

Research Article

Tehpai as an Expression of Filial Piety

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Abstract. Tehpai is one of the events in the series of wedding ceremonies for Indonesians of Chinese descent, for both the Peranakan and the Totok. This ceremony is not religious, and is a custom that has been carried out for hundreds of years. In this modern era, the tehpai custom is still carried out as a cultural ceremony. Why is this custom not considered out of date? What is the thought or idea behind this sustainable tehpai? This ingrained custom is believed to have a philosophical background, from the teachings of Confucius. The purpose of this research was to explore the teachings of Confucius that underlie the tehpai event in the Chinese wedding ceremony. Peirce's theory of semiotics was used to explain the philosophical background. This research found that the concepts of filial piety and family relationship from the teachings of Confucius underlie the tehpai event in the wedding ceremony of those of Chinese descent in Indonesia.

Keywords: tehpai, Indonesian Chinese descent, filial piety, Confucius

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1. INTRODUCTION

In general, Indonesian of Chinese descent can be classified into the Peranakan and Totok groups [1]. Both of them carry out a wedding ceremony called *tehpai* which is offering tea to parents and other older generations. As we know that the Chinese are famous for drinking tea, no wonder that tea is appointed as an important treat in wedding ceremonies. The importance of this ceremony is undeniable, for example, performed by Roger Danuarta with Cut Meyriska who underwent an Islamic marriage. This event is not religious, but rather a custom that has been carried out for hundreds of years. In this modern era, the *tehpai* custom is still carried out. However, nowadays people only know *tehpai* to respect parents. Actually, there should be other reasons [2]

We believe there are other reasons besides respect for parents [3]. The question is why this custom is not considered out of date although it has been carried out for hundred years. What is the idea underlies *tehpai* ceremony? Because since ancient times the Chinese have always adhered to the teachings of Confucius, we explore the underlying ideas from the point of view of Confucius' teachings. The purpose is to explore the teachings of Confucius that underlies *tehpai event* in Chinese wedding

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ceremony. Then, this philosophical background will be explained through Peirce's theory of semiotics with its semiosis process. This research found that the concept of Filial Piety (*xiao* or *bakti* in Bahasa Indonesia) and Family relationship from the teachings of Confucius underlies the *tehpai* event in wedding ceremony of Chinese descent in Indonesia. From Filial Piety there are ideas of respect and good attitude, not only to the inner family but also to the extended family.

The *tehpai* will be analyzed by Peirce's sign theory using the semiosis process. This process can show the idea behind respect for parents and the older generation. Carrying out cultural research with a philosophical background using semiotic theory is the novelty of this paper. Through the publication of this article, it is hoped that the Indonesian Chinese descent inhabitants will understand the meaning of carrying out this ceremony.

2. THE CONCEPT OF DEVOTION IN THE TEACHINGS OF CONFUCIUS

The devotion called *hao* (Hokkienese) or *xiao* (Mandarin Chinese) has the character 孝 or *bakti* in Bahasa Indonesia. In Hokkienese a child who is devoted to his parents is called an u hao child (有孝) or filial son [4]. In the book of Xiao Jing (孝经), the book which contains Confucius' conversations with his disciple Zeng Zi, Confucius says that devotion is the basis of morals, it is also the starting point of enlightenment [5]. The human body, even a hair or a piece of skin is all inherited from one's parents. It is proper for a child to understand the feelings of his parents' love for him by taking care of himself and not destroying it. Thus, parental love is the beginning of devotion or *xiao/bakti* [5].

Furthermore, a child's filial piety is also addressed to other family members such as brother and sister. The older brother/sister must help and guide his younger brother and sister to be u hao child. On the other, the younger brother and sister must respect his brother and sister. They should help each other in helping household chores. If a family runs a shop, all children in that family should take part in serving buyers, and other works related to the activities of running a shop. All children should participate in family activities and devote their lives to the family, especially boys, because they will carry on the family name and inheritance.

Devotion is divided into three stages as mentioned in Xiaojing chapter1:6.

(1) The initial stage

At a young age, devotion is manifested in caring for and serving parents and making them happy.

(2) The second stage

It is at the time of middle age. Devotion is intended to serve the community because of one's position as an official or public servant.

(3) The third stage

It is at the age of service. It is interpreted as being oneself with a strong personality [5].

Furthermore, how should the attitude of a child who is filial to his parents is mentioned in Xiaojing chapter 10:1

(1) A child must respect his parents while they are still alive.

