

Sustainability of Customary Society: A Case Study of Lampung, Indonesia

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Introduction

Since the collapse of Soeharto's regime (1966-1998), the democratization and decentralization are in progress in Indonesia. Also got out of the financial crisis then, Indonesia is now enjoying the benefits of economic expansion. Here, we will discuss about the sustainability of custom (*adat*) amidst these changes based on the cases from Lampung, Indonesia (Figure 1).

Lampung is a province at the southern tip of Sumatra Island, and its indigenous people are also called the Lampung. They are living with the domestic migrants whose population is nearly eight times of them. The migrants were come from dense population areas, such as the islands of Java and Bali, especially in 1970s to 1980s. As the result, multi-ethnic situation has become general not only in cities but also in the villages in this province. Along with the influences of this migration, the labor mobility, materialistic tendencies, life course diversity of the Lampung themselves is also causing custom changes. Generally, they have experienced the similar changes of what Sipirok Batak people of north Sumatra Island experienced in 1970s; the de-sacralization and de-politicization of *adat* [Rodgers 1979: 35].

Currently, the main roles of a custom in Lampung are to define the relationships between kin, between villagers, or between villages, also work as protocols for rituals and social norms. Here, we call the person, *tokoh adat*, who is playing an important role for the practice of custom as *adat* Intellectuals. By focusing on custom (*adat*) and its practitioners, I would like to try to show that the inheritance of the knowledge and the successor dilemma for practitioners is the two main problems for the sustainability of customary society in Lampung.

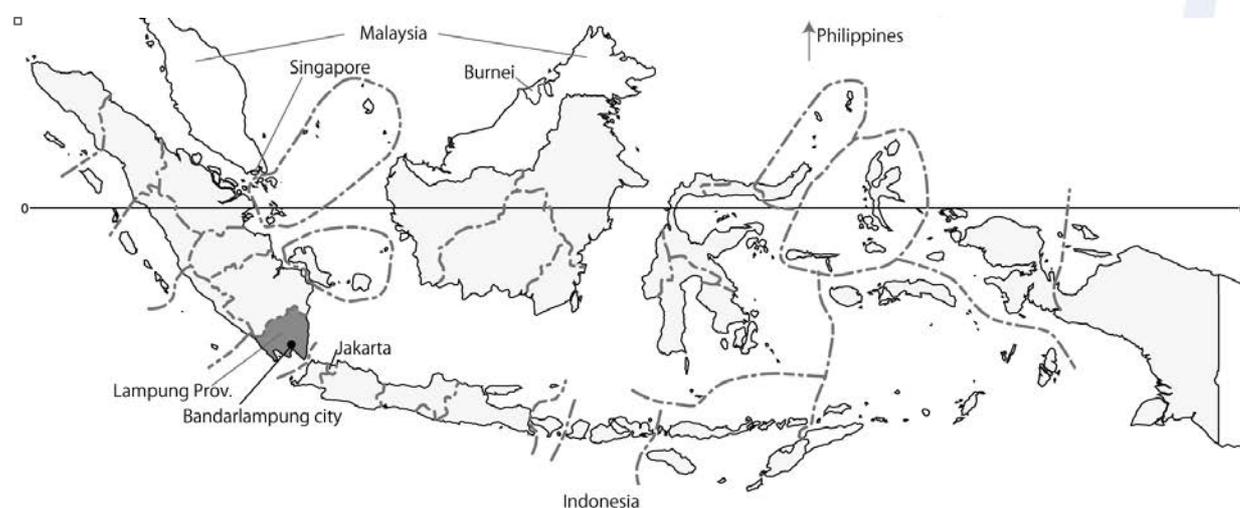


Figure 1: Map of Indonesia and Lampung

1. Social and Cultural Background of Lampung

Historically, Lampung has been one of the most important pepper production areas in the world, also an intensive cash crop production area, which focused on crops like coffee, palm oil, cacao, sugar cane, and corn. Therefore, the main industry of Lampung people has been agriculture.

