

THE ROLE OF THE CHINESE DURING THE PHYSICAL REVOLUTION IN PALEMBANG

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ABSTRACT

The role of Chinese people was very important in the struggle for independence during the physical revolution in Palembang from 1945 to 1949. This study aims to understand the efforts of ethnic Chinese during the revolution in Palembang, the form of ethnic Chinese assistance and the role of organizations in fighting for independence during the revolution in Palembang. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a historical analysis method, which involves collecting data from archives, historical documents and interviews. The results of this study indicate that the role of Chinese entrepreneurs is very important in the struggle for independence, in addition to that Chinese organizations were also involved in the struggle for independence in Palembang. This study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of Chinese people in the struggle for independence in Palembang.

Keywords: Role, Chinese ethnicity, Revolution

INTRODUCTION

The news of the proclamation of Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945 only reached Palembang on August 22. The youth in Palembang immediately moved to seize power from the Japanese after hearing the news. On October 8, they managed to defeat Japanese forces and take over many important facilities, such as radio stations, post offices, and government buildings (Mestika, 2003). One of the most important events was the Battle of 5 Days and 5 Nights, which took place from January 1 to January 5, 1947. In this battle, the Indonesian Republican army and soldiers fought against the allied army and Nica, who tried to retake Palembang (Abdullah, 1991).

During the revolution, Palembang became a strategic and important city thanks to the existence of an oil refinery in Plaju. Control of this facility was crucial for the Dutch. To prevent oil refineries from falling into the hands of the enemy, the fighters used scorched earth tactics (Peeters, 1997). The history of Indonesia's independence struggle cannot be separated from the contributions of various ethnic groups that inhabit the archipelago, including the Chinese. Palembang, as one of the important cities in Sumatra, has a long history of ethnic Chinese, who have settled there since the 7th century (Setiono, 2008). Although many Chinese have long lived in Indonesia and have abandoned their Chinese identity and identified themselves as part of indigenous peoples, they are not necessarily considered an integral part of Indonesian society. Traditionally, Chinese people tend to be seen as a homogeneous group, even though they come from different places and ethnicities. Generally, Chinese migrants to Indonesia came from the Fujian and Kwantung areas (Koentjaraningrat, 1975). The Chinese in Palembang played a complex role during Indonesia's independence revolution.

During the revolution, the Chinese community played an important role in various sectors of the economy, including trade in textiles, food, agricultural products, traditional medicines, financial services, and groceries. They take advantage of international networks to import fabrics and textile products, dominating the market in major cities despite being often accused of speculation (Twang, 1998). In the food trade, they act as intermediaries in the distribution of rice, sugar, and cooking oil,

even collaborating with guerrilla fighters to smuggle food into resistance areas, although their main motivation is profit.

Chinese traders were also active in the agricultural trade, buying commodities from local farmers and exporting them to international markets. This, in addition to generating significant foreign exchange, also triggered anti-China sentiment (Ang, 2001). Chinese pharmacies continue to operate as alternative medicine amid the scarcity of Western medicines, and serve as community meeting places (Mackie, 1976). They also offer informal financial services, such as loans and currency exchanges, to fill the void left by the collapse of the banking system (Coppel, 1983). Chinese-owned grocery stores also provide daily necessities and serve as information centers for local communities amid political and economic uncertainty (Lohanda, 2002). Based on this description, this study aims to examine the role of the Chinese during the Physical Revolution in Palembang (1945-1949). The main focus of the study includes analyzing the efforts of the Chinese during the revolution in Palembang and the form of assistance provided by the ethnic Chinese in fighting for independence.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with historical or historical research methods. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand and interpret social phenomena. According to (Creswell, 2014), a qualitative approach is appropriate when researchers want to explore and understand the meaning given by individuals or groups to a social or humanitarian problem. The historical research method was chosen because this research focuses on past events. As stated by (Kuntowijoyo, 2013), it allows this researcher to reconstruct past events critically and analytically based on the available evidence. (Gottschalk, 2008) explained that historical research is the process of critically examining and analyzing past records and relics to reconstruct events that occurred. Based on the explanation above, therefore the research entitled "The Role of the Chinese in the Revolution in Palembang (1945-1949)", the researcher will use the historical method. Because this is very relevant to the research that will be carried out looking at the documents that are owned, it is necessary to study using the historical research method in order to produce a complete historical story.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Chinese Businesses in Palembang during the Physical Revolution

