

# Local Wisdom in Housing and Settlement Planning: A Case Study of Sudiroprajan Chinatown, Surakarta

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## Article

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## Abstract

Local wisdom is essential in urban development planning, for it brings cultural values. Local wisdom in housing and settlements forms special characteristics both in spatial and social aspects. Chinatown is a form of residential area created by Chinese community groups. Sudiroprajan Chinatown is the center of Chinese settlement located in the economic center area of Surakarta City. This study intends to identify and describe local wisdom characteristics in Sudiroprajan Chinatown related to Chinese culture. The qualitative method is used in this study through a literature review and direct observation to analyze the settlement characteristics based on physical and non-physical characteristics. The results show that settlement in Sudiroprajan Chinatown has a linear pattern following the river and road and is influenced by feng shui in arranging the interior and exterior of the housing. Most residents in Sudiroprajan Chinatown work in the trade and services sector, namely by opening businesses in their house buildings or at Pasar Gede. There is also a temple at the intersection of Pasar Gede, which becomes the worship center for Chinese residents in Chinatown. The local wisdom found in Chinatown influences other activities, such as the emergence of economic activities and cultural tourism, which then affect the character and condition of settlements, both physically and non-physically.

**Keywords:** Chinatown; housing; local wisdom; settlement

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## Introduction

Local knowledge is a feature of a civilization that must be preserved as a positive identity and a filter for many harmful characteristics of external culture (Adhitya Hidayat Putra *et al.*, 2021). Local wisdom is defined as a cultural identity that carries symbols of wisdom, such as philosophy and cultural values (Sirajuddin, 2020). Local wisdom is essential in urban planning, especially in developing cities. Local wisdom originates through internal processes and is passed down for a long time as a result of the interaction between humans and their surroundings. This protracted process of evolution will lead to the emergence of a value system that has solidified in the form of common law, belief, and local culture (Vitasurya, 2016). It can help preserve

the commitment to better urban planning (Sedyowati *et al.*, 2023). A city or region's growth is regulated based on the wisdom of its local community (Ali *et al.*, 2019). Local wisdom is elucidated as the basis of postmodern urban design to deal with the complexities of urban planning in the 21st century. Integrating local wisdom with urban and regional planning will bring a more relevant context to sustainability, especially diversity in developing countries.

Local wisdom reflects a community's Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices (Diab *et al.*, 2022). Local wisdom builds solidarity and relationships among multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities, perhaps resolving disputes in a plural society (Sulistono *et al.*, 2019). It is important to maintain the local values in the settlement since they are not entirely maintained in the sense that some previously existed but have not been continued or implemented until now (Julianti Tou *et al.*, 2023a). Siti Rukayah *et al.* (2018) pointed out that local wisdom can be blended with current situations and copied into other regions. In addition, preservation rules must also be implemented to ensure that local values, such as history, customs, and culture, are preserved in order to keep their identity alive (Darmayanti & Bahauddin, 2021).

The culture in Indonesia is very diverse. Every culture that grows in Indonesia comes from tribes and ethnicities that develop to form characteristics. Local wisdom can bring symbolic forms, environmental conservation, and socio-cultural values. Moreover, it will undoubtedly lead to a harmonious housing design if this is applied to the planning strategy to achieve sustainable housing (Sirajuddin, 2020).

One of the ethnic communities in Indonesia that shows ownership of local wisdom is the Chinese. They have a significant role in fostering tolerance and harmony among people. The demonstration of the integration of Chinese cultural elements into the design of their houses shows how they plan for unity, harmonization, and acculturation in Indonesia (Sirajuddin, 2020).

Settlements are shaped by the community's social and cultural standards (Osman *et al.*, 2020). Chinese settlement focuses on building layout patterns and the Chinese community's history of creation. Chinatowns are being marketed for recreational and tourism purposes based on the economic merits of culture, diversity, and multiculturalism in many locations across the world (Sudarwani *et al.*, 2023).

The characteristics and uniqueness found in every Chinese house in Chinatown characterize the local wisdom of the communities. The people of Chinatown still maintain the original elements in the interior and exterior of their houses. The community does not want to lose the original characteristics of their house, so in the renovation or repair stage, they still apply ancient methods and pay attention to Feng Shui principles so that the preservation of the building is maintained until it is passed down to their descendants.