(2) A child should serve his parents with pleasure.

(3) A child is obliged to take care of his parents when they are sick.

(4) A child feels sad when a parent dies.

(5) A child with respect and sincerity performs prayers

Above it is said that parental love is the beginning of devotion. Respecting parents until they die is a rule that can not be broken. Children should take care of their parents when they are sick, make them happy, and other family tasks such as praying for family members of the older generation who had died.

Xiaojing is not the only Book that talks about the relationship parents-children. In Zhongyong `The Doctrine of The Mean' (中庸) verse 19 Confucius says that there are five main relationships in the world. The five relationships are the relationships that exist between:

(1) superiors and subordinates

(2) father and son

(3) husband and wife

(4) brother and sister

(5) between friends

Between each of these relationships there are norms that distinguish them as mentioned in the Shijing `The Books of Odes' (诗经):

(1) Between superiors and subordinates there must be faith

(2) Between father and son there must be affection and filial piety

(3) Between husband and wife there is a virtue

(4) Between brother and sister there must be mutual respect

(5) Between friends and friends there must be trust.

From those three books only three relationships, namely between father-son, husband-wife, brother-sister exist in a family. The remaining two are relationships between superior-subordinate, friends-friends exist in society. This means the relation between family members has the main role in shaping one's attitude and morals before entering the community. When a person can treat well his family members, he will be able to do the same in society. Harmony in a family can occur in society.

Harmonious in the family is one of the main elements in forming a moral community. Zhongyong---another book from Confucius---has its teaching how to get harmonious that will not discuss in this paper. To get harmonious in a family there must be devotion (xiao or bakti) from children to parents [6]. But, tehpai ceremony only concerns the relationship among father-son, brother-sister, and also the old generation at the level of parents, grandparents, or even older if they are still alive. The concept of devotion expressed children's respect or jing 敬 to their parents. The respect idea is spread to another family member in the older generation. This relationship develops into a big family both because of blood relations and because of marriage. That is why the whole big family members are served tea in this ceremony.

3. EXPRESSION OF DEVOTION IN MARRIAGE CEREMONY

The Tea Offering or tehpai is held on the wedding day [7]. This event is held before a religious wedding ceremony. In families who still hold on to traditional customs, this event is first carried out at the bride's house after the groom arrives to pick her up and take her back to his parents' house. When the groom comes to the bride's house a tehpai ceremony is held for the bride's family only. After the ceremony is over, the bride is brought to the groom's house to perform the same ceremony for the groom's family. So, traditionally this ceremony takes place twice. After the event was over, it is continued with a religious ceremony in front of the family altar table for Confucianists, or go to church for Christians [8].

However, in modern times that everything is made practical, that ceremony is held after a religious ceremony, only carried out once in the wedding party hall. First, it is for the groom's family, then the bride's family.

How will the tehpai ceremony be held? It has been arranged neatly, who will be served first, second and next. The first is the parents who raised them until they got married that day. The second is the grandparents, then followed by the brother or sister of grandparent together with their husband and wife if they are still alive. The order of tea serving takes into account the generation level, the older generation comes first, followed by a younger generation. All of them are based on Confucian xiao teachings.

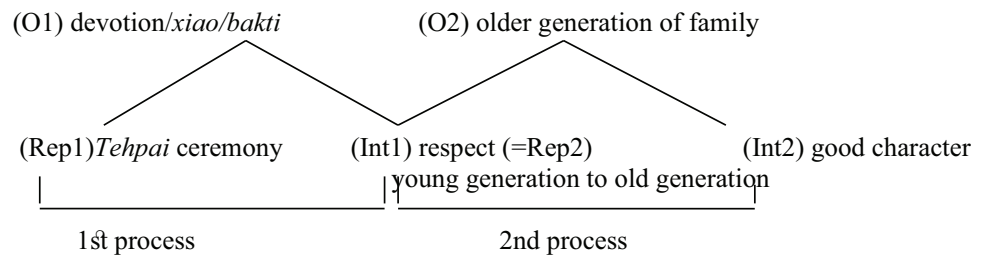
How is the ceremony performed? The persons who will be served tea sit on a chair. While the groom holding a tray containing two teacups, the bride gave the tea with slightly bowing her body. The person took and drank the tea, then return the cup with an angpao. Then, the bride handed the angpao to the groom. The more people who are served tea, the more angpao they got.