Ethnic Chinese in Palembang have been an integral part of the local trading system since the time of the Srivijaya Kingdom, with their trading activities continuing to grow rapidly until the colonial era (Mubarok, 2021). During the Indonesian independence revolution (1945-1949), their position became very complex as they had to face political uncertainty while maintaining their retail operations in the city's traditional markets. This situation forced them to make significant adaptations in their retail business strategies in the midst of a situation full of social and political tensions (Zed, 2003).

Ethnic Chinese in Palembang control almost all aspects of the wholesale trade, from staple foods such as rice, sugar, and cooking oil to manufactured goods such as textiles and household appliances. Palembang's strategic position as a port city and trade center in South Sumatra provides geographical advantages for this community in building an extensive distribution network. Their

wholesale trade system not only meets local needs in Palembang but also distributes goods throughout South Sumatra and even exports them to neighboring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia (Irwanto, 2011).

The retail business of ethnic Chinese traders in Palembang during the physical revolution was manifested in the trade in rice, a key commodity that dominated the regional market of South Sumatra. They controlled rice distribution lines from the interior to the city center and port, buying directly from farmers and storing rice in large warehouses along the banks of the Musi River. This business model includes milling, sorting, packaging, and distribution to various regions in Sumatra, even exporting to Singapore and Malaysia. The main locations of the rice trade are concentrated in the Cinde Market area and along the road to the Boom Baru port, which facilitates river transportation access. Rice is a major commodity, accounting for about 60% of their total wholesale trade volume, followed by sugar, salt, cooking oil, and other staples (Zed, 2003).

Ethnic Chinese Small Trade Businesses During the Revolution in Palembang

Ethnic Chinese in Palembang have long been an integral part of the city's trade structure since colonial times. During the Indonesian Independence Revolution (1945-1949), small Chinese traders faced significant challenges due to political tensions and armed conflicts that swept through South Sumatra. These small traders generally sell retail, food stalls, grocery stores, and various other small businesses that cater to the daily needs of the local population. Their position is further complicated by the conflict between the Republic of Indonesia and the Netherlands, which is regaining control of several territories (Zed, 2003).

Adaptation strategies are key for small Chinese traders to maintain their businesses amid political uncertainty. They had to be careful in navigating between various warring parties, from the Indonesian government to the Dutch military and various local armed groups. Some merchants chose to support the independence struggle by providing logistics and basic necessities for the fighters, while others sought to maintain neutrality to ensure the continuity of their business. This situation reflects the complex dilemma faced by the Chinese community in choosing a political stance in the midst of the revolution (Irwanto, 2011).

Small-scale Chinese traders in Palembang played an important role in providing logistics for the resistance movement against the return of Dutch colonial rule after surrender to the Japanese. The crucial role of the Chinese community in Indonesia's struggle for independence is often overlooked in national history, but they provided significant support in a variety of roles, including funding the independence movement. They took advantage of the trade network built during the colonial period to distribute aid in the form of medicines, food, and military equipment to freedom fighters in Palembang and its surroundings (Daliman, 2012).

The Great Trading Enterprises of the Chinese During the Physical Revolution

Large-scale import-export trade was a key sector dominated by the ethnic Chinese of Palembang during the revolution. They control strategic commodity trade routes such as rubber, coffee, pepper, and petroleum from the interior of South Sumatra to the international market, especially Singapore and Malaysia. This trade network not only involved significant capital, but also required sophisticated business diplomacy skills in order to operate in the midst of the Dutch

economic blockade. Some Chinese businessmen even have their own fleets to transport this commodity, such as a businessman named Ang, who owns the ships Sri Menanti and Sri Nona for trade to Java and Singapore. This large-scale trade venture is not only economically profitable, but also makes a significant contribution to the foreign exchange reserves of countries that are struggling for independence (Zubir, 2012).

