

**Culture Differences of Indonesia Ethnic Minorities in Non-verbal
Communication**

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's islands are homes to a diverse ethnic and religious group which have given rise to a large number of cultural practices. Despite their cultural wealth, Indonesian Ethnic Minorities have been facing many problems regarding their cultural heritage existence. Most of their problems occur due to the inharmonious relationship between them and the government. Therefore, cultural approach is needed as a means to bridge the gap between the indigenous groups with the government by socialising the cultural aspects in the academic environment. By doing so, people from academic environment can take part in preserving those cultures by joining some performances, learning to play traditional instruments and raising awareness in the society. As a result, people in academic environment will have a chance to show the government that those cultural heritages need to be preserved. At the same time, the Ethnic Minorities will understand that there are some people who are aware of the cultural values. In the end, the Ethnic Minorities can work hand in hand with the government in the cultural preservation and development.

Keywords: *Culture, communication, Ethnic Minorities*

INTRODUCTION

There is ongoing debate on the definition of ethnic minorities in Indonesia. Many terms have been used to describe their communities: native people, isolated people, rotational forest farmers, *adat* communities or *adat* law communities, and many others. Each term has different program implications. Each term has different program implications. This section explains their use, rationale, and implications, and why the “*adat* community” term is discussed.

Indonesia has a population of around 210 million people, including 500 ethnic groups speaking more than 600 languages (Alcorn, 2000). This ethnic diversity is understood as an asset of cultural riches supporting state unity, which is reflected in the national slogan, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (*Term in Sanskrit*¹), in English became: “Unity in diversity”. During the New Order (*Orde Baru* – Suharto’s Era) period, *tunggal ika* (unity) which usually was understood as unified, standardized effort was more strongly emphasized than *bhinneka* (diversity). Many efforts were made to limit the expression of

ethnic identity through policies and programs on development emphasizing uniformity. Raising ethnic identity was considered dangerous to state unity.

According to Baumann (2004), Ratcliffe (2010), and Bulmer (1996), ethnic group is defined as a group which has the same origin, history, culture, language, experience and values. It explained that every ethnic group has its own identity in the form of languages and cultural practices. However, not all of ethnic groups have a chance to show and preserve their cultural heritage, especially Ethnic Minorities. In fact, ethnic groups occupied Indonesian territory long before the nation was established. Therefore, they are called Ethnic minorities or indigenous people of Indonesia. Based on this, some parties consider all ethnic groups throughout Indonesia to be indigenous peoples.

In this modern era with so many changes and developments happening, Ethnic Minorities have been facing several factors such as urban development, popular culture, lack of facilities and cooperation with the government, and many other factors that

prevent them from developing. Therefore, an effective action to help the Ethnic Minorities to keep, preserve, and develop their cultural heritage needs to be done. The writers believe that approaching the people in the academic environment through cultural aspects will help to reduce those factors.

DISCUSSION

Ethnic Culture

Ethnic Minorities are those who are native to the lands they live in and having their own distinct languages and culture (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, n.d.). Despite their cultural wealth, Indonesian Ethnic Minorities have been facing many problems regarding their cultural heritage existence. According to AMAN—Indonesian Ethnic Minorities Alliance (2016), Ethnic Minorities or broadly known as *Masyarakat Adat* in Indonesia experienced poverty, discrimination and political marginalisation. Most of their problems occur due to the inharmonious relationship between them and the government. Therefore, cultural

approach is needed as a means to bridge the gap between the indigenous groups with the government by socialising the cultural aspects in the academic environment.

Language and Intercultural Communication

As the medium between the individual and culture (Corder, 1973) which means that the language is the principal vehicle to deliver the cultural knowledge, attitude change, social perception, personal identity, social interaction and so on (Krauss & Chiu, n.d), language and culture are two things that cannot be separated. It can be said that language represents culture and the way people acquire the language is through culture (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012). However, what if the language itself cannot accommodate the communication between different ethnic groups?

Most linguists often say that language and communication are two

different things. However, they are closely correlated and interrelated. Sapir (1921) pointed out that culture and social behaviour involves communication both explicit or implicit. Since Ethnic Minorities have their distinct language and culture, verbal communication seems hard to be done. In this case, non-verbal communication can be a way to deliver any messages from the indigenous ethnic groups to those who are aware that there are more values in the indigenous culture that should be preserved.

Cultural Preservation

Cultural heritage covers the tangible and intangible cultural aspects that have different values which need to be preserved as a counterbalance of the globalisation and standardisation (Bouchenaki, n.d). Indonesia, which consists of a diverse ethnic group, has more intangible cultural heritage that covers cultural practices, representations, knowledge, skills, instruments, cultural spaces, communities, and many others (Sari, 2014). Nowadays, UNESCO has

already prioritised the safeguarding of the cultural heritage through international festivals and some other activities (Eliot, n.d.). However, the attempts to safeguard, preserve and develop the cultural heritage should be done by Indonesian people as well.

