



Mythologization of The Goddess Mazu: Readings through Spacial Setting and Activity in the Interior of Cu An Kiong Temple

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the myth of the Goddess Mazu in Lasem City, Central Java. The research was conducted by observing the interior space at Cu An Kiong (CAK), the oldest temple in Lasem City. This study uses a verbal communication approach from Rapoport (1982) and a cultural approach from Koentjaraningrat (2015) to explore human relations with their environment and explain phenomena that exist in the research object. The research found that there is an exaltation space in this Mazu temple; this space is placed on the axis of space and time, it is to see the meaning of the space that has been built is practiced by the whole community, both the Chinese and the Javanese ethnicities, in a continuous flow of time from the first time the temple was built until now, as well as providing an interpretation of the phenomenon which are actually happened in Lasem. Based on the research, it can be concluded that the exaltation space shows the mythical practice of the Goddess Mazu by the local community, both Chinese and Javanese ethnicities. The mythology of Goddess Mazu, or Mak Co, is the protector of fishermen, sailorman, and common people in Lasem.

Keywords: Goddess Mazu; Cu An Kiong temple; interior design, mythology

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INTRODUCTION

Talking about Chinese culture in Lasem will not be meaningful without discussing Cu An Kiong temple, a place of worship built five centuries ago by immigrants from China. The interior of this temple is a rich Chinese cultural heritage with beautiful interior details and ornamentation and is still well preserved today and is visited by many congregations of the general public. Pratiwo (2010) states that temples are an important element in Chinese tradition,

and Hadinonto (2001) says that temples in this city can become landmarks of the city of Lasem. Cu An Kiong Temple is the biggest, most beautiful, and oldest temple in Lasem. Here resides Dewi Mazu or Tian Shang Sheng Mu, in local terms referred to as Mak Co, as the goddess or guardian angel of this place of worship. They are considering the title of Cu An Kiong temple as the largest, most beautiful, and oldest temple in Lasem and in Java in general, research on Cu An Kiong temple with its Mak Co is important to do.

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Many experts have conducted studies on Chinese art, interior architecture, history, and culture in Lasem, such as Iskandar Y. and Topan, M. A. (2018), who wrote about the characteristics of the Chinatown area. Pratiwo (2010), in his book, also explains a lot about traditional Chinese architecture. Handinoto et al. (2005) also analyze Lasem as a city with Chinese nuances in their article. Many other experts also discuss acculturation (Nurhajarini, D. R. et al., 2015, Atabik, A., 2015, Sudarwani et al., 2018, Pradhana R. et al., 2020); there are also explained history (Unjiya, MA., 2008, Darajadi, 2008) and also explained about conservation in Lasem (Wulaningrum, SD., 2017). However, these various writings still leave gaps that have not been discussed, namely the meaning of the Cu An Kiong temple with Mak Co, the Goddess of its inhabitants.

This study was conducted to complement existing studies and specifically discuss the interior of the Cu An Kiong temple and relate it to Mak Co or Dewi Mazu, the resident of the main temple in Lasem city. The discussion is carried out by connecting three things: the existing spatial settings, the activities carried out, and the values shown in the interior of the Cu An Kiong temple. With these three things, we can draw the meaning of the space that is built, and then the meaning that appears is related to the time axis to see how long this culture has been practiced. In this further meaning, the mythical theory of Mak Co in Lasem is found, which is the final result of reading the interior of the Cu An Kiong temple through its spatial settings and activities.

This paper argues that the presence of a room for the exaltation of a figure, in this case, Dewi Mazu, accompanied by activities of worship, reverence, and purification of her, which are practiced continuously for a long time, can foster myths about Mazu. The practice of worshipping Mak Co is demonstrated by presenting a *kimsin* (statue) of this Goddess and placing it on the main altar of Cu An Kiong temple. It decorates the Mazu altar and the main

hall with beautiful and luxurious interior details, worships and gives offerings to Mak Co every day, and guards and cares for the sacredness of Mak Co's *kimsin* carefully and strictly. The worship and purification aimed at Mak Co have been practiced continuously for a long time, not only by Chinese community groups but also by the Javanese people who live in Lasem. Thus, a myth was built against Mak Co or Dewi Mazu, a goddess from China who protects fishermen, sailors, and coastal communities in Lasem.

