

# The Survival of Chinatown Architecture: Lasem Chinatown, Indonesia

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## Abstract

*The survival of form and space of Lasem Chinatown, which is different from other Chinatowns, can be described as follows: 1) Lasem Chinatown is one of the Chinatowns that does not adopt shop houses but has a large residential lot with a unique architecture and has survived until nowadays. 2) The settlement is quite old and the age of the houses is between 150 and 200 years. 3) The spatial pattern of Lasem is still maintained, in the shape of a corridor with a solid high wall on both sides of the road. The uniqueness of Lasem Chinatown's architecture deriving from space formation where people survive to occupy it indicates the existence of meaning and attachment to their place that people have.*

*To explore this uniqueness, a research extracted data and information from resident informants and community leaders in Lasem Chinatown. The focus of this research is to discuss the survival of Lasem Chinatown area based on activities, functions, and values. This study uses a naturalistic qualitative method based on a phenomenological approach with an inductive method to explain or reveal the meaning of experiences related to the phenomenon of Lasem Chinatown survival based on the awareness of several individuals from Lasem Chinatown.*

*The findings indicate that there are three elements underlying the survival of form and space of Lasem Chinatown which are the power of tolerance, the power of adaptation and the power of physical character. The three elements are supported by local powers, which are history power, economy power, tradition power, religion power, kinship power, and social community power. The values of Lasem people which are certainly different from others become the center of all survival elements, forming a unique Chinatown.*

**Keywords:** architecture, Chinatown, cultural heritage, Lasem, survival

## Introduction

In the global history of architecture since approximately 3500 BC in China, India and Europe, there have been various big architectural works (Ching, Jarzombek, & Prakash, 2017; Sopandi, 2013). Indonesian architecture was influenced by Chinese architecture and Indian architecture up to the 15th century (Priyotomo in Rahardhian et.al, 2018). Chinese architecture that became part of the Indonesian history is an interesting topic because Chinese architecture

in Indonesia carries a characteristic of its own that is unique in terms of the material to adjust the local conditions. One of them is the architecture of Lasem Chinatown, Rembang Regency of Central Java. The survival of form and space of Lasem Chinatown, which is different from other Chinatowns, can be described as follows:

1. Lasem Chinatown is one of Chinatowns that does not adopt shop houses but has a large residential lot with a unique architecture and has survived until nowadays;
2. The age of the settlement is quite old; The houses are between 150 and 200 years old with a unique architecture;
3. The spatial pattern of Lasem is still maintained, in the form of corridor that forms a solid and high wall on both side of the road.

In addition to this, the Chinese people in Lasem still maintain economic, religious, and socio-cultural activities related to their place of residence which functions as an economic center and residence. Like other Chinatowns, the Lasem Chinatown has physical and non-physical characteristics (economic, social and cultural activities) that have survived until now. Lasem written batik, which has become a cultural icon of the city, is a source of livelihood that supports the economic potential of Lasem City.

The Lasem Chinatown, with all of its uniqueness, should be maintained as a city identity that gives it a unique characteristic. To explore the uniqueness, a discussion based on activity data mining field and community information from informants and Chinese community in Lasem. The discussion addresses the survival of form and space of Lasem Chinatown based on activities, functions, and values. This paper reveals the elements that are thought to be the important basis for the survival of form and space of the Lasem Chinatown, which is able to struggle and respond to both internal and external shocks and identify factors underlying the existence of this survival. Referring to the focus of the research above, a research question arises: What is the meaning that is built in the phenomenon of the survival of the form and space of the Lasem Chinatown which is able to resist and respond to shocks (both internal and external)? The objectives of the research on the form and space of the Lasem Chinatown area are: to understand the meaning that is built up in the phenomenon of the survival of form and space in the Lasem Chinatown which is able to resist and respond to shocks (both internal and external); to find out the contribution of the form and space of the area in maintaining Lasem's Chinatown; to find out the reasons behind the occurrence of such resilience; and to find out the theoretical construction that can explain the phenomenon of the resilience of the Lasem Chinatown

Survival is the ability of a system to complete its mission in a timely manner in the presence of attacks, failures or accidents (Deshpande et. al., 2014). According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2015), survival means:

1. The state of continuing to live or exist, often despite difficulty or danger,
2. Something that has continued to exist from earlier time; and survivable means able to be survived (of an accident or experience).

In planning, survival is often used as a synonym for adaptation, and adaptation is part of survival (Folke et.al, 2010). According to Baibarac & Petrescu (2017), adaptive capacity and transformation are the two main concepts in this interpretation of survival. The capacity to learn from, and retain, lessons from past distractions and experiences, and the ability to prepare for, and adapt to, uncertainty and change, are important aspects of building adaptive capacity. Transformation requires a more radical path than adaptation, which refers to system changes that occur when the current system is no longer desirable. According to Wang, Deng, Wong, Li, & Chen (2018), the survival of urban tends to be a systematic approach to the sustainability of a city. According to Cere, Rezgui, & Zhao (2017), survival is a concept that meets several requirements related to adaptive capacity, recovery, and related to the built environment issues in their interactions. According to Sanchez, Heijden, & Osmond (2018), the survival of urban is related to urban governance systems, political pressures, uncertain and emerging nature of threats, the speed of change, and the level of complexity of the long-lived networks that make up cities. According to Shaw & Ray (2018), in contrast to the very bureaucratic development process in modern times, traditional or vernacular building forms evolved to achieve a higher

human comfort by using locally available building and construction materials, and are more responsive to geographic conditions. According to Juwono (2009), there are several factors that can affect the survival of an area in relation to city development:

1. A life that is based on togetherness and the concept of being in harmony and in the struggle to survive in a city,
2. Local forces which are able to grow and complement each other in the life of a city,
3. The ability to adjust due to external factors, the strength of city development and internal factors in the area to manage and maintain the pattern of life.