In order to prevent the cultural heritage from extinction, the younger generation, especially those who are in the academic environment needs to know the benefits of learning about culture. From cultural heritage, the young people will have more understanding about the moral values, how to behave and how to treat other people. In addition, cultural preservation can strengthen the identity of a nation. For instance, in Indonesia, Bali is famous for its various dances, Java is famous for its *Wayang* (puppets made from animal skin), Jakarta is famous for its *Lenong* (traditional theatrical performance), and many other traditional (indigenous) cultural performances will be explained as follows:

A. Music

We must admit that music always plays an important role in the human society. Despite the linguistics barrier that always occurs in every music from different ethnic groups or societies, people can still enjoy the melody and the feeling that need to be conveyed by the composer (Garfias, 2004). This thing also happened in Indonesia. With more than 300 ethnic groups that have different cultural arts, especially music, people from different ethnic groups in Indonesia can still enjoy and learn the music from other ethnic groups.

B. Dance

As mentioned before that Bali is famous for its various dances. As the part of the culture, dances are not merely a combination of movements, but also a story that can be told without a verbal communication. According to UNESCO (2015), Balinese dances are divided into three groups which are sacred, semi-sacred and that for the purpose of enjoyment. Those dances are categorised based on their purpose. Due

to its uniqueness, dances can be an identity of a particular ethnic group and people can learn more about that ethnic group through its dances.



Figure 1. Barong - Balinese Dance (Directorate of Internalization of Value and Cultural Diplomacy, 2014)

C. Theatre

Traditional theatrical art or stage performances are also one of the most well-known identity of Indonesian culture. Those theatrical performances are *Lenong* from Betawi ethnic group, *Wayang* (Indonesian traditional puppet) from Solo (Javanese ethnic group), Paper Puppet from Yogyakarta (Javanese ethnic group), and many more. It is similar with Balinese dances, the theatrical performances are also

being performed based on specific purposes.

D. Sculpture

As one of the cultural identity of particular ethnic group, sculpture is often found in several areas in Indonesia. One of the region that keeps producing sculpture are Bali, Jogja, and Solo. The sculpture produced by their ethnic groups are different based on their historical values.

E. Painting

Similar to dances and sculpture, most of the Indonesian paintings are originated from Bali. Balinese artist tend to paint the cultural practices in Bali as well as the daily activities of Balinese people. Painting is also a way to perpetuate the cultural heritage of Bali.

F. Architecture / Infrastructure

The ancient architecture can be found in the ancient historical building such as temple. In Indonesia, there are

several well-known temples that have its own stories. For instance, Borobudur Temple in Magelang, Central Java. Borobudur Temple is a symbol of the greatness of Syailendra Dynasty which ruled Java for centuries (UNESCO, Borobudur Temple Compounds, 2016).

G. Cuisine

Indonesia is rich for its herbs and spices. It makes Indonesia has a diverse cuisine that can be a symbol of a particular ethnic group. One of the most well-known cuisine is Rendang which is originated from Padang, West Sumatera. Besides that, Sumateran food is also well-known for its spiciness that might not be found in any other places in Indonesia. In Java, people can find a diverse cuisine ranging from the sweet to the spicy one. Since Java is occupied by several ethnic groups, it is easy to find different tasty traditional food. For instance, Gudeg which is originated from Yogyakarta that has sweet taste. However, we can find Sambal that has different level of spiciness depends on the origin of the Sambal.

Discussion on Preservation of Ethnic Groups

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagos nation, is located astride the equator which has more than 300 ethnic groups. It is surrounded by oceans, seas and straits unless where it shares an island border with East Malaysia and Brunei on Borneo (Kalimantan); with Papua New Guinea on New Guinea; and Timor Loro Sea on Timor. West Malaysia lies across the strait of Malaka, the Philippines lies to the northeast, and Australia lies to the south (Alisyahbana and Takdir, 1966). In that matter, *Pribumi* (Ethnic Minorities) make up about 95% of Indonesian population (Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, 2006). As a great majority of the population of similar cultural heritage among various ethnic groups in Indonesia, *Pribumi* (indigenous) culture plays an important role in shaping country's not only in socio economic condition but in political and religious developments as well. The Figure 1 presents the percentage of *Pribumi* in Indonesia.

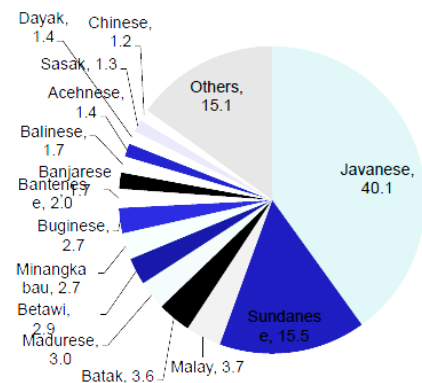


Figure 2. Native Indonesians / *Pribumi* (Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003)

As expected there, the largest native group in Indonesia is the Javanese who make up 40.1% of the total population. The Javanese are concentrated on the island of Java. One of the reason in instance is capital city of Indonesia, Jakarta is located in Java Island. The Sundanese are the next largest group in the country. Others which are merged from each ethnic is illustrated as the third largest. Then, the Malay, Batak and Madurese are the following group over 3 %. Many ethnic groups, principally in Kalimantan (Borneo), Sulawesi (Celebes), and Papua also represent different character.