Since 1905 under the ethical policy of Dutch colonial rule, many people have been migrated to Lampung, mainly from Java Island, for to reduce the population pressure of Java (called *kolonisasi / transmigrasi* in Indonesian). Even after the independence of 1945, same policies have been executed continually, especially under Soeharto regime. In 1971, the population of Lampung province was around 2.7 million people, it was over 7.6 million people in 2010. Such rapid population growth was accelerated because most migrates of the earlier years were young newlyweds aged from 20s to early 30s, often migrated with their infants. The flow of migrants peaked out in late 1980s. Statistic data in 2000 shows that the nearly ninety percent of the inhabitants are migrants or their spouses, and not only in the urban area but in the rural area, and even in their household because of the increasing inter-ethnic marriage, people live in the multi-ethnic situation. The migration influences Lampung people both politically and culturally, and they take it as a process of "*Jawanisasi* (Javanization)," because most of the migrants are Javanese. Population mobility for job opportunities is also increasing, not only to nearby urban area, but also inter-provincial, so incoming and outgoing flows of population are also characteristic for younger generations of Lampung. Because of this absence, younger generations cannot participate in rituals constantly and it also causes the difficulties for succession of customary practice.

Therefore (1) dominance of migrants and its influences for custom of Lampung people, and (2) the changing ways of earning and the way of life of them are causing modifications of custom and also causing the sustainability dilemma of it. Although the main industry of Lampung people is still agriculture and the base of a customary society is in rural area even now, increasing city-based white-collar workers like office workers, bureaucrats, merchants, academics, such white collar workers gain more money than people who live in rural areas, and the quick ascend of such people in customary social hierarchy by feasts of merit is also causing the social structural change of the customary society.

For to approach the sustainability problems of custom (*adat*) in Lampung, the practice and the succession, it would be better for us to see what is an *adat* in general.

2. *Adat* in Indonesia

Adat is a Malay word, which originated from An Arabic word, *ādah*. It means "custom," "practice," "traditional order," or "customary law." The word has been used not only in Indonesia, but also in Malaysia, southern Thai, and southern Philippine. Although the usage of the word varies between each area, it is a kind of past norm or rule which succeeded up to the present. In some cases, an *adat* is documented, but many of which are orally succeeded.

While an *adat* is easily received as an immutable traditional system of a society, we should mind that the flexibility is the key nature of it, so it can be changed both consciously and unconsciously through practice. Therefore, one should rather not to think a customary society as a unitary whole of ritual, language, and social organization, especially in the present age.

A *masyarakat adat* (customary society) is basically almost equal to an ethnic group whose mother land has been in the territory of Indonesia. On the other hand, for example, societies of the Chinese, the Arabic, and the Indians whose ancestors have migrated to Indonesia centuries ago don't be mentioned as *masyarakat adat*. A *masyarakat adat* is also be called *masyarakat hukum adat* (customary law society), it is because *adat* regulations have been legally valid in the late Dutch colonial era, and

the Indonesian juridical system succeeded it, a custom is still mentioned as *hukum adat* legally.

In Indonesia, the right of customary (or traditional) society is clearly written in the constitution (Undang-Undang Dasar 1945) as follows:

Clause 2 of article 18-B: *Negara mengakui dan menghormati kesatuan-kesatuan masyarakat hukum adat beserta hak-hak tradisionalnya sepanjang masih hidup dan sesuai dengan perkembangan masyarakat dan prinsip Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, yang diatur dalam undang-undang.* (Customary law society is accepted and is respected by the government as far as it contributes to national unity and also observes the national law.)

Clause 3 of article 28-I: *Identitas budaya dan hak masyarakat tradisional dihormati selaras dengan perkembangan zaman dan peradaban.* (The cultural identity and right of the people will be valued as far as it meets with the development and manners of the times.)

For to build the new nation-state, Indonesia, *adat* is redefined juridically. *Adat* lost its position in the political and juridical arena, although because of the imperfection of legal system, some disputes over resource, such as land, forest, and water, may be settled in accordance with custom.

Adat can keep its position in cultural arena as far as it meet with the developing national value and national culture, and it has also become taken as the source of cultural diversity which should be reserved.

