

THE MEANINGS OF KNOWLEDGE IN MINANGKABAU PHILOSOPHY

Its Relevance to the Communal Forums

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Introduction

Minangkabau society is one so many ethnic groups in Indonesia and uniquely embraces matrilineal system and its people are famous for their non-sedentary habit. It is also worthy to note that Minangkabau culture is also based on Islamic teachings. The religion has been considered very crucial to shape one's personality. The harmony between matrilineal system and the adherence to Islamic teachings has made a differing characteristics of Minangkabau society when it is compared to other Indonesian ethnic groups.

Minangkabau society is well-known for using their custom values and Islamic teachings as the references for their life or as the basis for their behaviour, attitudes, expressing ideas, socializing and dressing. The blending of custom values and Islamic teachings, recognized in its philosophical *Adat Basandi Syara', Syara' Basandi Kitabullah*, has profoundly become the foundations for its social systems and philosophy for Minangkabau society. *Adat Basandi Syara' Syara' Basandi Kitabullah*, henceforward referred to as ABS-SBK, is the custom or norms that has been used by the ancestors of Minangkabau society and is based on *syara'*. *Sendi* means 'principles' or strong grounds and *syara* and *kitabullah* refer to Quran.

Even though there has been some differences, but there is not any contradictions between the customs and the teachings of Islam. While Islam is a religion which bases its teachings on Quran and the Prophet's *Hadiths* or

what Prophet Mohammed did and said, Minangkabau customs are based on teachings which use the parables taken from the nature's regularities (*alam takambang jadi guru*, so that there has been a law which says *syara' mangato adat mamakai*, which means that whatever taught in the religion is conceived within the customs. The coming of Islam which was complemented Minangkabau customs and the philosophical expression ABS-SBK makes it clear that Minangkabau customs has used Islamic teachings, Qoran and the Prophet's hadiths as its sources of rules and regulations

Recently, the people of Minangkabau are worried by the fading understanding of the people towards the values of Minangkabau customs which have been considered as their uncontested guidance. It seems that the shallowing processes not only affected the grassroots, but also the political elites and the custom exponents. The devaluation towards Minangkabau cultures may have been resulted not only from the conflicts within Minangkabau societies, but also due to some external influences resulting from technology advancement in the global era. The globalization which is signified with the technology, information and communication and materialistic, consumeristic, hedonistic and capitalistic behaviors have contributed to degradation of the custom and religious as well as ABS-SBK within the livelihood Minangkabau society.

Philosophically, the issues within Minangkabau culture cannot be solely reviewed from axiological aspects, but it needs to be investigated through epistemological perspectives, because Minangkabau has played an important role in the nation's political, socio-cultural, literary, religious aspects as well its contributions of critical thinking and knowledge. In the history of Indonesia, Minangkabau has left valuable educational legacies through its *Sumatera Thawalib Padangpanjang*, *INS Kayu Tanam*, *Adabiah* College, the Madrasa of *Diniyah Putri Padangpanjang* and it is, in fact also has become the places of origins for a number of national figures such as Mohammad Hatta, HAMKA, Haj Agus Salim, Sutan Syahrir and Tan Malaka.

As Minangkabau custom philosophy fades away, so does the thinking skills and the knowledge. Syafri Sairin (2007: 10) claims that Minangkabau used to be a 'constantly rich sources' for those who were always seeking knowledge, whereas now, people are more apt to find other knowledge sources outside Minangkabau and worse, become the agents of the knowledge outside Minangkabau. The

discussions on epistemological issues around Minangkabau customs, especially those related to its meanings of knowledge and philosophies, needs to be made relevant to practical issues, because by finding the implementations to present realities, the philosophical studies will be meaningful and useful.

Minangkabau epistemological studies which contain the truth, meaning and depth of Minangkabau culture needs to be grounded, in order that it will not merely becomes a discourse, rhetorical materials or nostalgic pasts, but can be used to relate the present and the future. One of the efforts to seek the relevance of meanings of knowledge within Minangkabau philosophy is orienting the epistemology of Minangkabau philosophy into its empirical forms within its communal forum.

This approach is necessary because decision makings within communal forums in Minangkabau is considered unique. Decisions are usually made based on *bulek aie dek pambuluah*, *bulek kato dek mupakat* adage (the water is bulbous due to its tubes, but discussions are unanimous because of agreements). In realities, however, there are many decisions made through other methods such as voting, legal processes or using a third party as a mediator. Then, why is not decisions made by the communal forums popular anymore? Are there any factors that hamper the decision making processes? Have the communal forums lost their effectiveness?

