in building community identity, strengthening social cohesion, and ensuring the sustainability of traditions in the context of modernization. Compared to similar rituals in the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia and Singapore, this procession has unique characteristics because it still retains its traditional elements without undergoing massive commodification. To gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and impact of this procession, the following discussion will examine the research findings from several theoretical perspectives, namely phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and functionalism.

Phenomenological Perspective: Spiritual Meaning and Ritual Continuity

From a phenomenological perspective (Hasbiansyah, 2015; Nindito, 2013; Putriandini, 2012; Wita & Mursal, 2022), individual experiences in undergoing religious rituals are key elements in constructing collective meaning. Interviews with Oey Tjin Eng

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(March 16, 2024) and Ersia Novia Sena (June 8, 2024) reveal that this procession is not just a ceremonial celebration, but also a spiritual journey that provides a transcendental experience for the participants. In Chinese belief systems, the 12-year cycle in the Chinese zodiac holds profound meaning related to the transformation of energy and harmony with the cosmos. Therefore, this procession serves as a means of spiritual renewal and the cleansing of negative energy, in accordance with the concept of feng shui in maintaining environmental balance. The concept of feng shui in Chinese belief relates to the balance of energy (qi) and harmony between humans and their environment. In the context of the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession, feng shui plays a role in determining the procession's route, the selection of ritual timing, and the symbols used in the procession. According to an interview with Oey Tjin Eng (March 16, 2024), this procession is believed to drive away negative energy and bring luck to the community, aligning with feng shui principles that maintain spiritual and material balance. Furthermore, the position and direction of the Kim Sin statues in the procession also follow feng shui considerations to ensure that the ritual brings blessings and protection to the community.

This finding is in line with the research conducted by Chin et al. (2024), which shows that religious rituals in diaspora communities often act as mechanisms to strengthen spirituality and group identity amidst social and cultural pressures. However, compared to the rituals in Malaysia and Singapore that have transformed into cultural attractions, the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession maintains its spiritual focus. Unlike the Chingay Parade,

which now emphasizes entertainment and tourism promotion, this procession continues to be carried out as a form of respect for Dewi Kwan Im and as a spiritual cleansing ritual for the Benteng Chinese community. This makes the procession an example of cultural resilience in a diasporic community that has preserved its spiritual values without undergoing major modifications.

Symbolic Interactionism Perspective: Ritual as a Medium for Identity Negotiation and Social Cohesion

In the context of symbolic interactionism by Derung (2017), religious rituals not only function as spiritual practices but also as tools for social communication, allowing individuals to construct collective meaning through the symbols used in the procession. Social meaning is formed through interactions among individuals within a specific cultural context, where the symbols in the ritual represent the identity and solidarity of the community. Based on interviews with Friska Ong (July 13, 2024) and Dhammacari (Lim Kok Hoh, July 6, 2024), it was found that since 2012, this procession has evolved into a more inclusive cultural parade, involving people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The symbols used in this procession, such as the *joli* 神轿 (*shénjiào*) for carrying the Kim Sin statues, the lion dance (*barongsai*), and traditional attire, not only have aesthetic value but also function as tools for communication that reinforce community solidarity. For example, the participation of the youth in carrying the Kim Sin statues not only shows their involvement in the tradition but also represents a form of cultural identity reproduction passed down through generations. In Goffman's (1974) theory of frame analysis,

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this procession can be seen as a "cultural stage," where the community presents their identity to the outside world and creates space for broader social interactions.

This finding also reinforces research by Nianti (2022), which shows that diaspora communities often use religious rituals as a strategy for cultural diplomacy, enabling them to preserve their cultural heritage while building relationships with other communities. When compared to the Nine Emperor Gods Festival in Malaysia and Singapore, which has undergone adaptation due to urbanization (Soh and Keng 2024; Tong 1996), the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession continues to maintain its traditional ritual structure while opening space for interaction with non-Chinese communities in Tangerang. Therefore, this procession not only serves as an expression of the Benteng Chinese community's identity but also becomes a mechanism for negotiating their role in the broader society.