The paper will explain how the mythical Goddess Mazu is practiced by the local community, both Chinese and Javanese. Through existing interior design art and other cultural events, it is hoped that it can reveal the mythology of Goddess Mazu, or Mak Co, as the protector of fishermen, sailors, and ordinary people in Lasem.

METHOD

The observation is focused on the special setting and activities found at the Cu An Kiong (CAK) temple in Lasem to understand the myth of Goddess Mazu or Mak Co. Data analysis was carried out using the theory of non-verbal communication (Rapoport, 1982) related to human relations with their environment and the theory of cultural acculturation (Koentjaraningrat, 2015), which explained the phenomenon found at the temple in its textual aspect, rituals, and cultural practices.

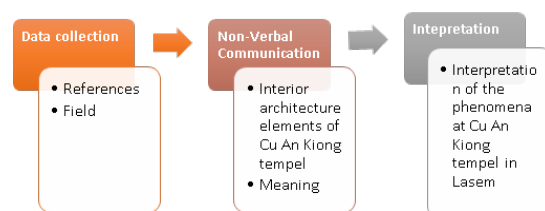


Figure 1. Research Flow

Rapoport (1977: 8-47) stated that there is a direct relationship between the design of human residential spaces and the

culture they practice. Here there is a continuous linear relationship between culture, way of life, values, norms, activities, and system settings. Thus, a socio-cultural structure and organization of society can be reflected in the structure and organization of its living space. Rapoport also said that an interior architectural phenomenon in a specific area is the design of the built environment, which is basically an organization or arrangement of space, time, meaning, and communication, which contains thoughts and considerations on the natural environment, perceptions of community to the environment, and the uniqueness of culture and values held by the community that owns it. Koentjaraningrat (2015) states that acculturation is a social process that arises when a group of people with a specific culture is confronted with elements from a foreign culture. These foreign cultural elements are then slowly accepted and processed into their own culture without losing their original culture.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tian Shang Sheng Mu and Cu An Kiong Temple

Cu An Kiong temple means "temple of Mercy and Peace." This name symbolizes a goddess placed in the temple, namely the Tian Shang Sheng Mu goddess, Dewi Mazu, or her local name, Mak Co. In the Chinese religion, the Mazu goddess is popular, and her role is recognized by the state and the clerical elite (Zhang, Y, 2019). She is the patron goddess of fishermen and sailors. She comes from Fujian, China.

According to legend, Tian Shang Sheng Mu was a daughter with spiritual powers that were able to save her father from danger when he was at sea. She was later known as a goddess; with her magical powers, she saved the royal ship heading to Korea (Heler, 2020). At first, Mazu was the local Goddess of a fishing village in Fujian, then during the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties, Mazu was promoted, and her myth became part of the state ideology. The ways used to promote Mazu are

by giving imperial titles, lists of sacrifices, and building official temples in honor of the Goddess Mazu (Zhang, Y., 2019).

Based on this brief explanation, it can be concluded that Mak Co, who was in CAK, was a protective Goddess for the Chinese immigrants who, at that time, started building settlements in Lasem. So, on the one hand, these migrants need protection from Goddess Mak Co while at sea while traveling back and forth from China to Lasem; they also hope for protection from Mak Co where they live and start a new life in Lasem (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Painting of Goddess Mazu hovering above the sailing boat (Source: Ruitenbeek, 1999)

The basis of Chinese belief is "Glorify the sky (God - Tian) and honor the ancestors (Zu or Shen). Tian as creator is only one, but Zu or Shen become many according to their respective duties as Tian's assistants in managing this universe (Setiawan, E., 1990). They are given names according to their powers. Heler (2020) explains how these gods and goddesses were born, mature, and finally bestowed with spiritual power, making their deities. As an open religion, many experts claim that Chinese people are really pragmatic in worshiping Gods-Goddesses in their life, bringing them into their settlement. The community will come to a consensus on which Gods or Goddesses they'll bring into the settlement, and the chosen one/s will then place within the community's temple (*klenteng*). Just like Mak Co in Lasem, it's completely within logic that the Goddess or figure placed within the temple of CAK follows the

life dynamic faced by the Chinese community as well as the agreement made during the time. Setiawan further explained that the Taoist temple founded by the Emperor was called "gong"; this term is also used by the temples in Lasem Cu an Gong or Cu An Kiong. Thus it can be said that Cu An Kiong is the official temple of the Chinese Emperor.