Most public figures and authorities in West Sumatra have always embellished their speeches with rhetorics and ABS-SBK philosophy. There have been many seminars and simposiums held around ABS-SBK philosophy, but they were meant more for conceptual rather than actualization and implementation purposes. This study becomes important because it can be used for investigating the meanings of knowledge in Minangkabau philosophy and its relevance to its custom philosophy and for complementing spaces which are left opened by previous studies, in order that Minangkabau customs can remain viable and sustainable amidst the globalization and advancement.

Epistemology and Culture

In general, 'core philosophy' in Nusantara philosophy tends to function as a way of life so that it is materialized into some axiological dimenstions of the

local wisdoms. The premise, however, may not be perceived as ‘difficulties’ for Nusantara or ‘east’ philosophy to display its epistemological aspects. According to Pranarka (1987: 22-23), one of the exposed liabilities is that epistemology as the philosophy of science is related to cultural systems for epistemology discusses the human knowledge. On the other hand, discussing cultures means discussing humans themselves. Thus, epistemology is actually looking at the relationship between knowledge and humans. Knowledge can never developed without humans and vice versa. Additionally, besides technology, economy, society, arts and religion, knowledge is also considered as one of the basic elements (Koentjaraningrat, 1985: 2).

Every culture has its own perspectives on knowledge and its roles in the life of the humans. Through their knowledge, humans are able to sustain and develop their life to more qualified and civilized. Referring to this fact, the researcher will focus his study on the meanings of knowledge in Minangkabau philosophy seen from epistemological aspect.

Etimologically, epistemology is originated from Greek; *episteme* and *logos*. *Episteme* means knowledge while *logos* is often used to show the occurrence of any systematic knowledge or theories. Thus, epistemology can be understood as the theory of knowledge. The issue around knowledge sources, however, is one of the fundamental problems in epistemology. Hospers (1967: 123-143) exposes five human knowledge sources sense experience, reason, authority, intuition, revelation and faith. Thiroux (1985: 477-488) adds that traditions and common sense belongs to knowledge sources.

A number of Western philosophies try to answer the debates on the knowledge sources. According to empiricism, humans obtain their knowledge through their experiences by the mediation of their five senses. John Locke, one of the empiricists said that when humans are born, their minds are blank (*tabula rasa concept*) and later be filled with experiences from their five senses. Empiricism emphasises on experiences especially those based on observations or five sense experiences. The empiricists believe that a valid knowledge is obtained by the five senses since all objects are real and observable. It is however, theories which are resulted from ratio, according to the empiricists, must be related to facts so that the ideas are validated by the existing realities (Dancy, 1993: 110).

Rationalism proposes that the sources of knowledge lie in human reasoning. Rationalists see that knowledge was obtained through *apriori* processes. They believe that ideas are not obtained through experiences, but through reasoning. Empirical accounts according to this group, is to stimulate thinking. Rene Descartes, the father of rationalism, even proposed a method of doubts to be able to obtain clear cut truth of knowledge (Dancy, 1993: 411).

Beside the two mainstreams, another mention that heart is source of knowledge. Blaise Pascal (in Hamersma, 1983: 16) argues that reason is merely one of the sources of knowledge. Pascal places intuitive knowledge which starts from the heart as a higher knowledge source because the heart has all the explanations unrecognized by reasons, and it is through the heart that humans are capable to receive the truth from God. Bergson called intuitive knowledge as intuition.

Bergson (1946: 95-97) believes that intuition is the most important aspect in humans. Intelligence merely serves practical operative functions in humans. In his opinion, human intelligence can only capture the external truth, while intuition is able to penetrate deeper to reach the core of the knowledge. Intuitions enable humans to deal with the truth within the reality itself and lead humans to the deepest mind, the awareness to reflect on the objects. The intuitive knowledge can only be obtained through dexterities in developing the knowledge in order to create a new understanding.

Minangkabau Philosophy

The discourse of Minangkabau philosophy can never be separated from the historical studies of the birth of the customs and its acculturation to Islam. When Islam entered Minangkabau in the 7th and 8th centuries, it already encountered communities with good structures called customs. Customs are referred to as all of the efforts, creations and will upheld by the community and passed down from generations to generations though habituations and repetitions manifested in attitudes, thinking patterns and behaviors.

The history tells that Minangkabau ancestors - *Datuk Perpatih Nan Sabatang* and *Datuk Katumangungan* – were the first persons to establish Minangkabau customs using the orders of the realm as he basic sources for

customs, which manage one's social positions and economic aspects. Beside that, nature order was also used to determine the order, the objectives and how to attain them in the society. These all were summarized in *petatah petitih* (Hakimy, 1973:5).