The Chinatown area not only functions as a Chinese settlement but also as a trade and tourism area in Surakarta. The number of shophouses and shops along the road and around Pasar Gede creates an agglomeration of trade areas in the region. The uniqueness of the building and the existence of trade (culinary) make it an attraction to tourists.

Traditional Chinatowns still exist in various places, although their meaning and purpose have evolved. Thus, the value of Chinese traditional culture should be preserved. Previous research in the same study area indicated that Grebeg Sudiro, a tradition of celebration to greet the Chinese New Year in Surakarta City, is a way of preserving ethnic peace in Sudiroprajan Chinatown (Muhammad, 2020). Developing harmony in multiculturalism is a strategy to maintain diversity among Chinese, Javanese, and other cultures (Marhaeni *et al.*, 2019).

The local wisdom in Chinatown is getting stronger so that it can continue to be sustainable and not lose its original characteristics and elements in the principles of Feng Shui. In this context, this study intends to identify local wisdom characteristics in Sudiroprajan Chinatown related to Chinese

culture. The result of this study is expected to be beneficial for stakeholders to evaluate what aspects should be improved to maintain local wisdom value in Sudioprajan Chinatown, Surakarta City.

## Method

The study took place in Sudioprajan Chinatown, Jebres District, Surakarta City with an area of 23 Ha. The existence of Pasar Gede that has been established in 1972, which became the economic center of Chinese people, and ethnic clustering during the Dutch East Indies era became the background of the emergence of Chinatown around Pasar Gede. Sudioprajan Chinatown has functioned as the center of Chinese settlements in Surakarta City. Figure 1 shows the location of Sudioprajan Chinatown.

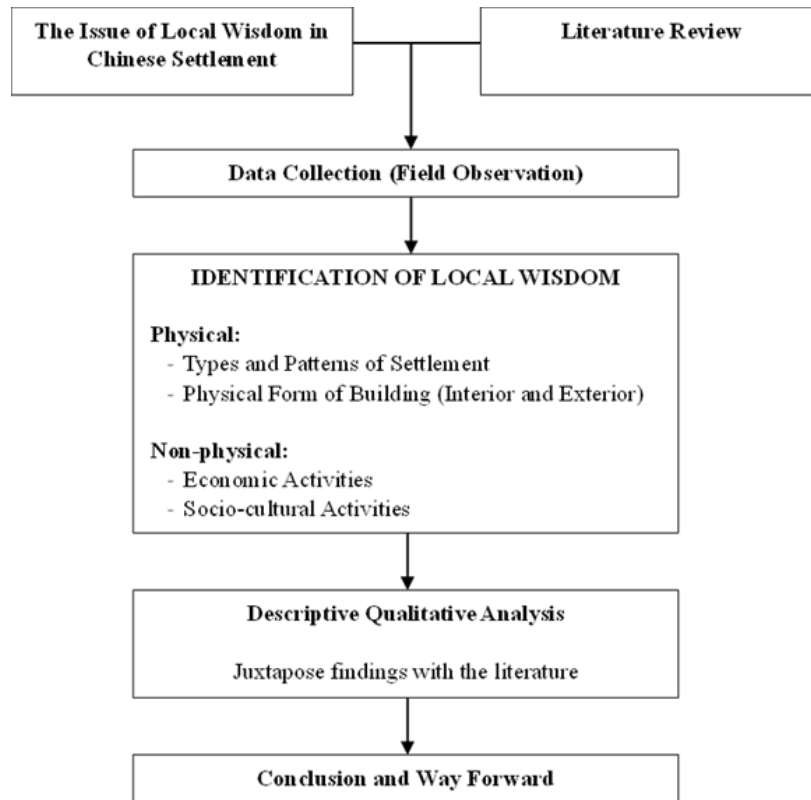


*Figure 1. Location Map of Sudioprajan Chinatown*

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, in which the data is derived from the researchers' experiences and the exploratory literature. This qualitative descriptive study describes the natural condition of a study area, resulting in a commitment to improving that natural condition. Descriptive research is a type of research that aims to describe a particular condition or phenomenon (Damayanti, 2019). The data is presented in the form of a spoken explanation that functions as a summary of the data's instructive substance (Julianti Tou *et al.*, 2023b).