In Indonesia, there are many temples worshipping Goddess Mazu. Along the Javanese north coast in Banten, Jakarta, Tuban, Lasem, Rembang, Gresik, and Sumenep. Meanwhile, these temples can be found outside Java in Kubu Raya - West Kalimantan, Makassar, and Manado. Seeing the names of the cities, i.e., port cities, it can be concluded that this Goddess Mazu is connected to the sailing activities of the Chinese travelers and explorers during the time. In this world, several most notable temples of Goddess Mazu can be found in Singapore, Taiwan, San Francisco, United States, and Melbourne, Australia. Research by Wang et al. said that in Taiwan, the Mazu Temple and its festivals are visited by many tourists, such as; leisure travelers, cultural enthusiasts, religious pragmatists, and devout believers (Wang, K.Y. et al. 2020).

The term Mak Co as the local name of Mazu or Tian Shang Sheng Mu, has been used by the people of Lasem for a long time, and people in this city only know of this name of the Goddess and no other names. According to Mr. Tri, a local resident, the term Mak Co means Honored Grandma (*Simbah Putri*). The words 'Mak' and 'Co' both mean grandma. Mak Co received state titles from the ruling dynasties in China, such as Celestial Consort of Illustrious Manifestation who Protects the State and Guard the People (1299), Glorious Response, Magnimous Humanity (1400-an), and many more. These titles are official imperial titles (Zhang, Y., 2019).



Figure 3. Mak Co's statue in the temple altar of Cu An Kiong (Sources: Budiarti, 2021)

In previous research, it is mentioned that in visualizing the gods and goddesses in two- or three-dimensional artworks, specific values or characters can be observed from the patterns and gestures, accessories, paraphernalia, expression, as well as decorative ornaments. These forms represent certain ideas and meanings attached to the gods and goddesses, and their purpose is to differentiate a god/goddess from the rest (Goldamer, 2018, as cited in Susilo, 2019). The research conducted by Susilo on the statues of gods and goddesses in the temples in Indonesia showed the same conclusion. It is also mentioned that certain characters visualize some gods-goddesses to enhance their special function (Susilo, 2019). For example, the face of Mak Co. As one of the goddesses in the Chinese pantheon, Mak Co is very popular and exalted (Zhang, Y., 2021). Her face is calm, serene, and motherly, and this can represent her loving and patron quality.

There are five statues of Mak Co in the temple of CAK. All five are placed on the altar in the temple's main hall. This main hall with the altar stands at the far end of the temple's building. The wall surrounding the altar is divided into three segments, the middle is for Mak Co, while the left and right, respectively, are for Gia Lam Ya and Hok Tik Tjing. The front of the altar is adorned with a table and carpet. This area is for praying and kneeling in front of the altar. It can be seen from the picture that the table and carpet for the middle

altar that's for Mak Co are bigger compared to the two other altars. This main hall of the temple of CAK is the most majestic and luxurious structure in the temple and is relatively preserved.



Figure 4. The altar of Hok Tik Tjing Sin (Earth God) by the north of Mak Co's altar (Source: Budiarti, 2021)



Figure 5. The altar of Goddess Mazu or Mak Co with its altar table and offering table (Sources: Budiarti, 2021)

The altar is made up of a 1-meter-high table with a house-shaped box that has a hole in the middle. Within this hole is Mak Co's statue. The wall of the altar is made of carved wood, painted in gold color, and is ornamented with embroidered drapes. In front of the altar is another table made of wood and covered with an embroidered tablecloth, where offering food is placed commonly (or daily).

The statue of Mak Co itself is shown wearing a traditional Chinese costume with a drooping robe covering almost the whole body of the statue. According to our informant, this costume is a present from a worshiper who felt blessed by Mak Co. The costumes can be ordered directly from China or made in Indonesia. During this research (2020/2021), Mak Co's costume is a yellow robe embroidered in dragon and fireball patterns, with a red pleat and golden crown.

The statue is made of bronze-colored wood. In Heller's article (2020), it is mentioned that the statue of Goddess Mazu is usually carried during a sail, kept by the captain in the ship's hold. This way, the sailors and fishermen can hope for protection and safety from Goddess Mazu.