The rubber trade was a leading sector dominated by Chinese merchants in Palembang during the Physical Revolution. They have access to rubber plantations in the interior of South Sumatra and control the distribution chain from farmers to exporters. Rubber is a commodity that is in great demand by the international market, especially for the tire industry and other rubber products. Although official trade routes are often disrupted by conflicts, Chinese traders are able to maintain trade through alternative channels and informal networks that they have built (Ari, 2002).

Their families and business networks were also actively involved in supporting these smuggling operations, creating an organized trading system that was difficult for Dutch intelligence to penetrate (Zed, 2003). The large capital owned by these Chinese businessmen allowed them to finance the purchase of large quantities of weapons and ammunition from the international black market, especially from Singapore and Thailand (Kartodirdjo, 1987). Their investment in the form of large merchant ships allows the transportation of weapons in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of various TNI units in the Sumatra region (Zubir, 2012).

The Role of the Chinese in Palembang in Helping the Military Struggle

Ethnic Chinese in Palembang made a significant contribution in supporting Indonesia's independence struggle through various forms of military and logistical assistance during the 1945-1949 revolution. As a community that has been living in South Sumatra for a long time, they have extensive trade networks and deep geographical knowledge, thus enabling them to provide strategic support for the struggle for independence (Onghokham, 2008). Their contribution was not limited to the financial aspect, but also included direct assistance in military operations and the provision of resources needed by the freedom fighters (Suryadinata, 1999).

Despite the difficult situation, some ethnic Chinese in Palembang made significant contributions in supporting the military struggle of the Republic of Indonesia through various forms of logistical and financial assistance. This assistance includes the provision of much-needed medicines, food, and military equipment for the Republic of Indonesia forces, which are facing limited resources. Chinese merchants with extensive trade networks leveraged their connections to facilitate military procurement, despite facing the risk of arrest and punishment by the Dutch colonial authorities (Zed, 2003).

Financial support was a crucial aspect of the ethnic Chinese contribution to the Palembang revolution. As a group that is generally engaged in trade and has relatively strong economic capabilities, they contribute funds to buy weapons, medicines, and other logistical needs (Suryadinata, 2002). These funds are also used to finance military operations, including transportation, communications, and food supplies for guerrilla fighters in the forests around Palembang. These financial donations are often given secretly through informal networks to avoid detection by colonial authorities (Kwartanda, 2002).

The Role of the Chinese in the Organization During the Revolution in Palembang Organisasi Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH)

Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH) is an organization formed in 1945 as a replacement for Hua Chiao Chung Hui (HCCH) which was established during the Japanese occupation, serving as a liaison organization between the Republic of Indonesia and the Chinese community in various regions, including Palembang. This organization emerged in the context of the transition from the Japanese military government system to the era of Indonesian independence, where the Palembang Syu government structure that was previously controlled by Japan had to adapt to the new political reality. CHTH served as a formal representation of the Chinese community that supported the newly independent Republic of Indonesia, replacing the organizational structure that had previously been subject to Japanese colonial interests (Coppel C., 1983).

CHTH played a crucial role during the physical revolution, maintaining security and stability in the Palembang region. The organization works closely with local governments to prevent riots and horizontal conflicts that could weaken the independence struggle. Through internal diplomacy, CHTH seeks to ease tensions arising from Dutch propaganda aimed at dividing various community groups, including indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. This effort mirrors experiences in other areas, such as Malang, where CHTH figures worked closely with the local population to create peace and prevent people from being deceived by Dutch sheepfighting tactics. (Syafudin, 2019).

In the context of Palembang's socio-political structure during the revolution, CHTH played a crucial role in organizing the support of the Chinese community for Indonesia's struggle for independence. This organization serves as a forum for the Chinese community in Palembang to declare their loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia, while also helping to overcome doubts that may arise from the indigenous population regarding the Chinese community's commitment to the national struggle. CHTH in Palembang also played a role in coordinating various social and political activities that supported efforts to defend independence, including fundraising and logistical support for the revolutionary struggle (Abdullah, 1984).