Data was collected in October - November 2023 by field observation to identify the characteristics of housing and settlement in Sudioprajan Chinatown, both physical and non-physical. Physical characteristics consist of types/patterns of settlement and the physical form of the building. Non-physical characteristics observed in this study are economic activities and socio-cultural activities. Theoretical triangulation was carried out by comparing empirical data to theoretical studies.





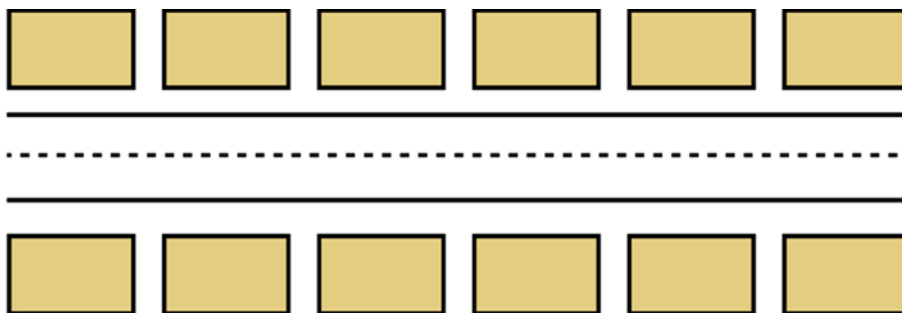
*Figure 2. Research Framework*  
Source: Authors, 2024

## Results and Discussion

### Physical Characteristics

#### Types and Patterns of Settlements

Due to the dense population, Chinatowns are generally located in urban areas or city centers and tend to choose strategic locations. Sudiroprajan Chinatown, located on Jl. RE Martadinata, is a collection of two-story vertical houses lined up in a linear pattern following the main road, with the main door facing the road and opposite other vertical houses and Pasar Gede at the end of the road.



*Figure 3. Linear Pattern in Sudiroprajan Chinatown*  
Source: Authors, 2023

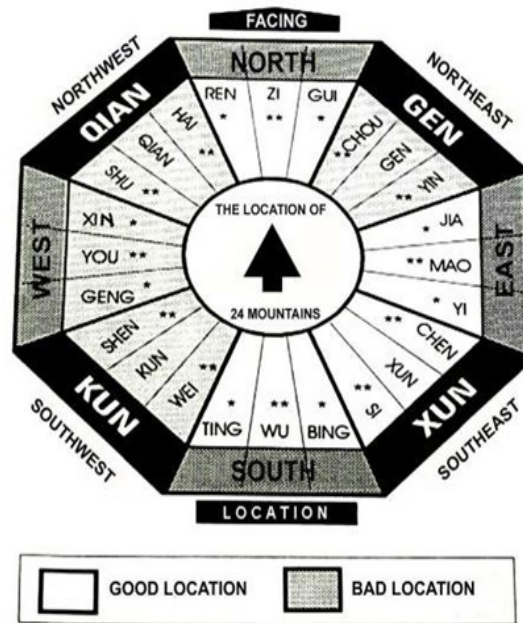
A house will tend to make a linear pattern following the road because easy access to the road is synonymous with easy accessibility. The pattern is influenced by land use in dense areas, so the linear pattern is applied to maximize land use that can contain the density of buildings in that location. In addition, this area has a primary marker, namely, at the intersection of the Pasar Gede clock in the

south, there is a temple, which is a house of worship in Chinatown Village and is ended by a transit node, Jl. RE Martadinata and Jl. Kapten Mulyadi.

The location of Sudiroprajan Chinatown is close to the Pepe River, as the concept of patterns of settlement in Chinatown is formed along the river. Previous research from (Rukayah *et al.*, 2021) found that the Semarang River became the wall to separate the area inside and outside Semarang Chinatown. A study in Thailand also found that Chinese settlements were placed on the banks of the Chao Praya River (Wu *et al.*, 2020).