Functionalism Perspective: Ritual as a Means of Community Solidarity and Cultural Preservation

From a functionalist perspective Arif (2020), collective rituals such as the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession function as tools for social cohesion, strengthening internal solidarity within the community as well as external relationships with the broader society. Based on the research findings, this procession not only unites Buddhists and Confucians within the Benteng Chinese community but also attracts participation from people of various religions and ethnicities in Tangerang. Furthermore, this procession serves as a symbol of multiculturalism,

enabling cross-cultural interactions within both religious and social spaces, although non-Chinese community involvement tends to be more prominent in the cultural aspects rather than the core ritual domain. The recognition of Gotong Toapekong (大伯公) as Intangible Cultural Heritage on August 22, 2024, further emphasizes that this procession holds broader cultural significance, extending beyond a mere religious practice of a particular community. According to the Tangerang City Government and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Tangerang 2025), intangible cultural heritage encompasses not only physical artifacts but also traditions, social expressions, and community practices.

Thus, this recognition not only solidifies the position of the ritual as part of Indonesia's national identity but also demonstrates how local communities can actively ensure the continuity of their traditions through the institutionalization of culture. On the other hand, this study also found that although the procession maintains its traditional values, there are differences in how the community represents the procession to the public, where cultural aspects are more open to external participation, while spiritual elements remain exclusive to community members. When compared to similar festivals in Malaysia and Singapore, where government involvement is stronger in supporting and directing rituals within national cultural policies (Tong 1996), the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession is more organic in its management. Community participation remains the key factor in preserving this ritual, indicating that cultural resilience can occur without significant intervention from the state or the tourism sector. Therefore, this procession can be seen as a form of tradition sustainability that

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remains relevant amid social changes, without the need for major modifications as seen in other countries.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications for the fields of cultural studies, sociology of religion and cultural heritage preservation. Theoretically, this research strengthens the study of religious rituals within diaspora communities by affirming that the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession has endured in its authentic form without undergoing significant modifications. This study also demonstrates that religious rituals do not solely function as spiritual practices but also serve as tools for social communication, enabling diaspora communities to negotiate their identities in multicultural societies.

Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a reference in cultural preservation policies, particularly in strategies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Indonesia. The recognition of this procession as Intangible Cultural Heritage on August 22, 2024, serves as a model for how religious rituals can gain national legitimacy, which can be replicated to protect and preserve other cultural practices facing the threat of extinction. Furthermore, this study offers valuable insights for other diaspora communities on how to maintain a balance between preserving traditions and adapting to social changes.

Conclusion

This study explores religious rituals and intangible cultural heritage preservation within the Benteng Chinese diaspora community, particularly through the 12-Year Kwan Im Hud Couw (观世音菩萨) Procession at the Boen Tek Bio (文德庙) Temple in Tangerang. Its primary novelty lies in the integrative application of phenomenological and symbolic interactionist approaches—methodologies that have been scarcely utilized in previous studies of similar rituals—allowing for a nuanced examination of subjective participant experiences and the socially constructed meanings embedded within the procession. By analyzing how participants engage with and interpret this religious tradition, the study demonstrates that the procession serves not only as a ritual practice but also as a medium for negotiating cultural identity within a multicultural society.

Unlike prior studies that predominantly focused on the modernization and commodification of rituals—such as Malaysia’s Chingay Festival and Singapore’s Nine Emperor Gods Festival—this study establishes that the Kwan Im Hud Couw procession has retained its spiritual authenticity and traditional structure, largely untouched by commodification. This finding underscores the unique socio-cultural mechanisms within the Benteng community, which facilitate the organic continuity of the ritual independent of state intervention or commercial transformation. Additionally, this study highlights the inclusive social evolution of the procession since 2012, marked by increasing participation from non-Chinese communities, thereby reinforcing its role in fostering social

cohesion and interethnic dialogue within Tangerang's multicultural landscape. The official recognition of Gotong Toapekong (大伯公) as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage on August 22, 2024, offers institutional validation of the ritual's cultural significance, addressing an aspect that has been previously underexplored in both local and national historiography.

Theoretically and practically, these findings contribute to interdisciplinary discourse in diaspora studies, the anthropology of religion, and cultural heritage preservation, while also offering an empirical foundation for heritage policy development at the community level in Indonesia and across the broader Southeast Asian region.

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