The spaces created in a city are a historical production (process) that cannot be separated from society. Lefebvre (1991) in his theory of 'social production of space', states that (social) space is a (social) product. According to the Ecistic theory, settlements are divided into two main elements. The first, is space in the form of a physical container (the container) which accommodates activities consisting of the physical space and the natural environment; The second, is the content including humans and society and their social and cultural life, where the two influence each other, but the basic actor is humans as anthropocosmos (Doxiadis, 1977). The concept of genius loci which develops the spirit of place, the sense of place and the power of place enables survival which makes residents feel at home or tied to their space (Schulz, 1984).

Some studies related to the Lasem Chinatown locus have been carried out by several researchers and focused on architecture. For example, a study compared the interiors of two cases of Chinese Residential Houses in Lasem and found several differences in the styles applied to interior design (Rachmayanti et.al, 2017). Other researchers have studied the structure and construction of buildings in Lasem (Purwanto & Titiek, 2015), revealing that the building in Lasem combines Chinese and Javanese architecture in terms of spatial layout. Sopandi (2013) describes the architecture of the Chinese house in Lasem by juxtaposing it with the Javanese house. Adinugraha (2017) explained that apart from using the traditional Chinese style, Rumah Lawang Ombo Lasem also adapts foreign elements such as the use of Javanese building layouts and the use of European-style building components. From the previous research studies on the Chinatown area of Lasem, it can be seen that these studies tend to focus on regional history, regional morphology, interior, spatial transformation of the area, and regional spatial structure. Meanwhile, research on the survival of the form and space of Lasem Chinatown is scarce.

## Research Methodology

In determining the research paradigm based on the research objectives and from several existing research objectives, the appropriate paradigm for this research is the Naturalistic Qualitative Paradigm. Paradigm Qualitative research focuses on diverse methods, evolving interpretations, naturalistic approaches become important objects. So, qualitative research observes everything related to natural conditions into a feeling, phenomena that occur in society, and their effects (Groat & Wang, 2013). The research approach is suitable for research on the survival of the form, space, and function of the Lasem Chinatown is a phenomenological approach to explain or express the meaning of experiences about the phenomenon of regional survival based on the awareness that occurs in several individuals of Lasem Chinatown. This study uses a naturalistic qualitative paradigm based on phenomenological approach with an inductive method to explain or reveal the meaning of experiences of several individuals from Lasem Chinatown. The phenomenological approach requires the use of a phenomenon-based inductive method as a local theory-building process. Therefore, this research requires an inductive research process scheme as a research guide (Purwanto, 2007).

## Finding and Discussion

### Overview of Lasem Chinatown

In 1351 Lasem was ruled by Dewi Indu, a cousin of King Hayam Wuruk. Lasem was one of the centers of the Majapahit kingdom. From the book Negara Kertagama, it is known that Majapahit had several vassal kingdoms in Java and Bhre Lasem became one of the seven members of the advisory council of the Majapahit King. The importance of Lasem for

Majapahit can be seen from the fact that King Hayam Wuruk visited Lasem in 1354. In the Majapahit kingdom era, Lasem was an ancient shipping center for the Majapahit Kingdom. The main purpose of the ethnic Chinese traveling to areas outside China including Indonesia was to conduct trade in 1368-1643 AD. In addition to trading, the Ming Dynasty tried to expand its protectorate territory to Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. Admiral Cheng Ho received the mandate to travel to Indonesia and made 7 voyages to Indonesia and during that time, he sailed 6 times to Java including Lasem (Suliyati, 2009). The Kingdom of Lasem changed its status to *Kadipaten* of Lasem, which was led by Adipati Tejukusumo in 1628, the period of VOC colonialism. In 1750, the capital of *Kadipaten* of Lasem was moved to Rembang and in 1751. Lasem has been a sub-district city until now.

Lasem sub-district has an area of 45 km<sup>2</sup>, consisting of 20 villages and 50,000 people, while Lasem City consists of 8 villages. The Lasem Chinatown consists of five villages which are the Soditan Village, Karangturi Village, Babagan Village, Gedongmulyo Village, and part of Sumbergirang Village (Abdullah, 2019). Considering the research area of the Lasem Chinatown, the formation of themes is divided into five observation units. The division is based on the empirical reality in the field, that each unit of observation has a unique character. In addition, the division will make it easier for the researcher to build concepts and theorizations. The division of observation unit is as follow: the area of observation unit I is Gedongmulyo Village, the area of observation unit II is in Soditan Village, the area of observation unit III is Babagan Village, the area of observation unit IV is Karangturi Village, and the area of observation unit V is Sumbergirang Village. Map of the research area of Lasem Chinatown can be seen in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1:** Map of the vast area of Lasem Chinatown  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

### Spatial Themes of the Survival of Lasem Chinatown

From the spatial themes approach in 5 observation units, 18 regional spatial themes were found, which are:

- Space as a historical source,
- Space as a place to seek hockey/luck,
- Space as a place to interact,
- Space as a place to maintain cultural heritage,
- Space as a place to earn a living,
- Space as a place to reminisce the services of heroes,
- Space as a place of respect for ancestors,
- Space as a place to maintain tradition,
- Space as a place to struggle, space as a place to survive,

- Space as a place of tolerance,
- Space as a place of creation,
- Space as a place of survival of myths,
- Space as the birthplace of various communities,
- Space as a place to establish kinship ties,
- Space as a place to transmit family values,
- Space as a place for revitalization of the lasem heritage district
- Space as a place to worship parents.