**Physical Form of the Building**

Based on the primary knowledge of Chinatown housing, namely Feng-Shui science, there is an influence on the physical form of the building, both on the interior and exterior of a house. Most of the buildings in Sudiroprajan Chinatown, in the corridor of Jl. RE Martadinata, have undergone many changes in the shape of their faces to become semi-modern. However, some buildings still maintain their original form based on Feng-Shui science, which is embodied in the shape of the roof, doors, windows, and other ornaments. The following references determine buildings or spaces in feng shui science.



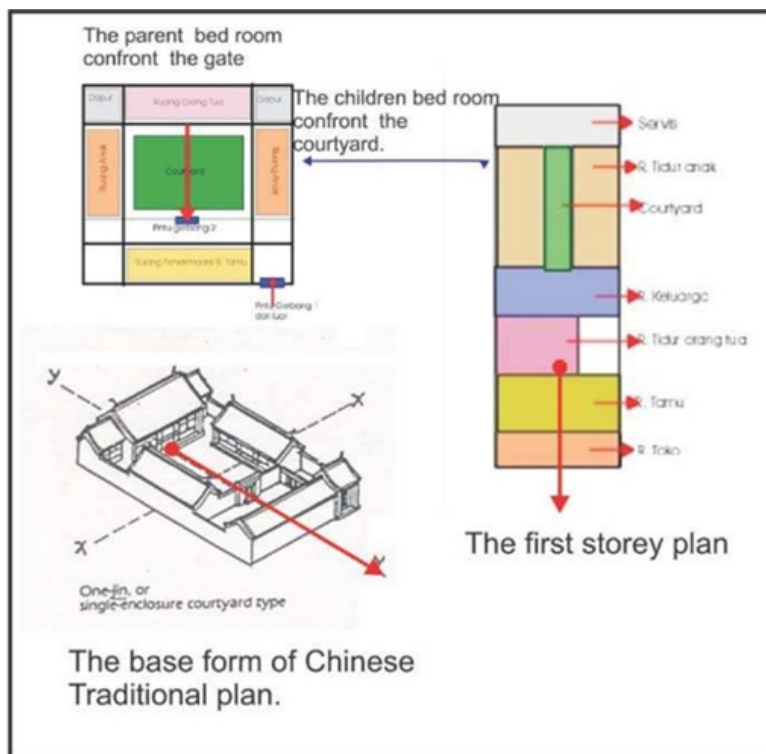
**Figure 4. Luo Pan Compass**  
 Source: Hogianto & Mediatika (2019)

The Luo Pan compass is used as the basic guidance of Feng Shui to determine the best and worst locations for providing energy to the dwelling. According to Chinese belief, structures should not be located at the end of a road, except for places of worship or pagodas, as they are thought to be able to withstand reinforcements (Soetomo *et al.*, 2020). The analysis results obtained on the Sudiroprajan Chinatown Village building are divided into the interior part of the more detailed part of the building and the exterior part, or the outside of the building.

a. Interior Factors

- (1) Building form: suitable rectangular and square spaces according to the Feng Shui flow of shapes as they signify order and stability.
- (2) The main door in Feng Shui is oriented towards Chi energy. In Feng Shui, a good orientation is a door that opens towards the inside.

- (3) According to Feng Shui, a good space form is a rectangle, square, circle, or octagon. These shapes are considered good because there are no missing angles (intact shapes), so the space has balance.
  - (4) The space organization method in Feng Shui generally uses Pa Kua to determine the space and plan the location of the space according to the direction and symbol.
  - (5) Circulation in Feng Shui is oriented toward the movement of Chi energy within the space. The ideal circulation is that the layout of the rooms in the building should allow Chi's energy to flow smoothly.
- b. Exterior Factors
- (1) An inward-opening double-paneled door shape invites Chi's energy.
  - (2) The use of square columns at the front of the house has a good Feng Shui flow that creates a sense of solidity and balance.
  - (3) A high enclosure fence is good, according to Feng Shui, to prevent negative energy (Sha Chi) from entering the house.
  - (4) Based on Feng Shui, brown and holy house colors related to the earth element are suitable for residential colors.
  - (5) The location of the house is in the white tiger formation, which in modern times is interpreted as a tall building, which means a bearer of harmony in Feng Shui belief.
  - (6) The location of housing in Sudiroprajan Chinatown is close to Pepe River, which in Feng Shui is believed to bring good luck.