Nasroen (1971:38) says that Minangkabau philosophy is based on two regulations – nature and religion. Pre-Islam Minangkabau based its philosophies on nature laws, and after Islam came, it uses religious laws or *syara'* to perfect its laws. With the coming of Islam, the two structure systems which carry with them unique features from each met in Minangkabau. These two structure systems demanded observations from their adherents so that Minangkabau customs and Islam reciprocally attracted one to the other.

The adage *Adat Basandi Syara' Syara' Basandi Kitabullah* is the culmination of the whole interaction, frictions, adjustment and acculturation processes between the customs which already took their roots with Islam which came later to Minangkabau. Empirically, Minangkabau society base their attitudes and behaviors to Islam and the customs. The customs and *syara'* cannot and must not be separated, otherwise, each will nullify the other. Consequently, an authority in Minangkabau local communities must be a Moslem who obediently observes the laws of Islam, whereas an ulema must be a Moslem who obediently observes Minangkabau customs.

In ABS-SBK philosophy, Minangkabau customs are divided into four structures. *First, Adat nan sabana adat* is unchangeable realities in the universe which predetermined and cannot be changed by anything including time, place and condition. The realities contain the values, norms and laws. In Minangkabau it is expressed through *adat nan indak lakang dek paneh, indak lapuak dek hujan, diasak indak layua, dibubuik indak mati*. The source *adat nan sabana adat* is actually *syara'* in the verses of God's *qauliyah* and *kauniyah*, so that they are universally embraced.

Second, Adat nan diadatkan is any customs which are deliberately engineered and arranged by Minangkabau ancestors to be passed down to later generations as laws and regulations for all aspects in life based on *adat nan sabana adat* (*Syara'*). In this case, it is "*syara' mangato adat mamakai*" philosophy which matters most.

Third, Adat nan teradat is custom provisions which are arranged in the state to carry out *adat nan sabana adat* and *adat nan diadatkan* according to the situations of every state, thus, there might be differences in manifesting the provisions. This is confirmed with the expression *adat salingkuang nagari*.

Fourth, local customs are local regulations created within communal forums to accommodate the aspirations of the people of the state in accordance with *alua jo patuik, patuik jo mungkin*. Local customs are social systems in Minang society and are the result of cultural endeavors which can be modified over time and places in accordance with *adat nan sabana adat* limitations.

The four custom structures, further, are classified into two: (1) *adat nan babuhu mati* is the supremacy of custom truth which cannot be modified by any means which includes *adat nan sabana adat* and *adat nan diadatkan*. Both are understood as the main guidance for the local customs; (2) *adat nan babuhua sentak* (*adat nan teradat* and *adat istiadat*) which should change whenever it is seen necessary.

Minangkabau society addresses their area as *alam Minangkabau*. *Alam* or nature possesses a deep meaning. In Minangkabau perspectives, the nature represents an ultimate prominence. It is not only seen as the place to bear offsprings, to live, to die but it also bears a philosophical meaning as the source of knowledge and inspirations as implied in *Alam takambang jadi guru* (Navis, 1986: 59). The term *alam* Minangkabau shows that the Minangkabau people depend very much on the nature. In epistemological contexts, the social conception patterns are constructed from some observations of natural phenomena occurring around them. The shapes, the characteristics and the special qualities are metaphorized into all aspects of life used as the sources of inspirations, knowledge and way of life.

Minangkabau philosophy is understood through the idiom *pepatah petitih* in accordance with the social and metaphorical thinking patterns of the Minangkabau people. *Petatah-petitih* or *pepatah-petitih* is similar to the old proverbs in the Indonesian literature. *Petatah* originally comes from the word *tatah* or to carve, carvings, principles or guidance. Thus, *petatah* refers to carvings made of words or principles (norms) which are used to guide people in to be optimally functioning within the society. *Petitih* comes from the word *titi* or *titian* (the bridge) which means that words can function as a bridge or a

way which can be travelled to optimally perform in the daily life. *Petitih* is used to help explain *petatah* (Saifullah, 2008: 44-45).

Petatah-petitih may have been initially generated through the tendency of the people of Minangkabau to use satires or *tamsilan* (analogy), because *petatah-petitih* refers to broad, deep, accurate, refined and idiomatic understandings (Bakar, 1981: 6). A person's ability to convey messages in the form of satires as well as a person's ability to accept and understand them is considered as a sign of wisdom.