Some spatial themes of the survival of form and space of Lasem Chinatown can be described as follows:

### 1. The theme of space as a place to struggle and survive

The survival of form and space, which becomes a unique character of the Lasem Chinatown area undergo physically changes due to trade developments and also road widening, resulting in the transformation of settlement structures, transformations of form or changes in the appearance of buildings due to changes in function. This ultimately threatens the survival of form, space, and function. External and internal shocks such as the tragedy of Angke/Yellow War that occurred in 1740-1743 which caused the Chinese community from Batavia to flee to Lasem, the Sabil War of 1751 in which Lasem troops led by Widyadinigrat (Oei Ing Kiat) and Reden Panji Margono along with Kiai Baidawi invaded the position of the VOC in Rembang, significantly affected the Lasem Chinese community. The war that was carried out after Friday prayers was called the Sabil War of 1751. Panji Margono and Oei Ing Kiat were killed. In 1959, the Indonesian government issued government regulation no. 10, which closed all Chinese trading sectors in rural and small towns. The regulation made the Lasem Chinese leave the retail trade. They left Lasem and Lasem suffered a setback. Until now, there the Lasem Chinese community who still survives to fight for life in Lasem. The district has moved to Rembang. Later, Indonesian Political Regulations and Economic Policies, especially during the Era from 1967 to 1998, were also not in favor of the Chinese people at that time. According to Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, all activities of the Lasem Chinese have been monitored. There were no activities at the temple. Even cleaning activities were not allowed.

“.....Since 1965 the Chinese people have all their activities monitored. Then the temple should not have any activities, let a lot of people get together like this and a lot of lights are not allowed, cleaning activities is done secretly because the one who supervises is not from the police, during the 1965 era there was a Social and Political Department. All the regulations that were applied during the 1965 era were extremely oppressive. At the temple, we have to ask for permission from the social and political department, you know, we should ask for permission to pray at the temple and wait for hours while giving them an envelope filled with money... If I remembered that my blood pressure went up immediately” (Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, temple supervisor, at Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple, interview on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 5:00 PM)

Many Chinese people also converted from Kong Hu Chu to Christianity because Kong Hu Chu was prohibited at that time, so that the role of the Temple for the Chinese community in Lasem Chinatown was decreasing. According to Mrs. Jarum, a secretarial employee of the Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple, during this era the temple did not hold any prayer activities.

“...In the 1965 era, the temple did not have any activities, so my work at that time was taking care of the rental of the furniture/temple items for people to use, such as marriage, such as renting tables, chairs, renting plates, spoons, etc., not only for only consume the area here but some are from Rembang...so there is no prayer activity at the temple as it is now...only worshiped individually...” (Mrs. Jarum, Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple secretariat employee, interview on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 3.00 PM)

Mr. Rudy Hartono revealed that in 1965-1968, the Chinese society was afraid of politics, including Chinese writings at that time were also prohibited.

“...Politics in 1965-1968 was all messed up...especially the influence of Christian later if those who finished praying in Kong Hu Chu didn't want to eat, afraid, it was all because of the doctrine of a priest that praying in Kong Hu Chu was considered worshipping the devil...” (Mr. Rudy Hartono, owner of Rumah Merah, interview on January 24th, 2020, 1.00 PM)

According to Mr. Santoso Hartono (interview on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021), during Gus Dur Era in Lasem, there was a lot of looting. Mr. Santoso's teak house above the ceiling was lost. Many thugs asked for money from shops, and many wallet houses were robbed. As Mr. Sie Hwie Djan (interview on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020) stated, the Chinese population, especially those who embrace the Kong Hu Chu religion, shrank to only 10% or even 5%. This is due to several factors. The first factor is that all the regulations applied during the 1965 era were not favorable to the Chinese community. They had to ask for permission from the Social and Political Society if they wanted to worship at the temple. If they did not worship, they were considered communists. The second factor is the development of Christian religion. Therefore, the development of Christianity could not get along with the Chinese community who worshiped in Chinese Temples. The third factor is human resources including the elders and many people died. Mr. Sie Hwie Djan expressed his concern that in the next three to five years, this temple could be handed over to the government because no one would take care of it. According to one of the *Kesengsem Lasem* activists (2020), in 1700s, most of the population was 90% Chinese 10% Javanese, but now it's reversed to being 90% Javanese and only 10% Chinese, because no one has returned to Lasem after schooling or going to college outside the city.

“...There was no Chinatown in Lasem before because in all the villages and in all corners of the river banks were all Chinese, so when the temple held a Shampo parade, all Kongco Makco went out around Lasem, there was no need to look for paid workers because Chinese people is enough even more than enough.....” (Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, temple supervisor, at Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple, interview on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 5:00 PM)

Mr. Sie Hwie Djan (interview on November 6th, 2021) stated that in 1965, many Lasem Chinese people left Lasem to Surabaya and other big cities such as Jakarta on the ground that Lasem's security was not guaranteed, but for Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, it was not a problem because he preferred to stay in Lasem. Since then, young people study at least up to junior high school in Lasem. The senior high school has gone out of town including college. After graduating from college, young people did not choose to return to Lasem because of the absence of job opportunities. Therefore, many people of Lasem migrated and left their houses. The houses that remain are occupied by the owners.