We can see an example of the actual changes of an *adat* (custom) and *masyarakat adat* (customary society) in a case study. Rodgers, an American cultural anthropologist who has conducted her field research of *Sipirok Batak* people of north Sumatra Island in 1970s, showed that "the Indonesian lessons in the schoolrooms introduce national concerns and social expectations to the children. Beyond this, city newspapers, national political campaigns, city radio broadcasts, and the steady stream of visitors to the village from large cities forcefully brings Indonesian national culture into the most isolated farm village. Considerable portions of *Batak* institutional life and social thought, not surprisingly, fall outside the scope of the traditional *adat* today" [Rodgers 1979: 32]. And she also showed the de-sacralization and de-politicization of *adat* at that time [Rodgers 1979: 35].

Another case study shows that the review of the social position of *adat* is still in the process. Okamoto, a Japanese political scientist, showed the current situation of *adat* in South Sumatra province, where local government assessed the actual conditions of *adat* in mid 1990s, and clarified its limit and defined the validity of *adat* because it is not suitable for the current social circumstances any more with the view of human right, inconsistency with superior regulations, and so on. It is partly because there are many disputes over customary land rights, and government does never want to escalate by giving more authorities to customary societies for regional security [Okamoto 2012: 237-242].

Besides that the external economic, demographic, politic, and legal factors are working for redefining what a customary society is, there are internal factors which cause the sustainability problems for customary society now. For to see internal factors, we'll focus on the practitioners of *adat* of the Lampung.

3. *Tokoh adat* (*adat intellectuals*)

The word *tokoh adat* means key figures of a customary society like customary high ranked people, for example. They should be responsible for sustaining the customary society by nature, however, it is also true that both of who are descended from the high ranked families and who are recently ascended the customary hierarchy have not enough knowledge about their *adat*. It is partly because they have moved to urban areas and do not have enough chance to participate in rituals usually held in rural areas. Rural based ordinary younger generations of the Lampung who would be easily recognized as the main successors of their custom also have less practice because of their labor migration to larger cities outside the province for years and often for longer period, so they also have not enough chance to participate in rituals in their home village.

Here, I will use the word *tokoh adat* in rather expanded definition including practitioners of *adat* whose customary rank is not so high, and will translate the word as "*adat intellectuals*" for to explain their character. They also arbitrate troubles over the customary rights, however as I mentioned above, the main role of *adat* in the daily life is to define the relationship between kin, villagers, or between villages, and it also works as a protocol for rituals and a norm for matters of ethics. A *tokoh adat* should be able to conduct rituals correctly and for that purpose a candidate of *tokoh adat* should have enough experiences of rituals and better understandings of the protocols, rules, and necessities for ritual. It is also important that they have the ability to interpret protocols and rules, to solve irregular troubles or misunderstandings for ritual in progress. As practitioners, not only they moderate the feast of merit, the marriage ritual, and other rituals related to life cycle. Historically, they have also played another important role for documentation of their custom, therefore, I translate the word as *adat Intellectuals*. Here, we see the cases of the *Pubian* people, a sub-group of the Lampung.

In Lampung, *adat* had been inscribed on large bundled strips which was made with the slice of a kind of palm leaf stem. It is said that some of them were collected and moved to Netherlands during the Dutch colonial era, and also some of them were flooded away or just lost at natural diseases, or damaged during the war. It was also related to the changes of people's mind about *adat*. A group of *adat intellectuals* from *Bukujadi* clan of the *Pubian* society thought that they were confronting the crisis of their *adat* under the Dutch colonial rule.

They have started to research and document their *adat*, in 1930-60s but intermittently and once came to a deadlock, mainly because of the war and independence struggle. Researching the original strapped *adat* records was a difficult work as they kept by various people who lived in various areas, and even the straps were also lost in various reasons during that period. After the independence, people became prefer to the nationalistic way of thinking than customary one. However they kept on trying, and completed it in 1960s (*Kitab Kutara Rajaniti / Adat Siti Gumanti*, 1st ed:1965, 2nd ed:1968). Their result was published as 1,000 copies of private edited book, and it became the indispensable resource for the practice and the succession of knowledge of *adat* of *Bukujadi* clan.