Figure 3. Several major ethno-linguistic groups of Indonesia (Kuoni,1999)

The proportional population of *Pribumi* according Kuoni (1999) based the census 2009 is influenced by location and geography. The matter is every location has their own local wisdom to relocate communication. It is true that communication plays a major role in bridging differences in order to have similar understanding about something. In addition, through communication, many unresolved problems can be discussed and overcome. Those conditions are also applied to the case of the gap between Ethnic Minorities and government. However, what kind of communication that will bring the Ethnic Minorities and government come together and work hand in hand to preserve and develop the precious culture that might become extinct?

Indonesia has a diverse cultural heritage that can be used as a means to convey unspoken messages. Through culture, people can understand each other without even exchanging a single word. There are several traditional plays and performances that contain the life story of one ethnic group, their ancestors, and their way of living. For example, *Yadnya Kasada Ceremony*, one of the ceremony done in Bromo Tengger Semeru² area that has been adapted into a performance (Eastjava.com, n.d). The story behind this ceremony is to commemorate the sacrifice that has been done by the couple Joko Seger and Roro Anteng (Riyanto, 2011). This couple has been married for a quite long time, however, they still suffered from not having any children at all. One day, they heard a voice from the crater of Mount Bromo upon their hermitage. That voice said that God will give them 25 children with the condition that they have to sacrifice one of their children. Soon after that, they have 25 children and after Roro Anteng have given birth to the last child, she stopped being pregnant. They are very happy and forgot about their promise to the God.

One night, the God warned Joko Seger that if they do not sacrifice one of their children soon, the village around Mount Bromo will be hit by major disaster. Their youngest child, Jaya Kusuma, sacrificed himself and jump into the crater of Mount Bromo. Before sacrificing himself, Jaya Kusuma said to his parents that when the 14th of Kasadha month comes, his parents and people in the Mount Bromo area need to give their crops and animals to the God of Mount Bromo as a commemoration of his sacrifice. Nowadays, the Ethnic Minorities of Mount Bromo are still doing that ceremony.

Besides Yadnya Kasada ceremony, there are many other cultural heritages that might tell people from the modern era about the history of Indonesian ethnic groups and their cultural practices. In order to help the preservation of that cultural heritage, the role of academia is really essential. As the agent of change, academia can be a bridge to connect Ethnic Minorities and government. Besides that, academia are the people who have the capacity to be a part of the ethnic group and might

have an access to the governmental institutions.

As the first step, academia who are interested in the cultural heritage preservation can start learning to do the cultural practices. One of the cultural practices that can be learned by the academia is cultural performance that has many components that will help the academia to learn more about the ethnic groups where those cultural performances belong to. Those components covering music, costume and story.

In learning about the culture as well as the performance, academia need a form of organisation to help them organise the people who are interested along with the goals that they want to achieve. Since the goal is to reduce the gap between the Ethnic Minorities and government, academia need to convince both parties to get along in order to preserve and develop the cultural heritage that still exists.

On the one hand, by means of this organisation, the academia will start to indirectly approach the Ethnic Minorities by showing them that they

are aware of their ethnic's cultural heritage. Moreover, nowadays, there is an association of the Indonesian Ethnic Minorities which is called AMAN—*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* (Indonesian Ethnic Minorities Alliance) which can connect the academic organization with the Ethnic Minorities. The existence of this alliance is a really great help for the academia to understand their current condition. AMAN has a website that explained mostly about their living condition and their “inharmonious” relationship with the government.

On the other hand, the academic organisation will approach the government as well. By doing some promotions about cultural heritage in the academic institutions, the academia will have the power to get the government's attention.

CONCLUSION

Although there has not been a common understanding of the concept of ethnic minorities in Indonesia, their existence is not ignored. Lack of basic information on community reality

makes their identification difficult. There are no comprehensive data on adat communities. In that matter, by learning the cultural performances, people from academic environment can take part in preserving those cultures by joining some performances, learning to play traditional instruments and raising awareness in the society. As a result, people in academic environment will have a chance to show the government that those cultural heritages need to be preserved. At the same time, the Ethnic Minorities will understand that there are some people who are aware of the cultural values. In the end, the Ethnic Minorities can work hand in hand with the government in the cultural preservation and development.

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NOTES

1. The Sanskrit influence in Indonesia came from contacts with India long ago before the 1st century. Sanskrit became major language during Srivijaya and Majapahit Empire as the Literature Language. The words are either directly borrowed from India or with the intermediary of the Old Javanese language
2. Bromo Tengger Semeru are National Park located in East Java, Indonesia, to the east of Malang and to the southeast of Surabaya, the capital of East Java. This National Park consist of two mountain, Mount Bromo (Located at Pasuruan, Malang, and Probolinggo) and Mount Semeru (Located at Malang and Lumajang).