Organization of the Indonesian Chinese Party

The Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) was founded on September 25, 1932 in Surabaya by Liem Koen Hian (1897–1952), a Peranakan Chinese journalist with an Indonesian nationalist outlook. In September 1932, he founded the first Chinese party, the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI). The PTI was explicitly founded to support the Indonesian nationalist movement that was fighting for independence at the time. Liem Koen Hian was appointed as the chairman of the PTI and made the Sin Tit Po newspaper an unofficial mouthpiece of the organization to voice the political aspirations of ethnic Chinese who were oriented towards Indonesia (Suryadinata, 1986).

When the independence revolution began in August 1945, former PTI activists in Palembang played a role in the formation of new organizations that supported the Republic of Indonesia. They were involved in the formation of Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH) and other organizations that explicitly supported Indonesian independence. The experience and network of organizations they built through PTI became crucial in coordinating support for the Palembang Chinese community in the struggle to defend independence from the Dutch efforts to recolonize Indonesia (Kwartanda, 2008).

During the critical period of the Five Days and Five Nights Battle in Palembang, one of the most decisive battles in defending Indonesian independence in South Sumatra, a number of Chinese community leaders with PTI backgrounds were actively involved in the city's defense efforts. They act as logistics coordinators who connect local traders with the operational needs of combatants, ensuring the continuity of the supply of food, medicine, and other basic necessities for combatants and civilians affected by the war. Some houses and shops belonging to the Chinese community were also used as temporary command posts and shelters for wounded fighters, demonstrating their real commitment to the struggle for independence (Hanafiah D., 1995).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research that has been carried out on the role of the Chinese during the Revolution in Palembang (1945-1949). Therefore, it can be concluded that the following statement is the result of a study obtained through a systematic research process.

1. The Chinese people played an important role in various aspects of life during the revolution, albeit in a position fraught with social and political dilemmas. In the economic aspect, the Chinese community in Palembang plays a major role in the trade sector, both wholesale and retail. They control the distribution network for basic necessities such as rice, sugar, cooking oil, fabrics, and other grocery items. Important markets such as Pasar 16 Ilir, Pasar Cinde, and Pasar Kuto became centers of economic activity dominated by Chinese traders. Despite facing a situation full of uncertainty due to the war and economic blockade, they were still able to carry out trading activities in an adaptive way. The trade network that they have built since the Dutch colonial era, even to foreign countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, allows them to continue to supply the basic needs of the local community and support the economic continuity of the city of Palembang.
2. In the midst of political chaos and armed conflict, some Chinese people also showed direct and indirect involvement in the struggle for Indonesian independence, especially in military and logistical aspects. Although many of them chose to remain neutral in order to maintain the safety and stability of the business, there were a number of Chinese individuals who actively supported the Republican side. This form of support included smuggling weapons and logistics into guerrilla areas, providing hiding places for fighters, and participating in evacuations and medical assistance during the five-day, five-night battle in Palembang in January 1947. Even in very risky situations, some Chinese traders have been known to donate gold, silver, and foreign currency to support the struggle for independence, demonstrating their courage and commitment to the fate of the Indonesian nation.
3. The contribution of the Chinese community is also seen in the field of organization and social activities. Organizations such as Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH) and the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) were established as a forum to strengthen internal solidarity as well as a means to show support for the Republic. These organizations played a role in maintaining the stability of the supply of basic materials, distributing logistics to the fighting areas, and even establishing emergency health facilities that served both the Chinese and indigenous communities. In addition, they also continue to carry out educational activities and open access to schools for the general public. Their role in bridging communication between the Indonesian government and

the Chinese diaspora community in Southeast Asia also had a major impact in gaining international sympathy and support for Indonesia's independence. Although the role and contribution of the Chinese community in Palembang is not always apparent on the front lines of the armed struggle, they play a strategic role in supporting the survival of the community and the struggle of the republic behind the scenes.

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