Figure 6. Statues of Mak Co in CAK, with different costumes when brought outside the temple (Sources: Budiarti, 2021)

Mak Co's statues are sacred. It is usually forbidden to photograph these statues. It is said that capturing the statues into images can be bought about the disastrous or unpleasant incident. The rule is carried out during the research's data gathering, where the researcher couldn't take Mak Co's statues' photograph and had to be accompanied by the temple keeper, Cik Lin, when inside the main hall. Cik Lin keeps reminding the researcher not to take any photos. Mak Co in CAK can be said to be always guarded and monitored.

This treatment is vastly different from Goddess Mazu's statues in other places. People can take pictures of those Goddess Mazu statues without a problem. Moreover, Goddess Mazu is materialized as an enormous 40 meters high statue in Tian Jin. As a matter of fact, this prohibition against taking pictures and the act of erecting this statue are ways to honor the Goddess, but in different forms.

At the present time, Mak Co is no longer solely connected with marine life. However, in everyday life, many people in Lasem pray to Mak Co to ask for a lot

of things, such as finding spouses, graduating from school, asking for recovery from illness, and even asking for the charm to make them rich. In addition, they often perform a ritual to ask for protection from Mak Co before they sail to fish.

The non-Chinese or non-Chinese descendant fisher community in Lasem (*wong mbelah*), since then until now, whatever their faith, always visit the Taoist Temple to ask for Mak Co blessings before they sail to fish. They ask for blessings so that they can catch a ton of fish. So they feel somewhat lacking if they don't visit Mak Co Dasun Temple (CAK) before they sail to the sea (Swie Lan, 11 February 2021).

The big celebration involving Mak Co is the Chinese New Year, the Lampion Festival as part of the Chinese New Year celebration, Goddess Mak Co birthday, and the temple anniversary. This parade or celebration in Chinese, called *Xu Jian* literally means "wheeling the environment," similar to *jut bio* - go outside the temple or *jiao keng* - go around the neighborhood. With several terms above, *xu jian* can be described as carrying Kim Sin (the Goddess who lives within the temple) to go outside the temple to clean the neighborhood from bad influences or negative spirits.

An informant said that the tradition of parading Mak Co in a carnival had been long run in Lasem, as stated by previous researchers who studied Lasem (Handinoto & Hartono, 2005; Pratiwo, 2010; Atabik, A., 2016). They recorded the same thing; however, nobody can say when this *xu jian* tradition started to be performed.

As the first god/goddess to be homed within the temple in Lasem, Mak Co, together with temple CAK became the honorable Goddess and was considered to have greater power than the gods/goddesses within other temples across Lasem. This cannot be separated from the tradition in Chinese culture, which highly cherishes their ancestors.

The Space of Exaltation

The following part will deliver the

reading of the meaning thoroughly toward the physical as well as the non-physical phenomenon we discovered in the field, namely about Mak Co or goddess Mazu in temple CAK. Thus, a deeper exploration of meaning is carried out by using Rapoport's theory. The theory says that there is a chain of linear cross-cultural relationships to a specific setting system (culture-life view - values - lifestyle - activity system - spatial order system), so that the structure and organization of the socio-cultural community will be reflected in the structure and organization of the space in which they live (Rapoport, 1977).

The chain of analysis mentioned above is then narrowed down into a triangular meaning of space, connecting three important things in interior architecture: spacial setting, activity, and value.

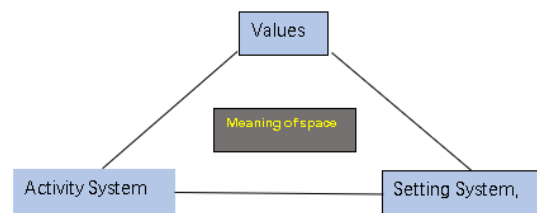


Figure 7. Triangular Schematic Relationship between Activity System, Setting System, and Values (Sources: Triatmodjo, S., 2021)

Based on the description that has been presented on the front and considered the reading of the meaning scheme above, a table of discussion about the discovery space can be arranged as follows (Table 1).