The function of urban space as a place to struggle and survive occurs because there is a bond between space actors and spatial settings supported by the strong traditional and religious values adopted by space actors so that they are able to face both internal and external shocks. In the context of space as a place to struggle and survive, there are underlying values, which are a sense of community and a sense of togetherness in defending the place they live in.

## 2. The theme of space as a place to maintain cultural heritage The Three Chinese Temples of Lasem

There are three Chinese Temples in Lasem namely Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple (located at Jalan Dasun No. 19 Lasem), Poo Ann Bio Temple (located at Jalan Karangturi VII No. 33 Lasem) and Gie Yong Bio Temple (located at Jalan Babagan No. 7 Lasem). Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple is a temple for the Goddess of the Sea, which is the oldest on the island of Java. The carvings on the roof and walls of the temple are the carvings of the Chinese Guandong people who were deliberately brought to Java. On the upper terrace of Tjoe Ann

Kiong Temple, there is a carved console structure in the form of the Hong/Feng Huang/Phoenix Bird, which is believed to be the Queen of all birds, bringing Peace, Happiness, and Luck. This Hong Bird ornament is also found on the roof ridge of the temple. Then, at the top of the roof, a Chilin/Unicorn statue can be seen. It is a symbol of virtue, descent and luck with the hope that the Chinese people of Lasem will get blessings and good luck. Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple has more detailed ornaments than the other two temples because Tjoe Ann Kiong carries more architectural characteristics from its original area in South China. The Chinese people tried to express their identity by building a temple and bringing in builders from China to help build the first temple in Lasem. Meanwhile, over time, the second and third temples began to reduce their ornaments according to local conditions and materials. The second temple is Karangturi Temple, has a multipurpose building on the right, which is often used for the Chinese New Year celebrations for the three temples. Gie Yong Bio Temple was originally a house of worship to commemorate the services of the heroes of Lasem, but over time, the house of worship has been turned into a temple. In the courtyard of the Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple, there is a monument to commemorate the struggle of the Chinese and Javanese against the VOC. According to Mr. Sie Hwie Djan (interview, January 24, 2020), the placement of the monument is not appropriate if it is placed in the courtyard of the Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple. However, it is still placed in the courtyard. According to war history, the monument should have been appropriately placed in the Gie Yong Bio temple because that is where the three heroes of Lasem are worshiped, namely: Raden Mas Panji Margono, Tan Phan Ciang and Oei Ing Kiat. All three died in the struggle against the Dutch so that the Lasem people built a house of worship to commemorate their services. On the monument, there is an inscription entitled: Monument to the Struggle of the Chinese and Javanese Warriors against the VOC 1740-1743.

### Lasem Chinese Residence

When entering the Lasem City, the atmosphere of a Chinatown is very impressive and draws us to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Lasem city, which is often referred to as Little China, besides having the remains of three temples, also has unique Chinese houses. Lasem's Chinatown area is an old settlement that has about 240 cultural heritage buildings whose age is between 150 and 200 years. Chinese settlements existed in the Majapahit era in 1294-1527 (Krom in Unjija, 2014). The houses are large and have an average site of 1000 m<sup>2</sup> to 5500m<sup>2</sup>. The architecture of this house mixed the Chinese and Javanese architectural styles. The Chinese architectural style can be seen in the curved ridge of the roof. The tip of the ridge is tapered like a wallet bird's tail and on the wall below the ridge of the roof, there are carvings of Chinese characters. The element of local culture, namely Java, is reflected in its symmetrical layout and the pavilion in front of the house. See Fig. 2.



**Fig. 2:** Type of Early Lasem Chinese House in Soditan Village  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

“....The houses of Chinatown residents are very unique and beautiful, even though they are not visible from the outside and are covered by a fairly high wall fence. Several old houses in Babagan Village are often used for filming, such as the house of Mr. Sigit Witjaksono on Jl. Babagan IV No.4 and the house at Jl. Babagan III No.3 is often used for film setting. In addition, many immigrants both from within and from abroad come to Babagan to take photos of the ancient houses in Babagan Village....” (Pak SE, owner of a rice stall at Jalan Babagan, interviewed at the stall, on November 20th, 2018, 1.00 PM).

There are several characteristics, such as symbols, numbers, and colors employed to create Chinese Architecture (Rukayah et.al, 2021). On the walls of some Chinese houses in Lasem and on the roofs of the gates, there are carved images of the lotus flower or *lián huá* (莲华) which symbolizes summer, purity, harmony and descent (see Fig. 3). In addition, there are other carvings, such as: the curve of the Chou Dynasty (1122-256 BC) which for farmers in South China means rain which is very important for agriculture, the image of the beetle or *shòu* (受) which symbolizes long life (Pratiwo, 2010). This symbol is believed to protect the house from misfortune brought by the neighboring roof ridge, which is straight towards another house.