Referring to the observable nature phenomena, therefore Minangkabau philosophy has a real basis for its foundations. Minangkabau philosophy is not speculative in nature. The capturing of the natural phenomena through the five senses inspires the Minangkabau people on how to think, to understand to the deepest and to many analogies as the teacher. The nature is used as the starting point to think about the principles to be performed in their daily life. The natural phenomena are also used to arrange the norms and the values in the society in order that Minangkabau society may still be viable in the realm. The positions and influences of the nature on Minangkabau philosophy are written as follows:

“Panakiak pisau sirauik,
ambiak galah batang lintabuang,
salodang ambiak ka nyiru,
nan satitiak jadikan lauik,
nan sakapa jadikan gunuang,
alam takambang jadi guru” (Madjo-Indo, 1999: 2).

The proverbs show that the knowledge system in Minangkabau philosophy is founded on the nature. The natural phenomena are all observed and studied and concluded. One of the examples which uses the nature to generate knowledge is the calendar to determine the time for working on the ricefields as shown below:

“Gabak di hulu tando ka hujan
cewang di langik tando ka paneh” (Hakimy, 1988: 24).

The idea of learning from the nature for Minangkabau society – as illustrated above – becomes the sources for learning and inspirations to manage their life.

The closeness of Minangkabau society to the nature in their daily life enriches their life which in turn generates varieties of expressions and proverbs which have idiomatic meanings. This has become Minangkabau people personal which Hakimy (1997: xi) also claims as “*kato baumpamo, rundiang nan banyak bakieh*”, which means that if somebody wants to make parables or metaphorize, she or he should use a lot of idiomatic expressions.

This fact is similar to the a research made by Frederick K. Errington (1984: 45) entitled *Manner and Meaning in West Sumatera*, which says that Minangkabau people tend to be indirect in conveying their messages. This tendency, according to Oktavianus (2005: 653) can leave a bad impression, but on the oter hand, it also implies that the speaker does respect other interlocutors as well as shows that the speaker does not want to appear authoritative or arrogant.

Because Minangkabau people always use idiomatic expressions through their *pepatah petitih* for their interactions, consequently, people need to posses the knowledge to comprehend and to interpret the messages between the lines. If the idiomatic expressions are merely logically interpreted, therefore, meanings can be misinterpreted against the logic itself, as illustrated *duduak surang basampik-sampik, duduak basamo balapang-lapang*. Logically, the idiom is *duduak surang balapang-lapang, duduak basamo basampik-sampik* (if we sit alone, we will have more spaces than if we sit together).

Epistemologi Minangkabau: Epistemologi *Raso Pareso*

Knowledge sources are closely associated with where or how the knowledge is obtained. According to Hospers (1967: 123-143) a person’s epistemological knowledge is obtained through his or her senses of experience, reason, authority, intuition, revelation and faith. Minangkabau philosophy places the combination of empirical experiences, reason, intuition and revelations as its sources of knowledge. The empirical experiences and reasonings in Minangkabau philosophy are understood as human endeavors called *pareso* (reflection), while intuitions which is understood as the understanding of heart is called *raso* (emotion). The four knowledge sources in Minangkabau philosophy cannot be disintegrated even though each has its own roles and functions. This combination is refered as *raso pareso* epistemology.

Empirical Experiences

The concept of *alam takambang jadi guru* means that Minangkabau people capture the realities based on the real circumstances and empirical experiences of the natural phenomena. Observable experiences are used as sources of knowledge, as what is claimed by John Locke's *tabularasa* where humans are shaped by their experiences and to obtain the knowledge they need to undergo experiential processes, as illustrated below:

“Mancaliek tuah kanan manang
maliek contoh kanan sudah
manuladan kanan nyato
alam takambang jadi guru” (Hakimy, 1997: 40).

“Karatau madang di hulu
babuah babungo balun
marantau bujang dahulu
dirumah baguno balun” (Madjo-Indo, 1999: 193).

These adages are important for Minangkabau people for it contains the cultural values of exploring other places as a means of enriching personal knowledge, improving maturity including recognitions to ideas, attitudes, behavior and new norms. Exploring other places enable Minangkabau people to observe, emulate, make use and communicate with their new surroundings. Exploring other places also functions to increase the awareness to broaden one's knowledge in order to stimulate the *sense of belonging* in all aspects in life (Naim, 1979: 311).

Aka l

Beside basing its philosophy on empirical experiences (*alam takambang jadi guru*), Minangkabau philosophy also places reason as its source of knowledge. In Minangkabau language, logics, creativities and thoughts are referred in an abstract and non-abstract term – *aka*. According to Navis (1986: 97) *aka*, means *thoughts* and *tree*. Often, the use of the word *aka* (reason) is to be associated with roots (of a tree), such as in: (1) a scholar may also be called a person who has a thorough reasoning (a long root) who can always be able to give solutions to problems future-oriented reasoning or visionary; (2) a scholar

may also be called a person who has a lot of techniques (*banyak aka*) to solve a problem with satisfactory results; (3) a cunning person is also called a person with crooked thoughts (*aka babalik*) to deceive other people; (4) an ignorant person is also called a person with a short wit (*singkek aka*).