In 1980s, another group of *adat* intellectuals from other clans of the *Pubian* society (*Tambapupus* and *Manyakhakat*) tried to research and document their *adat*. Based on the fruits of research, they have published *Buku Handak* and later its enlarged edition, *Buku Handak II*. For people of *Tambapupus* and *Manyakhakat* clan, this book also became the indispensable resource for the practice and the succession of knowledge of *adat* until now. It was until 1990s that the older generations were still actively working in *adat* matters, and such documentation was a kind of heritage to younger generations.

4. Successor dilemma of *adat* intellectuals

In Lampung, the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic circumstances, the population mobility, and also other modernization factors which changing peoples' way of thinking and way of life also cause the sustainability problems of customary society. Along with the external economic, demographic, politic, and legal factors, there are two main internal factors for successor dilemma of *tokoh adat* of the *Pubian* people, Lampung: (1) migration flow of younger generation from rural to urban, (2) changing nature of *adat* and *tokoh adat*.

Nowadays, most of *tokoh adat* and also most of the *Pubian* people belongs to the generations after the independence of the republic in 1945. Current *tokoh adat* in villages act as practitioners and there are no such remarkable intellectual activities now, it is one of the major changes of *adat* intellectual's character.

Other major change is that it looks like that they gained a new role in political arena especially after entered this century. Although they have almost no access to the decision making process, they act as a contact person of one's village for elections; election for provincial governor, for example. It may relate to the regional autonomy in progress, which was first approved by the People's Representative Council in 1999. Before that time, under the highly centralized government of Soeharto, the second president of the republic, the local chiefs were appointed by the central government, but nowadays grass-roots support for election is indispensable for to win the election because of the democratized election system. Many *tokoh adat* take part in organizing the customary society based political units.

For people living in the multi-ethnic urban area, the importance of *tokoh adat* and *adat* relatively looks like reducing. They looks prefer more modernized feasts rather than traditional exclusive customary rituals. For example, it is often true for marriage that *adat* ritual is only a mere formality while *pesta* (party) is held in big scale. It is partly because the social relation of each urban people is not limited in their ethnic groups but extended to other ethnic groups. The shift of social interest is influencing the present condition of *adat* both directly and indirectly.

A *tokoh adat* was usually a lifelong-village-based person, but nowadays one should also have some job experiences like elementary schoolteacher. It is because one should recognize the general knowledge and experience outside village for to correspond to the changing and diversifying way of life because these change and diversifications also affect the way of practicing *adat*. Few *tokoh adat* manage many life cycle rituals of villagers so they are very busy but paid little except for well reputed one, and paid less proportional respect for their heavy work. This is also a

reason of difficulty of the recruitment.

Each *tokoh adat* manages many life cycle rituals of villagers so they are very busy but paid little except for well reputed one, and usually paid less proportional respect for their heavy work. This is also a reason of difficulty of the recruitment.

The successor dilemma is also related to the dilemma of succeeding the *adat* knowledge. One would think the books above is useful for to gain *adat* knowledge, but only essential matters are written in these books, therefore not enough for daily practicing. Detailed records of ritual verses, procedures of each ritual, necessities, arrangements, and so on are kept by each *tokoh adat* in private and such records are not shared usually.

It is expected more difficulties for recruitment in the near future because younger generations go out from their villages for job opportunities as mentioned above, so they cannot take part in rituals constantly and cannot gain enough experience and knowledge. This means that there are not so many experienced candidates for *tokoh adat* and as one recruit candidates personally, candidate may become fewer. Usually, the style of succession is "from the older to less old," therefore, one cannot work as *tokoh adat* for long time, owing to some *tokoh adat*, it is about 5 to 10 years.

Conclusion

The dilemma of succession of a custom is not only for the Lampung, but for any other ethnic societies. Once a customary knowledge was acquired unintentionally in their daily life, but now one should intentionally try to acquire it. If we see the current situation Indonesia, a custom may survive in limited arena as a cultural norm and ethics for kin and neighbors. One cannot avoid the qualitative changes of *adat* and *tokoh adat*. It may cause a great mistake if we try to salvage an *adat* as an immutable traditional system of a society and to impose the reservation on people because the key nature of an *adat* is its flexibility to meets with the times, and people also have their right to change their life.

As a temporary conclusion, we can say that the establishment of an effective succession framework of practitioners and customary knowledge is the key for the sustainability of customary society.

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