Broadly speaking, there are eight finding spaces whose meaning is narrowed into one space, namely the Space of Exaltation (*Peluhuran*). The term *Peluhuran*, from the origin of the word *luhur* (sublime), is defined as something good, high, or noble. There is also the word *leluhur* (ancestor) which means parents or respected predecessors. The *Peluhuran* Room is where the Chinese community in Lasem pays respects and glorifies Mak Co, prays for blessings to Mak Co, and purifies Mak Co. Every year Mak Co is taken around the village or town so that his strength and positive energy can drive away the evil for-

Table 1. The Relation between the Setting System, Activity System, Value, and The Meaning of The Rooms

Setting System/Rooms	Activity System	Value	Meaning
The altar of Mak Co with wider, more magnificent, and more beautiful space	The altar of Mak Co/Goddess Mazu is made bigger, prettier, and more luxurious	Exaltation	
The space to do prayer to Mak Co	Mak Co is asked for her blessing, prayed to	Exaltation	
The space of Mak Co where taking pictures is forbidden	It is forbidden to take pictures of Mak Co	Purification	
The space (Temple CAK) guarded & monitored	The altar is carefully guarded against vandalism	Purification	
The space/table of offerings	Mak Co is presented with offerings, incense, foods, and murals	Exaltation	Space of Exaltation
The space of inheritance is still authentic	The main altar in the temple is maintained authentic	Exaltation	
Long historical remembrance (<i>peluhuran</i>) space	In total, the ritual of offering has been carried out for 400 -500 years continuously	Endless belief	

ces in the village/city so that people can be protected and safe from harm. This is based on the belief that Mak Co has the power to love and protect. For nearly 400 or 500 years of the presence of CAK and Mak Co temple in Lasem, worship ceremonies and offerings to Mak Co continue as well as processions to ward off evil forces and present the power of protection and prosperity fortunes are carried out routinely in the city of Lasem and especially the CAK temples.

The Myth of Mak Co as the Loving Goddess of the Sea

In tracing the origin of the Mak Co's name, it is known that it comes from Mazu or Tian Shang Sheng Mu, a goddess who rules the ocean. As written by Heller (2020), this story about the magic of Goddess Mazu is a myth that dates back to the 10th century and first appeared in Fujian province on the east coast of China. This myth is widely believed by Chinese fishermen, sailors, and explorers. In the past, some of these sailors made goodwill to Java island, and some anchored, landed and settled in Lasem.

Mak Co is an adaptation of the name of Mazu Goddess or Tian Shang Seng Mu into Javanese. In this adaptation, the story

or myth about the power of Goddess Mazu does not change, what has changed is the name, namely from Tian Shang Sheng Mu or Mazu to Mak Co, by adjusting the Javanese pronunciation.

According to Dananjaya (1994), quoting from Bascom (1965-b), the function of the myth is explained as follows.

"Mite is a folk prose story that is considered to have really happened and is considered sacred by the storyteller. A mite is characterized by gods or demigods. Events that occur in another world, or in a world that is not as we know it today, and occurred in the past" (Bascom, 1965-b, in Dananjaya, 1994).

In another book, Bascom also mentions the function of folklore, including myth, there are four functions

"... as follows: a) as a projection system [projective system], as a means of reflecting the imagination of a collective, b) as a means of ratifying cultural institutions and institutions, c) as a means of children's education [pedagogical device], and d) as a coercive or supervisory tool so its collective members will always obey that community norms", (Bascom, 1965-a, in Dananjaya, 1994).

Referring to this definition, the story about the greatness and magic of the Mazu Goddess and her helpful and compassiona-

to nature to fishermen and Chinese sailors and explorers is a myth originating from Fujian and then landing in Lasem along with traders and sailors. This myth of the Mazu Goddess is strengthened by making a house, namely the CAK temple, and then practicing religious and cultural rituals related to the Mazu Goddess. It is in this way that the Mazu Goddess myth then carries out its function, as Bascom puts it: namely as a projection of collective imagination, as a means of validating social institutions, as a means of educating children, and as a norm followed by members of the Chinese community in Lasem.

The results of this study indicate that the Goddess Mazu myth does not only function in the Chinese community, but this myth also functions in some local communities, Javanese. The previous section explained how religious rituals and cultural rituals related to Mazu Goddess were followed by the Chinese in Lasem and practiced by the local community. Another thing is the change in the name of the character from a formal Chinese name to a name that feels more local, and the first is Tian Shang Sheng Mu, more familiarly called Goddess Mazu and later became Mak Co; this word is from Hokkien but feels more local because of the word "Mak."

The cultural practice carried out by the Chinese and then followed by the local people is actually a process of acculturation, which is a social process that arises when a group of people with a certain culture is confronted with elements of a foreign culture. The foreign culture is gradually accepted and processed into its own culture without causing the loss of the cultural elements of the group itself (Koentjaraningrat, 2015). Similarly, what happened

to the Goddess Mazu myth, this myth from China was slowly accepted in the Lasem societies, which was shown by the participation of local communities in activities to characterize Goddess Mazu or Mak Co.