Epistemologically, reason is recognized as creative ethical teachings to be used for the social and personal interests either in making considerations or using it properly according to Minangkabau philosophy. Since humans capabilities differ from each other, reason in Minangkabau philosophy is categorised into four: (1) *Aka sajangka* (a hand-length witted) is a term used for people who consider themselves who think that they are more intelligent than others; (2) *Aka duo jangka* (two hand-length witted) refers to a person who thinks that she or he is as intelligent as others; (3) *Aka tigo jangka* (three hand-length witted) refers to a person who thinks that she or he is not as intelligent as others; (4) *Aka bajangka-jangka* (many hand-length witted) refers to person who thinks that she or he always needs to learn from those who are more as well as less intelligent than she or he (Navis, 1986: 98).

Hakimy (2004: 85) explains that the potentials of reasons must be used for the welfare of the society. Reasons which always lead humans towards virtues are called *aka nan sabana aka* or reasons which are in line with ABS-SBK philosophy. It is also true that human reasons may be used for conducting bad deeds. Therefore, human reasons can be structured into levels: (1) *Aka sambarang aka* refers to reasons which only orients itself towards advantages and profits regardless of virtues and moral aspects of the actions; (2) *Aka manjala* refers to disoriented reason which leads to greed and envy; (3) *Aka takumpa* refers to reasons which fade and die especially associated with a person who likes to fantasize; (4) *Aka tawaka* refers to attentive reason which faithfully and obediently observe the norms stipulated by God; (5) *Aka sabana aka* refers to reasons which consider advantages and disadvantages, the alpha and omega, *the kosher* and the forbidden, optional and obligatory, Islam-based, death and life, high and low and justice and non-justice.

Minangkabau philosophy questions everything including the nature. The idiomatic expressions carried by *pepatah-petitih* cannot be sufficiently understood and interpreted using literal meanings only, but also some radical and critical thinking in order to reach the intended and proper meanings. In line

with Rene Descartes, the intended meanings can only be attained by presenting questions, as illustrated in the followings:

“Sadang baguru kapalang aja
nan bak bungo kambang tak jadi
kok hanyo dapek dek mandanga
tidak didalam dihalusi
mangauak tah sahabiah gauang
mahawai tak sahabiah raso
banyak pahamnyo nan tak lansuang
sahinggo batuka dari makasuiknyo” (Hakimy, 1997: 18).

The implicit meaning of the idioms is that a person should ask questions about the issues in order that she or he understands the ideas comprehensively in order to attain the object previously set. Logical thinking in Minangkabau traditions is founded on four features namely logics or *alue jo patuik*, observations to legal norms or *anggo jo tango*, ethics (*pareso*) and dialectics (communal forums). The element of reason and in Minangkabau epistemology is the key word to understand every custom provision which is expressed *pepatah petitih* as expressed in *yang tidak lekang oleh panas dan tidak lapuk oleh hujan*. The idiom means that acceptable ideas are those founded on correct, proper and naturally legitimate and can be acknowledge by humans fine attitudes and validated by intellectual thinking.

Minangkabau rationality is also reflected with its acceptance to new ideas in religions, socio-culture, etc. Even though the innovations are always affected with conflicts due to thinking frictions, but they can always be mediated within the discussion forums to reach agreements and consensus. Thus, new ideas can be accepted after undergoing cultural selection processes and social acceptance in accordance with custom and religious values (Zuhro, 2009: 107).

The differences of the product of knowledge obtained by the people in Minangkabau philosophy has been caused by the differences of human knowledge levels, and it is indispensable, as shown in the following idiom:

“Pincalang biduak rang tiku
didayuang sambia manungkuik
basilang kayu dalam tungku
baitu api mangko iduik” (Hakimy, 1988: 99).

From the adage above, it can be clearly seen that there are dialectic processes in obtaining a knowledge. The dialectic process in the idiom is the occurrence of disagreements as a form of thesis and antithesis as metaphorized in the criss-cross of sticks in a fireplace which causes the emergence of discussions as a dynamic synthesis. It is understood that there will never be fire if there are not criss-crossing firewood so is the discussion forums – there will never be any solutions if there are no disagreements.