**Fig. 3:** Decorative elements of carvings on the walls of houses and gates  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

According to Mr. Djunaedi Rusli, the uniqueness of Lasem's old house is that there is always a beautiful painting carved on the right and left of the top of the column on the terrace of the main house and the terrace of the gate: a decorative element in the form of a painting on ceramics with a picture of unicorn or *qílín* (麒麟). See Fig. 4. *Qílín* is a divine being with the head of a dragon, the body of a horse, and the scales of a goldfish. *Qílín* is generally associated with the ability to bring strong and protective feng shui energy with blessings of health, prosperity, and good luck to people. It is also known as a benevolent protector against relationship problems by bringing harmony and fertility luck into the household.

“...There are three houses which are the oldest in Lasem. The first is Lawang Ombo, the second is my house, and the third is Rumah Merah...So, the old house has a symbol if you want to know... if there is a painting on either side of the house, it means it is an old house... (Pak Djunaedi Rusli, resident of the house on Jalan Babagan III/3, interview on Jl Babagan III/3, November 26th, 2021, 10.00 AM)



**Fig. 4:** Painting Symbols at the top of the column of Houses and Gates  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

Besides the *qílín* painting, the Tou Kung construction also marks the old house in Lasem. Above the door of Lasem house, a vent is often found which has a circle decoration in various designs. There is a circle with 12 arrows, which is a symbol of Buddhism representing the ease of fortune. This symbolizes the owner's desire to get fortune from all directions. See Fig. 5.





**Fig. 5:** Various Ventilations of Lasem Door

Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

On the gate or the main house door, you can find a Chinese inscription, which means: health as wide as the ocean, fortune as high as the mountain (See Fig. 6). The decorative elements of this lettering are meant to invite health and good luck.

“...The writing on my door means health as wide as the ocean, fortune as high as mountain...”  
(Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, temple supervisor, interview at his house, on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 4:00 PM)



**Fig. 6:** Decorative elements of writing on the door of the house and the gate

Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

Most Chinese houses in Lasem combine elements of white, green, blue and brown. This color combination can be found in the color of the door leaf, frame, floor, roof structure, etc. There is a difference in the value of the room door. Brown color is used on the door leading to the altar because the value of the room is higher, green doors are used in other rooms that do not have a high sacred value, and blue doors symbolize intelligence and prosperity.

At the end of the 19th century, Lasem City experienced a golden age. The Chinese officers were able to build a house in a different style from the previous Lasem original house. They began to apply the Dutch East Indies architectural style, which was developing at that time. The architecture of this house is unique, because it has undergone a transformation from the original Lasem architecture (a blend of Chinese and Javanese styles) to an architecture with several architectural styles at once, namely Chinese, Javanese, and colonial architecture. All these architectural styles are combined in the form of architectural acculturation by adjusting the local natural conditions so as to create a beautiful and magnificent building. The use of Chinese architecture can be seen in the symmetrical organization of the space. In the middle of the building, there is a worship room. The main factor of the survival of Chinese culture in some Chinese settlements has the religious belief, which is implemented in a worship room in their house (Sudarwani, Purwanto & Rukhayah, 2020). The element of local culture, namely Java, can be seen from the pavilion, which is created, as a terrace, and the door on the right and left of the terrace is like a *pringgitan* room in a Javanese house. Meanwhile the Indische element is used because it gives the impression of being majestic, and sturdy. It reflects the level of social and economic status of the owner

of the house, as can be seen from elements of classical European architecture, such as using Ionic, Doric, and Tuscan columns on the veranda and roof walls (See Figure 7).



**Fig. 7:** Type of Lasem house with neoclassical columns and gable/gabletoppen  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

There are several houses that have facades with geometric windows, color stained glass, and art deco style (See Fig. 8). The roof of this type is also transformed from a Chinese architectural roof to a pyramid shape. What is interesting is that they still maintain a way of life with strong Confucian beliefs by not changing the house plan and still putting the altar in the middle of the house.



**Fig. 8:** Type of Lasem house with art deco style  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

In the Sumbergirang area, there are several buildings that can potentially be developed as cultural heritage, including: Marganingsih Girl Orphanage, *Rumah Ijo*, Monkey House, where the building has colonial Architecture with a tower on the one side of the house and equipped with balcony and balustrade. The windows are made of colored glass in geometric shapes. See Fig. 9.



**Fig. 9:** Type of Lasem house with tower and balustrade style  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

"...The houses of Lasem's Chinatown residents are very spacious, beautiful and rich in ornaments, myself as an indigenous citizen for the first time in early 2019 had the opportunity to enter one of the Chinatown houses in Karangturi Village when I had to accompany the Rembang Heritage Building Team to look closely at the Chinatown residents' houses which includes heritage building but disassembled. So far, the size of the lot and the beauty of the house are not visible from the outside because it is behind a high fence wall..." (Mrs. Sriyati, Head of the Welfare Section of Lasem District, interviewed at Sub-District Office, on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019, 1.00 PM).

Unfortunately, some of these Chinese houses are not receiving enough care. Especially for houses in the first Chinese settlements in Soditan Village, they look abandoned and left empty only to be used as wallet bird houses. On the other hand, many homeowners with

unique architecture use it as lodging houses, coffee shops or batik houses/showrooms to increase their income. Others make a living by selling antiques and selling Lasem's unique house as an asset which is then sold, dismantled and moved to another city. The houses that should become cultural heritage gradually decrease.