Table 2 shows that there has been a myth of Mak Co by the Lasem people. The Chinese and local communities have believed Mak Co as the Goddess of the loving ruler of the ocean, who can give help and protection to anyone who asks for her.

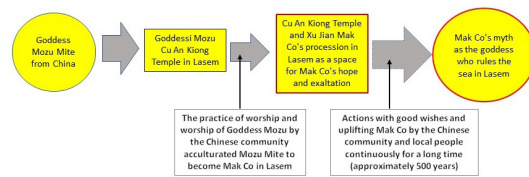


Figure 8. The Making of the Mak Co or Goddess Mazu Myth (Sources: Triatmodjo, S., 2021)

Figure 8 shows in more detail the myth that Mak Co can be awakened by Goddess Mazu, a mythological goddess who rules the seas from Fujian, China, to Lasem. The Chinese community in Lasem chose Mazu Goddess as the main occupant of the Cu An Kiong temple (16th century). The practice of worshiping Goddess Mazu at the CAK temple by the Chinese community and at the same time acculturating Chinese culture by the local Javanese community, which was shown, among other things, by the practice of worshiping Goddess Mazu by the local community and choosing the nickname Mak Co instead of using the name Goddess Mazu.

The series of explanations above, both events, and processes that occur as well as spaces with artifacts that are integrated with the Chinese community and their

Table 2. Relationship of Space Meaning, Cultural Practices, and Advanced Interpretation

Meaning of readable space	Cultural practices by the Lasem people	Interpretation of the two meanings of space as research findings
Exaltation Space	The meaning of space is embodied in the act of exaltation Mak Co, which has been carried out by many people continuously for a long time (400 years)	The myth of Mak Co as the Loving Goddess of the Sea,

interactions with local communities in Lasem, are pieces of evidence that show that there has been acculturation of the myth of Tian Shang Sheng Mu or Mazu Goddess into the myth of Mak Co, where this myth is not only recognized by the Chinese community but also a myth for the local Lasem community. Whereas the CAK temple and the procession of Goddess Mazu or Mak Co, in a spatial setting interpreted as Mak Co's exaltation space, have been present and practiced by the Lasem community (both Chinese and local) continuously for approximately 400 years. Based on all these facts, it can be interpreted that there has been a myth of Mak Co as the Goddess of the loving ruler of the ocean by the Lasem people in general.

CONCLUSSION

This research has found that the establishment of the Mak Co or Goddess Mazu myth is a direct result of the cultural practice of worshiping, revering, and consecrating Mak Co for nearly 500 years. This cultural practice is shown through the creation of an exaltation space at the Cu An Kiong temple. The exaltation space is visually embodied in the interior of the temple which is made so beautifully, full of luxurious carvings and decorations, and carefully maintained and strictly guarded. Kim Sin of Goddess Mazu is placed on the main altar of the spacious and luxurious temple, every day she is always worshiped and given offerings of fruit, food and drinks. The myth of Goddess Mazu as a compassionate sea goddess and protector of the fishermen, sailors, traders, and common people is not only believed by the Chinese community but also practiced by the Javanese people who live in Lasem.

The research that has been carried out provides additional understanding that if cultural interaction is carried out continuously and has lasted for a long time, it can give rise to deep and dense cultural acculturation, namely acculturation that manifests not only at the physical level but can penetrate into the realm of spi-

ritual values. Thus this proves once again that the cultural interaction of two or more social groups, when carried out slowly and little by little, will actually result in a deep mixing, superior culture melting into the values, beliefs and views of other cultures.

This study is still limited to the Cu An Kiong temple interior and the daily activities that take place within it. A more comprehensive study is needed to document all activities at the temple over the course of a full year. Additionally, this research has not fully recorded the physical features of both the interior and architecture of the Cu An Kiong temple. Another limitation of this research is that the primary informant, Mr. Gandor, who is an elder in the Chinese community and an administrator of the Tridharma Association, is elderly and may not always provide clear information and data. Regarding the last matter, the recording of knowledge, information, and data about Chinese culture in Lasem through Mr. Gandor needs to be expedited so that today's society can make notes of them.

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