Intuition

The kinds of epistemology in Minangkabau philosophy which orients itself to ethical values also gives intuitive roles as sources to gain a knowledge. Minangkabau philosophy places *raso* (heart/*coeur*) as a balancer for logical thinking (*pareso*). Intuition as a means to justify a knowledge in Nusantara philosophies including that of Minangkabau is not separated from the position of the knowledge as one of cultural elements which are materialized into ethical activities and which stems from the heart.

Conscience as the source of knowledge, according to Blaise Pascal is another word for intuition (Bergson) or *vernunft* by Immanuel Kant. Intuitive knowledge can be attained through one's perseverance and totality in developing the knowledge so that she or he can get new understanding and new insights. A person who has the intuitive knowledge, can spontaneously answer a question due to an ability which surpasses the knowledge of reason or sense of experiences. The knowledge which is based on intuition can be observed on the following adage:

“Kilek baliuang lah ka kaki
kilek camin lah ka muko” (Hakimy, 1988: 30).

“Baranang itiak dalam aia
alah tantu jantan batinonyo” (Hakimy, 1988:)

The first adage means that a lightning which strikes from a hoe-like tool and a mirror as subjects can already describes the feet and the face as the object. This is the idiomatic expression that a wizard can directly capture the realities which will happen due to her or his intuitive knowledge which stems from her or his conscience.

The second adage is the metaphor of a person who has to determine the sex of a duck which will swim in no time. A person who is knowledgeable about ducks, will spontaneously determine the sex of a swimming duck. The idea is that the abilities to learn, read and socialize are obtained through *raso pareso*.

The importance of the knowledge in Minangkabau resulted from should become the competence possessed by a custom leader who is also required to have some empirical and thinking skills (*pareso*) as well as the ability to socialize with the society in the sense that she or he understands the knowledge custom through her or his conscience (*raso*). A person who does not have such a competence is called a person who does not have the knowledge *hereang jo gendeang* (courtesies, sarcasms and idioms). In living *raso jo pareso* principle, a person will always conduct a study before hastily making important decisions.

Revelations

The acts of understanding the nature cannot solely be conducted under rational and empirical evidence, but also by using some divine guidance. The concepts of Minangkabau philosophy which are formulated within the custom norms, places *adat nan sabana adat* which bases itself on the divine custody (revelations) for reference in the next level, so that all of the custom norms and laws in Minangkabau epistemology always adhere to *syara'* (*Kitabullah*). The roles of the revelations as the source of transcendental knowledge gives some normative inputs for intuition which is found within the human conscience.

Alam Takambang Jadi Guru as an Inductive Method to Obtain the Knowledge

To understand philosophies, Minangkabau philosophy uses the inductive logics, where everything is based on the observations in the surroundings, which in turn, will be assessed using the truth standards observed by Minangkabau society namely *alua* (the plot), *patuik* (properness) and *mungkin*, so that *alam takambang jadi guru* philosophy will inductively verify the phenomenon.

The natural provisions later are interpreted into the custom provisions which are validated by the society. This is different from the Javanese provisions which is deductive in nature. the Javanese puts a strong

foundations towards its custom provisions. The next generations serve as the benefactors of the knowledge without having the opportunities to criticize or to re-interpret the existing custom provisions. Even though the Minangkabau culture has been built on a strong foundation of its customs, but it still gives spaces for reinterpretations in accordance to the dynamics of the time and the people. Epistemologically, this attitude brings about a more egalitarian society of Minangkabau which is reflected in *sakali aie gadang, sakali tapian barubah*.

The Minangkabau people observe the nature phenomena by using the inductive methods. In Minangkabau philosophy, the nature is categorized into four aspects – *alam batang* (plants), *alam binatang* (animals), thoughts and non-human realm (Sayuti, 2008: 169-171). In the realm of animals, the inductive method can be seen from the life of ants expressed in “*bak samuik bairiang*” (like the marching ants). Ants also ‘greet’ one another when they meet as expressed in “*tagak sapo manyapo, duduak tagua managua*” (when we stand, we greet, when we sit, we acknowledge), an attitude which is hard to find these days, except if the interlocutors have some interests to start a conversation.

Another characteristic of ants can be seen in the way they forage for food. In Minang, it is expressed as “*kok dapek samo balabo hilang samo marugi*” (together we will get food, and together we will not). Ants are also recognized for its defense systems. When ants are taking a rest or dwelling, they will build some gradual and systematic defense system. All characteristics shown by the ants for Minangkabau philosophy reflects *alam takambang jadi guru* which is inductively acknowledged from the realm of animals.