According to Mr. Agik, the entrepreneur of the Nyah Lasem Museum café on Jl. Karangturi V No. 2 Lasem, there are many Lasem houses that have survived until now. The number is around 240. According to Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, the buildings have survived because even though the owners are out of town, the children and grandchildren of the owners still take care of them. Like Mr. Tjoe Boen Hong's Lawang Ombo House, the house is cleaned twice a year, the roof tiles are dismantled, taken down and washed one by one and painted after that they are rearranged. According to Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, this is a very extraordinary thing because it is expensive to maintain a house like he did. It was done because of Mr. Tjoe Boen Hong love Lasem city. Mr. Sie Hwie Djan himself felt the friendly atmosphere in Lasem, which made him feel at home in Lasem. Moreover, his tolerance was high and there were no differences in skin. Some Lasem Chinese people think that the ancient houses in Lasem's Chinatown need to be preserved and they believe that there is bad luck for those who demolish old houses. It does not matter if anyone buys the house but they should not disassemble it, meaning that it will remain in Lasem. Change owners may but not dismantle. According to Mr. Sie Hwie Djan regarding the preservation of buildings, he often reminds the local government to make local regulations regarding the sale and purchase of ancient Lasem houses so that these ancient houses can be maintained and become tourist destinations for the surrounding community. According to him, the thing that still survives in Lasem's Chinatown is the building. Even though the residential building in Lasem has been abandoned, there are still housekeepers who are paid to take care of it so that it has survived to this day.

When we enter the old houses of Lasem Chinese residents, we still find various 19th century antiques ranging from wooden furniture, household utensils, decorations and pictures/paintings which are ancient items as part of the culture and memories of the Lasem Chinatown residents. One of the buildings that have the potential of cultural heritage with a lot of antique furniture that was estimated to be almost hundreds of years old is *Rumah Tegel LZ* which is located at Jl. Raya Kragan-Rembang-Surabaya No. 83 Lasem.

When we visit Lasem's Chinatown area, the first impression is that the atmosphere of the corridor bounded by high walls is quite arrogant and the impression of being lonely in the corridor. The monotonous impression of residential corridors is slightly lost with the emergence of models of beautiful Chinese roofed gates. See Fig. 10.



**Fig. 10:** One of the gate models a) view to the right site; b) view from site; c) view to the left site  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

In the context of the spatial theme of space as a place to maintain cultural heritage, there are several important things, namely:

1. There is an inner bond between the actors of space and the spatial setting so that it is very regretful if the occupied space setting is damaged or lost even though to maintain the physical setting of this space it has to spend a lot of money,
2. The many symbols in the process of forming a unique spatial setting, and

3. The activity of taking refuge and earning a living by space actors to gain health as well as luck in the spatial setting.

The theme of space as a place to maintain cultural heritage is influenced by:

1. The inner bond of space actors with spatial settings,
2. Space actors' recognition of the uniqueness and historical value of spatial settings,
3. Space has a protection function and economic potential.

In the spatial context as a place to maintain cultural heritage, there are underlying values, namely:

1. Sense of community / harmony,
2. Sense of comfort living in Lasem,
3. Sense of attachment to space,
4. Sense of togetherness in maintaining the place they live in.

### 3. The theme of space as a place to earn a living

Space as a place to earn a living is based on the ability to adjust productivity. Lasem's hand-drawn batik, which has become a cultural icon, is the dominant source of livelihood that supports the economic potential of Lasem City. One of the socio-cultural potentials of the Lasem region is the presence of Chinese community settlements and the existence of cultural arts typical of the Lasem region in the form of the Lasem batik craft industry. Batik is an intangible cultural heritage of Indonesia that has been recognized by UNESCO since October 2, 2009. At the beginning, batik was produced on the island of Java, especially on the north coast of Java and the middle of Java, especially in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. The Chinatown area of Lasem is one of the areas formed by people who mostly make a living by making batik in Babagan village. The production process of this business is still able to support them, including for batik craftsmen. The survival of this business shows that the preservation of activities is due to efforts to utilize the potential of the environment as a resource. For example, they still use houses, especially antique houses, to produce batik. The batik production is able to survive not because there is still local market demand but outside the environment. There is also recognition from outside, especially about the quality of Lasem's batik. According to Mr. Santoso Hartono, in 2022, Lasem was made a fashion city by the Governor of Central Java Mr. Ganjar Pranowo, the plan is that in August 2022, the fashion city will be launched simultaneously with the launching of the City of Heritage. This adds to Lasem's strength as a batik center.

The economic potential of Lasem hand-drawn batik can be described as follows:

1. Although the batik industry experiences ups and downs due to political situations and others, it is still able to survive and is unique,
2. Lasem hand-drawn batik production centers are located in almost all areas of Lasem sub-district and even extend to Pancur sub-district (workshops, showrooms),
3. Product image of Lasem batik is still strong, has characteristics and is more special than other batik so that it has high competitiveness in the batik market, supported by Indonesian batik being recognized as a world cultural heritage by UNESCO on October 2, 2009,
4. The existence of a Batik Tourism Village which includes Babagan Village-Karasgede Village-Karaskepoh Village-Tuyuhan Village-Pancur Village, and
5. The existence of an association community of Lasem Batik Village.

In the context of urban space as a place to earn a living, it is influenced by the following factors:

1. The spatial setting is shaped by history;
2. It is an activity based on togetherness;
3. There is a bond between the actors of space and the space.

The theme of space as a place to earn a living is based on the values: togetherness, maintaining harmony, and mutual respect.