**Figure 5.** *The Base Form of the Chinese Traditional Plan*  
 Source: Mutiari (2010)

The spatial organization of the buildings in Chinatown settlement is formed to create flexibility in planning, such as the layout of the master bedroom directly facing the gate and the children's bedrooms opposite each other, separated by the courtyard and living room. In the next room, the spatial organization will be the core of the Chinese residential form. The majority of buildings in Sudiroprajan Chinatown have two floors with two functions: residential and business. This finding is also explained in previous research in Semarang Chinatown (Soetomo *et al.*, 2020) and Yogyakarta Chinatown (Kumala, 2022) for the building typology that accommodates commercial activity on the

ground level and residential activity on the upper level. Feng shui, or Chinese beliefs in decorations, ornaments, suggestions, and bans, encourages people to obey them to avert disasters and thrive (Marpaung & Jenny, 2020).

### Non-Physical Characteristics

#### Economic Activities

Sudiriprajan Chinatown is located in one of the major trade and service areas in Surakarta City. This influences the activities of the communities in Chinatown to develop the trading area by maximizing the function of their houses with the potential of the existing location. Almost all houses on the first floor functioned as buying and selling trade houses, and the second floor functioned as a residence or home. Based on the observations shown in Figure 6, most residents in Sudiriprajan Chinatown work in the field of trade and services by opening a business in the house building or in the central market (Pasar Gede) to sell products.



*Figure 6. Trading Activities in Sudiriprajan Chinatown*  
*Source: Observation, 2023*

In the majority of Indonesia's big cities, including Surakarta, Chinatown has served as the economic growth center (Fatimah, 2023). Not only in Indonesia, Tan 'g'-Ling & Aminuddin (2019) discovered the characteristics that form the place identity of Kuala Lumpur Chinatown was a street market, a key aspect of Kuala Lumpur's Chinese cultural and ethnic enclave. It is proven that street trading as the main economic activity enhances the city's identity, culture, and history.

#### Socio-cultural Activities

There is a house of worship for the Chinese in this area, namely the Tien Kok Sie Temple, which is the center of religious activities and the development of the cultural traditions of the Chinese community in Sudiriprajan Chinatown. The Tien Kok Sie Temple is used in every Sunday service and worship on other holidays. In addition, one of the traditions that is still carried out annually is Cap Go Meh, a celebration of the Chinese New Year. In this event, there are Langliong (Dragon Dance) and Langsai (Barongsai or Lion Dance) arts that are still preserved.





**Figure 7.** *Tien Kok Sie Temple*  
 Source: Observation, 2023

It is also mentioned in previous research that Chinese ethnic cultural activities are quite intense and stronger than a system of social organizations in general. It happens because most residents utilize their properties as temporary residences, while some remain unoccupied (Soetomo *et al.*, 2020). The activities also have impacts on urban tourism. Thus, the empowerment of local communities is needed (Aji & Faniza, 2022).

## Conclusions

In the case study of Sudiroprajan Chinatown, it is known that house buildings based on Feng Shui principles have special rules that affect the exterior and interior aspects. This shows the achievement of various positive values that will affect the energy that appears in the building. The unique characteristics possessed by each building give rise to distinctive characteristics that show the local wisdom of Chinatown. In addition, the local wisdom that appears in Chinatown affects other activities, such as the emergence of economic activities and cultural tourism. This shows that local wisdom affects people not only physically but also non-physically.

The existence of the Feng Shui principles in housing or buildings in Chinatown still survives to this day. This is due to the attitude of people who do not want to eliminate the characteristics of local wisdom (Chinese) in their buildings or houses. However, there are some adjustments by the government related to modernity, such as the construction of pedestrians on Jl. RE Martadinata, which, because of its location in the city center and dense activities, still maintains the characteristics of Chinatown in its architectural design. In addition, this Chinatown area has a mixture of residents as the city and population grow. Future research should continue to investigate the resiliency of Sudiroprajan Chinatown toward modernization..

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