In plants, the inductive methods can be observed in the life of a banana tree. The shoot of a banana tree can still be a shoot if it still lives together with its ‘parent’ tree. But if the shoot is separated from the parent tree, it can become another parent tree. A similar thing also happens among the Minangkabau people where one’s freedom and independence are justified from her or his ability to live separately from her or his parents to create a new family. The habit of exploring other areas is used by a person to obtain her or his independence and competence.

The inductive method can also be observed in the non-human realm where the world is seen through good and bad dimensions. The human life is

always centered between the two polarities culminated in the concepts of heaven and hell. Minangkabau philosophy explains the meanings of good and bad inductively through the analogies of the life of plants and animals.

In the thinking realm, the Minangkabau people think and give meanings to their thinking products as expressed in “*pikia palito hati*” (one’s thought is one’s light) which means that there should be synergies between *raso* and *pareso* or between thinking and faith. *Raso* is within the conscience (soul, faith) and *pareso* is in the area of thinking or logics. *Pikia palito hati* means that whatever we are thinking must render meanings as what it means to live as a scavenger. If we do not find the meanings, therefore, we should use the adage “*haniang hulu bicaro*” (think before you speak) to gain the deepest meanings of one’s thoughts.

Alua, Patuik and Mungkin as the Standards of Truth

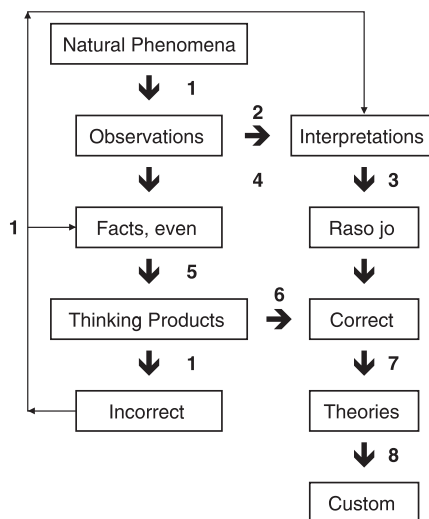
In the pre-Islam era, the standards of truth in Minangkabau refer to the synergy between the nature and the natural provisions as expressed in “*ka bukik mandaki*” (it is the hill we climb), fire burns and water cools things down. This is where the philosophy *alam takambang jadi guru* so is the *matrilineal* concept. For the people of Minangkabau, it is natural that mothers are the ones who bear children, understand them the best and have some psychological relationship with them even before children are born.

Minangkabau philosophy bases its standards of truth on three aspects – *alua* (system), *patuik* (properness) dan *mungkin* (opportunity). The knowledge is built through a system or a flow chart. Questionable, doubted, interpreted and decided ideas must undergo a proper and systematic thinking process. If an idea is proven to be *alua* but not *patuik*, thus the ideas cannot be accepted as a decision or truth as with a decision which is *alua* and *patuik* must be accepted as a decision and truth.

From the three aspects Minangkabau philosophy generates custom adages using natural phenomena as indicators, such as in “*gabak di hulu tando ka hujan, cewang di langik tando ka paneh*”. This adage is true due to the congruence among the three standards of truth. (*alua*, *patuik* and possible). This custom advice can be scientifically understood based on the

climatology that everytime people see *gabak di hulu* then it will eventually rain due to the condensation process when the vapor moves upward and hit a solid element. Meanwhile, when *cewang* is in the sky (clear sky) means there is no vapor and the high intensity of light which enables electromagnetic radiation which causes the vapor to disappear.

The following schema shows how the Minangkabau people base their knowledge findings on the systematicity of the inductive approach of *alua* and *patuik*:



- 1. Social Science : *lamak dek awak katuju dek urang*
(justice value)
- 2. Political Science : *tagang badantiang-dantiang, kandua bajelo-jelo*
(leadership value)
- 3. Manajement : *ka bukik samo mandaki, ka lurah samo manurun*
(cooperation and synergy)
- 4. Natural Science : *gabak di hulu tando ka hujan, cewang di langik tando ka paneh* (climatology)
- 5. Religion Science : *indak bingkudu tak bagatah, antah kok birah jo kaladi, indak penghulu nan ta gawa, antah kok Allah dengan Nabi*
(Human is erroneous, the Divinity is the perfect One)

Based on the schema, the process of obtaining knowledge in Minangkabau philosophy starts with observations through sense experiences (1). The sense experience results give stimulus to a person to interpret them (2). The interpretation process is assessed with *raso jo pareso* possessed by the interpreter (3). The results of the interpretation simulatively and interactively compared to the events (4) to generate a thinking product (5) which can be correct and incorrect. If it is correct, (6) then it becomes a theory (7) which will be materialized in custom advices (*kato adat*) (8). *Pituah adat* delivered covers all aspects of life and gives birth to a knowledge (9) in political, social, management and natural sciences. On the other hand, the thinking product can incorrect, (10) because it does not meet the concepts of properness (*patuik*) and impossible. If the thinking result is incorrect, the process should be restarted from the interpreting stage (11) until a correct thinking product is achieved. An incorrect thinking product may have been resulted from inaccuracies in doing the interpretation. The reinterpretation process shows the dynamics of the Minangkabau people in generating the knowledge. They do not stop with a stagnat and inaccurate thinking product because the nature as the teacher is continuously and consistently interpreted.

