

THE DECLINE OF EASTERN SYMBOLISM

*In the Fast Growing of Urban Culture in Minahasa
North Sulawesi*

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Introduction

Symbol has the important meaning in human life. Without symbolism there can be no social and cultural interaction. For the purpose the need to built mutual relationship with others, man continuously creates symbols. Started from creating symbol, man constructs groups of society which give birth to culture. A group of society is bounded up by their cultural values which are uttered in symbolical form. Symbol than appears as a central core, as a means of communication produced by social convention. Communication, whether or not accommodates language occurs only when using symbols.

This statement asserts that symbol speaks powerfully to human culture, for culture contains concepts of meaning which are manifested in a form of symbols. Grounded on this notion the concept of Eastern and Western culture can be easily determined. Part of Western culture is identified with the way they built urban culture through creating urban symbolism as the result of industrial revolution. The notion of Eastern symbolism will be detected through *Minahasan* local wisdom that find hard to survive in the fast growing of urban culture.

When Dutch came to colonize *Indonesia*, at the same time they brought and introduced the urban culture to Indonesian people. The diffusion of Western culture mostly occurred through the spreading of Christian religion. Some places in *Indonesia* adopted Christianity, however they still faithfully practicing their

local religion. Javanese for example, some of them converted to Christianity, but blood and flesh they are still honor their local wisdom *Kejawen*.

In contrast with *Minahasan* people they took for granted the Christian religion and left behind the old local wisdom, for Christianity strongly forbids any practices which contradicted with what are told in the Bible. The analysis will be focused on the survival of ancient *Minahasan* people themselves, taking into account on how they preserve the old wisdom in the fast growing of urban culture in this case Christian religion. The examination will be conducted through cultural and historical approaches.

The Practice of Eastern Symbolism in *Minahasa*

Minahasa is one of the largest ethnic groups inhabitant in North Sulawesi Province. The *Minahasan* ethnic covered four regencies which are located in, Central, North, South, and South East of that province. For all the early period, the facts of ancient *Minahasan* culture are mostly lacking. Most information of early period in *Minahasa* described in this essay taken from Bert Supit (1986), The ordinary *Minahasan* people lived in the small rural settlements separated a considerable distances from one another in the forest.

In the *Minahasan* folk society, the community was the village, and within the village the moral order was strong. All member of the community shared the same essential belief. And the practice of the religion was open to all. Ancient *Minahasa* viewed they are part of the cosmos. It was refer to a special supernatural or transcendental realm within the cosmos. It was not a substance from the ordinary world of human affair, but it is best examined as one aspect of the total cosmic order that the people believe to exist.

Nature to ancient *Minahasa* was believed had its sacred and personal attributes, almost any aspect in nature (mountains, forests, big stones, and trees, spring water) was thought to have indwelling force, the force belongs to sacred ancestors which was called *opo* (gods); thus they always waited for natural signs before doing any important activities. They waited signs from cat, snake, and bird; owl was considered as sacred that brought message from *Opo* (God). The relationship between *opo-opo* and men was conceived as the maintenance

of a harmony through offerings and prayers. The offering which evidenced the sacred contract as the *Opo* grant rain, health and harvest.

Sickness was in part regarded as a consequence of moral transgression, and cure was accordingly purification. The ancient *Minahasan* had their ceremony; a ritual whereby evil influence was cleansed from the sick man or household or settlement. Many of the categories of spirit-beings described reside on the Earth. Natural spirit who were associated with the soil, water, and forest were regarded as the guardians of their region. Periodically they offered food to please the ghost. The offering food was regarded as the feeding of the ghost. This activities were done with special ritual designed by experts or specialist called *Walian* who had the ability to communicate in ancient language. It is worth mentioning that the practice of ritual was dominantly a male role.

The Practicing of Urban Culture

As the changes in technology with the industrial revolution of modern times, so also the changes in the human habits and capacities of mind and pushes human beings converted to urban life. The urban revolution is the most important part, for it is with the coming of city life the folk people find hard to survive. Redfield (1958) asserts that It is the city that makes world-wide and conspicuous the self-conscious struggle to maintain traditional ethos as it is in the city, in the first place, that traditional morality is attacked and broken down.

It is obvious that the urban society took place in the cities with the “urban revolution” when civilization came into being, and with the industrial revolution of modern time, the city appeared the elite class, the literate priest with his opportunities to built congregation to cultivate his theological knowledge, these are new kinds of man, not only because they have found new kinds of economic support, but because of their relations with others which produced these city man have a new world view and essential style of live.

The city men introduced their culture to folk people, and this is the beginning of other style of life came into being, they attached with civilization, and yet retaining the moral of folk life; folk people subordinated to the culture of the city in this way they adopted the moral order of their conqueror. Both

city men and the folk intensely come into contact. The consequence is the folk might get lost their ancient tradition.