#### 4. The theme of space as a Place to Maintain Tradition

Most of the Chinese married Javanese Muslims and make a strong cultural assimilation. There is a sense of belonging to the Lasem culture built by Muslim and Chinese figures in history that resides in their memories. Therefore, the Muslim community highly respects Chinese culture in Lasem and *vice versa*. This fact shows a sense of shared ownership and has implications for preserving and caring for shared cultures and traditions. The Chinese also love the Javanese way of life. It is evident that the Lasem Chinese people like *gamelan*, *wayang*, and *keris*. The relationship with indigenous officials during the *cultuurstelsel* period (1830-1870) and afterward made the Lasem Chinese people also influenced by Javanese culture. This can be seen from the architecture of the house that is a mixture of Chinese and Javanese architecture, the interior that still smells of Chinese (prayer room) and Javanese art items such as Gamelan, Wayang, and Keris. This is also because in general, the Lasem Chinese is *peranakan* Chinese who are integrated with the Javanese way of life. They also love the Javanese way of life. Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, for example, admitted that when he had listened to gamelan and songs with music he liked, he could sleep on a mat close to where the gamelan musicians were.

For the Chinese tradition itself, the activities carried out at the temple are held regularly and every year. Mr. Sie Hwie Djan as the supervisor and Mr. Tjoe Boen Hong as the general chair of the temple receive a report from the administration regarding the list of prayers at the Lasem Chinese Temples for a year. For Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, who is the supervisor or police officer of the three Lasem temples, especially the Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple as the oldest temple of Lasem, the temple is a place to maintain culture: both Chinese culture and Javanese culture. Regarding Javanese culture, it is related to the desire to respect ancestors. Mr. Rudy stated that when his parents died, there was also a priest who came with the intention of leading Christian prayers but according to the family agreement, Mr. Rudy finally insisted on leading Confucian prayers because Mr. Rudy has the principle to maintain Chinese tradition. Mr. Sie Hwie Djan has a principle not to sell religion and prefers to maintain Chinese culture. His grandfather, whose mother is a Javanese, advised him to make friends with Javanese people, if neighbors, especially Javanese people, have a celebration though they are busy, they must take the time to come. At the Lasem temple, he still maintains *gamelan* and *wayang* held at the temple. According to Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, as long as he is alive, *wayang* and *gamelan* will still be played in the temple, because based on the teachings of his ancestors, the Javanese in Lasem are considered as elder brothers who should not be forgotten, come together and work together. If there is an event at the temple, gamelan music and gongs must be used (See Fig. 11.).



**Fig. 11:** *Gamelan* and Singer of Tjoe Ann Kiong Temple  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

They love the Javanese way of life. Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, for example, admitted that when he had listened to *gamelan* and songs with music he liked, he could sleep on a mat close to the *gamelan* musicians. The Lasem Chinese also held festivities at their homes following the

usual Javanese rituals, especially for family rituals such as births, marriages and deaths. According to Mr. Sie Hwie Djan, the acculturation between Javanese culture and Chinese culture has indeed become a tradition in Lasem. Therefore, what distinguishes the Lasem native Chinese from those who are not Lasem Chinese is the Lasem Chinese if they have a work for celebrating something, whether it's a wedding, birthday, or death always calculate the day according to the calculation of the Javanese calendar.

What is unique is that the Lasem Chinese loves the gamelan more than the Javanese in general. Moreover, on December 15, 2021, the UNESCO has designated gamelan as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Gamelan* has long been a part of the daily life of people in various regions in Indonesia, continues to be studied, developed, and passed down from generation to generation.

In the spatial context as a place to maintain tradition, it is based on values: respect for parents and ancestors, respect for elders, tolerance.

### The Concept and Meaning of Survival of Form and Space of Lasem Chinatown

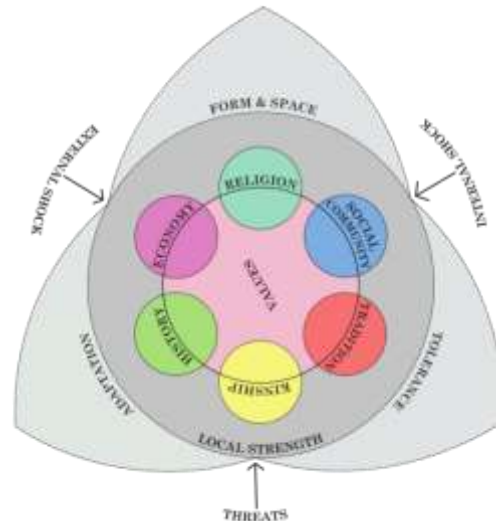
The theme of regional space that persists and is always present in every unit of observation is space as a place to maintain cultural heritage. The existence of this space shows that at the micro level of the area there are actions and behaviors to maintain the existence of the space. In order to know the role of space in maintaining the existence of the Chinatown area, further exploration is needed on the space that represents the existence of the Chinatown area. The next analysis is the concept of the spatial meaning of the Chinatown area of Lasem. From the 18 regional spatial themes, they were grouped again into major themes based on the characteristics and uniqueness of each and three unique themes were found and have characteristics that build concepts. The three spatial concepts are:

1. Space Concept of Tolerance: Space of Togetherness and Space of Understanding. The Space of Togetherness caused by the Chinese community and Javanese Santri always sit together and carry out effective dialogue so as to create a harmonious life. So, these people are not easily provoked by conflict. In the Space of understanding there are some understandings as follows: Understanding between adherents of the Confucian/Buddhist religion; Understanding between batik entrepreneurs; Understanding between batik entrepreneurs and batik craftsmen; Understanding between inn keepers; Understanding between innkeepers, batik entrepreneurs, and cafe entrepreneurs; Understanding between the Superintendent of the Temple/Monastery and the Kyai; Understanding between the Chinese community and the Javanese Muslim;
2. Space Concept for Local Strength: Local Strength of Form and Space of Lasem Chinatown including the Heritage Building. The local strength of heritage building, based on Rembang Regent Decree Number 432/2013/2020 dated 24 September 2020 concerning the Determination of the Plawangan Site, Bonang Site, and the Lasem Ancient City Cultural Heritage Area. The government's support for managing the Chinatown area of the Heritage City of Lasem, which has begun in early 2021, adds to the potential strength of the form and space; and
3. Space Concept for Adaptation (External Factor Adaptation Space and Internal Factor Adaptation Space), several events and political situations occurred in Lasem either in the form of external or internal shocks, which had a great influence on the Chinese community. However, with the ability to adapt to the political situation, although some left Lasem, a small number were still able to adapt and survive.

From the concept of the meaning of the space for the survival of the Lasem Chinatown, there are three groups of spaces, namely: the concept space of tolerance, the concept space for local strength and the concept space for adaptation. All the three groups of spaces are supported by sixth power namely:

1. The power of History Space, the arrival of the Chinese community in the 14th century and the union of the Chinese community with the santri community in Lasem who together fought against the Dutch had supported the ancient historical bond that connected them;
2. The power of Tradition Space; there is a sense of belonging to the Lasem culture built by Muslim and Chinese figures in history that are in their memories. Therefore, the santri community highly respects Chinese culture in Lasem and vice versa. This fact shows a sense of shared ownership and has implications for preserving and caring for shared cultures and traditions. The Chinese also love the Javanese way of life. It is evident that the Lasem Chinese people like *gamelan*, *wayang*, and *keris*. On December 15, 2021, UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, the United Nations agency in charge of education, science, and culture, has designated gamelan as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage;
3. The power of Economic (The power of Batik Space, Developing New Business, Fulfilling the Needs of Regional Neighbors), the economic potential of the Lasem area, one of which is the presence of Chinese community settlements and the existence of cultural arts typical of the Lasem region in the form of the Lasem batik handicraft industry. Batik is an intangible cultural heritage of Indonesia which has been recognized by UNESCO on October 2, 2009. The government's support in establishing Lasem City as a Fashion City in 2022 also adds to the potential strength of Lasem's batik;
4. The power of Religion Space, for Chinese people according to the beliefs of Confucian teachings, respect for gods, ancestors and heroes who are considered important is the main thing. They believe that devotion to parents and ancestors will bring good luck;
5. The power of Social Community Space, the various uniqueness offered by the City of Lasem make this city has its own charm for visitors who come. The city of Lasem is known as the funnel of the Little China, the City of Batik, the City of Santri, the City of Salt, and the City of Maritime. With the potential of Lasem City which is quite a lot to encourage the emergence or birth of various communities including: *Kopi Lelet* Community, *Kesengsem Lasem* Community, Lasem Heritage Culture Community, Communication Forum of Lasem, Lasem Community Association (Pawala), *Batik Lasem* Community, *Batik Tiga Negeri* Community, and others;
6. The power of Kinship Space, most of the Chinese married Javanese Muslims who eventually became affiliated with Muslim-based *pesantren*. Then, it creates a strong kinship bond. The existence of Islamic boarding schools and kampong Kauman in the middle of the Chinatown area and the resilience of the Chinese community there became the driving force for the occurrence of this kinship bond.

For the result, there are three elements behind the occurrence of the survival of form and space of Lasem Chinatown, namely: the power of tolerance, the power of adaptation and the power of physical character. The three elements are supported by the sixth local powers, namely: history power, economy power, tradition power, religion power, kinship power, and social community power. In the center of all the survival, there are values of Lasem people who are certainly different from others so as to form a Chinatown that is quite unique (See Fig. 12). These Values are based on: Yin-Yang School (Feng Shui), Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Respect for ancestors (Ji Zhu), Kinship (Jia Zhu), Food (She Er), Togetherness (He Gong), Devotion and Faithfulness (Xiaoa Zhong), Harmony (Zhong Yong).



**Fig. 12:** Theoretical Structure of Survival of Form and Space of Lasem Chinatown  
Source: M. Maria Sudarwani, Edi Purwanto, R. Siti Rukhayah

## Conclusion

The survival of the form and space of the Lasem Chinatown area is a distinctive character and becomes the identity of the Chinatown area that can withstand and respond to shocks (both internal and external). The theme of area space that persists and is always present in every observation unit is space as a place to maintain cultural heritage. In space exploration, it is known that space as a place to maintain cultural heritage contributes to maintaining the survival of the Chinatown area. The existence of the space as a place to maintain cultural heritage shows that at the micro-level of the area there are actions and behaviors to maintain the existence of the space. The reasons behind the survival of the Lasem Chinatown area to this day include the following: the sustainability of the Lasem Chinatown form and space, the strength of tolerance, and the strength of adaptation. In the theoretical construction that explains the phenomenon of the survival of the Lasem Chinatown area, it can be seen there is a core that becomes the basis of it. The core of the sustainability of the form and space of Lasem's Chinatown, the Strength of Tolerance, and the Strength of Adaptation which are the concepts of the resilient, are the values of the Lasem people which form an attitude of tolerance.

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