4. TEHPAI AS A SIGN OF RESPECT AND GOOD CHARACTER

How do we analyze tehpai ceremony from a scientific approach? According to C.S. Peirce, humans live in signs. Tehpai ceremony is considered a sign of having an idea behind it. Peirce stated sign is something that stands for something else and is understood by someone or has a meaning for someone [9]. Oehler (1987) tried to give a simple definition "a sign is something that stands for something in a relation to something". According to Peirce, there are three aspects of sign (1) the sign itself which is called representamen (2) the relation between the sign and its object (3) the sign and relation to its interpretant[9]. The interpretant is an interpretation of someone who interprets the sign concerning its object. This triadic relationship can be used to explain tehpai as a sign. This recursive interpretation in Peirce's semiotic triadic relation is known as the semiosis process. Hoed (2014) used the Javanese language to name this process as "gethok tular" [10].

Li and Song (2010) based on Peirce and Saussure theories set up five characteristics of sign in semiotics:

- (1) The information conveyed by symbols should be statutory and social
- (2) There are mutually related and opposite between signifier and signified
- (3) The symbol must be different from the message it conveys
- (4) The symbol must be material, with the sense or being sensed



Note: Rep = representamen; O = object; Int = interpretant

Figure 1: Semiosis process based on the Semiotic of Peirce.

(5) The signifier of a symbol should have distinctive features and be identifiable. [11].

The first characteristic of a sign or symbol is suitable for this research. Tehpai is a ceremony performed by Chinese descendants in Indonesia. In modern Chinese society in China nowadays, people are still performing tehpai in a different point of view.

Indonesian Chinese descendants are still performing tehpai to express filial piety and good attitude toward old people. As a sign, this ceremony consists of three components, namely representamen, object, and interpretant. It can be analyzed through Peirce's semiotic theory by carrying out the process of semiosis twice (see also [12],[13]).

The whole process of tehpai in these two processes is considered one sign with two interpretations. This recurrent process is named Gethok Tular by Indonesian linguist Benny Hoed [9]. In the first component of the first process, tehpai ceremony is representamen. A second component is an object. An object is something that the representamen refers to. In this case, the object is the idea. It is the relationship between father-son, brother-sister that reflects devotion. Who can be served tea? Traditionally, the one who will be served the tea only who has got married. The Brother and sister of the bride and groom who has not got married are excluded from this ceremony. But, at present, this rule is already loose. The interpretation of serving tea from the young generation to the old generation shows respect and thank from a child to his/her father and mother who has raised them until they also will set up a family. The process is continued because there is another tea serving beside to parents, to parents' sisters and brothers, also to older generation from grandparents level.

In the second semiosis process, "respect" as the first interpretation becomes the second representamen. This representamen refers to the second object. The

second object is other family members in the level of parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent if they were still alive. How do we interpret this ceremony? What's the thought behind this ceremony? What interpretation can be made? Concerning older generations, such as father mother's brothers and sisters with their husbands and wife; also to grandparents' brothers or sisters. Paying respect to older generations can be interpreted as a good character or attitude from the young generation to the old generation. From this semiosis process, we can understand that tehpai is signing to indicate that behind the concept of devotion (xiao or bakti) there is a good attitude from the young generation to the old generation.

Peirce's semiotic theory about humans living in signs can be proven in the tehpai ceremony. At first, the meaning of carrying out this ceremony was clearly understood. But over time the meaning blurred and became a tradition that must be carried out. The one that is not missing is this ceremony to show gratitude to the older generation.

5. CONCLUSION

Nowadays Indonesian young people of Chinese descent still carry out this ceremony like hundred of years ago. As we know, respect and appreciation to the older generation in wedding ceremony also carry out by other ethnic groups in Indonesia. The reason is due to the social situation as Li and Song (2010) stated that sign correlates to a social situation. Paying respect and honor can be found in other reality such s taking care of parents until they die. We could say that tehpai is a tradition that is preserved outside its home country indicating Confucian teachings are still alive. Tehpai ought to be carried out because the Indonesian Chinese descent still pays respect to the old generation, especially parents and grandparents. In China at present, the idea of carrying tehpai ceremony could be different from the idea in Indonesia.

The preservation of tehpai in Indonesia shows that the Filial Piety from the teachings of Confucius have been deeply rooted in the hearts of Indonesian Chinese descent.

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