The point here is not giving empirical detailed on how civilization comes about. It is also far from addressing the main outlines of the human adventure from the point of view of civilized men who looked back on their beginning. This essay would rather view the adventure originally from the position of *Minahasan* folk, originally folk-like manner of life which was changed into new and different manners of life. The expanding of Dutch civilization in the name of colonization have come into contact with *Minahasan* folk society. Through the conquest of folk people by alien civilization had carried the transformation of folk *Minahasan* society into the new phase.

The Declined of *Minahasan* Local Wisdom

With the expansion and the rise of the Dutch civilization to the Eastern world, they transformed *Minahasan* folk people into other kinds of peoples. Civilization of Dutch society with their basic type came to disturb the *Minahasan* folk into other types. They were taken into the culture of the invading civilization. Parallel with the notion, Redfield defines civilization may be thought of the antithesis of the folk society. It may also be thought of as the society in which the relation between technical order and the moral order take forms radically different from the relationship between the two which prevail in precivilized society.

Redfield further describes, moral order always be based and equally present in those societies in which the rules for right conduct among men are supported by supernatural sanction and in those in which the morality of human conduct is largely independent of the religion. The technical order is that order which results from mutual usefulness, from deliberate coercion, or from the mere utilization of the same means (Redfield, 1958: 21, 22).

That proposition affirms that moral order had been long practiced by precivilized people. Technical order come after moral order, the order constructed when social condition of urban life grows more complex. With the expanding of civilization, the technical order reaches out the folk societies with cultures different in traditional content from those which give rise to that civilization.

Far before industrialization grow and change the face of *Minahasa* land, came the civilized Dutch men, the Westerner, labeled on two contradicted names-colonizer and missionary. Both have the same mission, the first conquered by using gun for economic purpose, the other planted hegemonic authority to the whole *Minahasan* land. Raised in modern urban culture came the priest introducing Christian faith to *Minahasan* folk people and claimed the *Minahasan* local religion was not the religion coming from God. This statement disturbed seriously the *Minahasan* local faith, their moral order.

The spirit to Christianize the world, strongly pushed the missionary to Christianize the *Minahasan* folk. They moved deeper to meet *Minahasan* people which were still tribal and folk like. They slowly transformed the mind and attitude of the folk. Supit says in his book *Minahasa*, “*Dengan masuknya agama Kristen, lambat laun poso-poso (Minahasan local ritual) tersebut menghilang* (Supit,1986: 63). Christianity strongly rejected the *Minahasan* local religion which was judged as superstition, and they even termed it as *Alifuru* religion which implied negative connotation. *Alifuru* in *Minahasan* language means wild, uncivilized.

The notion presents the empirical process of how *Minahasan* people lost its identity since they released their original folk religion and welcomed the urban civilized culture. They started to adopt urban dimension of leaving. Customs and beliefs that were intimately connected with the life of the *Minahasan* folk tradition through out all the period of *Minahasan* history were faded away. The name of the *opo, walian, tonaas* were forgotten.

Religion is now, according to Redfield (1959: 65), a way of making citizens, the moral order is under public management. Ancient traditional forms were repeated with their meaning lost. There are lack of written as well as oral information of *Minahasan* old tradition seen from *Minahasan* perspective. The conversion of the old *Minahasan* tradition to Protestantism is presented chiefly in self judgement written by the Dutch, and examined from colonizer point of view.

It is not *Minahasan* the only one who lamented the lost of their valuable culture. The native Indian experienced the great lost of the destruction of the images of their gods, the prohibition of ritual dances. Chilam Balm a Native

Indian laments the breakdown of his old moral order after the conquest:

Then everything was good. Then they adhered to the dictates their reason. There was no sin; in the holy faith their lives were passed. There was then no sickness; they had then no aching bones. At the time the course of humanity was orderly. The foreigners made it otherwise when they arrived here. They brought shameful things when they came (Roys, 1933: 79)

The *Minahasans* might have the same lamentation as Native Indians have. Both of them had the same experienced witnessing the great loss of their old moral values by the coming of western imperialism. Urbanization continued, The *Minahasans* seem have to continue their live without realizing they have been trapped by complexity of urban culture.

Conclusion

The expansion of civilization in some cases pushed up the *Minahasan* folk people to flow around the urban culture-the Christianity. In most of the cases the old moral order of the *Minahasan* folk was thrown into confusion. The folk ways were transformed into a manner of life of that of the invader. In the process of invasion and conquest, they were assimilated to the culture of the white man. The surviving of folk society were mostly influenced by civilization of western urban culture. The notion proves that many folk-like peoples came to be dominated by either the colonizer or the missionary of an invading Dutch civilization. As the result they lost their precious local religion which mirrors their identity.

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