The Epistemological Base of the Communal Forums

The Minangkabau society has two value systems in carrying out the communal forums known as *lareh nan duo* (a synergy of two). The first synergy is a forum which uses Koto Piliang customs and the second uses Bodi Caniago customs. The two differs in a number of ways since they were created by two Minangkabau historical proponents – Datuk Ketumanggungan dan Datuk Perpatih Nan Sabatang who have different views in managing the social and political aspects in the society.

The practices of custom forums in minangkabau shows that there is a public space to show disagreements either within the synergy of Koto Piliang or Bodi Caniago. The discussion processes in Koto Piliang is commenced with addressing the problem conducted by a *manti* to the local participants such as the tribe, *kaum* and *paruik* (families of one mother) as instructed by the custom society of Minangkabau.

Based on the constructions, there are levels of discussion forums such as the ones in the communal house (one *nagari*), in *rumah gadang* (one *kaum*), and

in *rumah gadang* which is led by a *tungganai* (a leader from *paruik*). Following the problem addressing, the *manti* will request opinions and responses from the participants. In the process, the *manti* gives some guidance and alternatives towards a resolution. This is the stage where discourses occur because everybody has equal rights to express opinions and to disagree. When a solution and an agreement are made, they will be announced to a *penghulu* to be officially reported and to be legitimized or said to have been acknowledged by the *penghulu*.

In Koto Piliang system, the spaces for disagreements are possible when the forums do not reach any agreements which is said to be '*diparambunan*' or given a recess in order that the participants get ample time to do further thinking and reflections of the problem and free it from any interferences. When an agreement is attained, the decision can then be officially reported to and be given legitimation by the *penghulu*. A problem which is *diparambunan* can take as long as three, seven, fourteen and twenty-one days. During the *perambunan*, all parties conduct some further negotiations prompted by a *tungganai*, called *memasukkan raso* (involving emotions).

This procedure shows the central role of the system and the competence of the *penghulu tungganai* in generating decisions from the aspirations of the *anak kemenakan*. The *tungganai* is the house leader which directly assesses the problem before it is presented to *penghulu pucuak* to be given a legitimation. the commonest problem occurs within the *patuik* level. It goes with the saying "*rancak rumah dek tungganai, elok nagari dek penghulu*" (the house is good because of a *tungganai*, the *nagari* is good because of a *penghulu*). *Penghulu* hold the sole authority to make decisions by previously paying attentions to dialectics. The authority rendered to a *penghulu* must be based on good and bad considerations. The decisions made by a *penghulu* must be respected by all social components in Koto Piliang communities.

At the normative level, the decision of a *penghulu* must be adhered and obeyed by all participants. Nowadays, however, a *penghulu* gets less respects due to individual interests. There are cases when a problem already resolved in *tungganai* level cannot be given official approval by the highest *penghulu* because the later has her or his own interest in the matter. The system poses a weakness – that a decision might have been quickly resolved, but it might be accurate.

In Bodi Caniago system, the *penghulu* participates in the discussions together with *anak kemenakan* in levels of problems (*duduak sahamparan*). When the problem occurs at one-mother level, a tribe *penghulu* will also be summoned to be able to give inputs to the *anak kemenakan*. The practices of Koto Piliang and Bodi Caniago systems share a similarity in which they open public spaces for disagreements.

While Bodi Caniago system follows *duduak surang basampik-sampik*, *duduak basamo balapang-lapang* (sitting alone gives people free spaces, sitting together less spaces) which means that everybody has equal rights to express their opinions and in making decisions. This system is considered ineffective since every body is given the opportunities to speak so decisions cannot be made promptly.

Koto Piliang system follows *bajanjang naiak batanggo turun* (gradually go upwards, gradually go downward) which means that a problem should be discussed at the lowest level (*paruik*) and led by a *tungganai* first, before it is presented to the levels of *kaum (mamak)*, tribe (*niniak mamak*) and finally *nagari (penghulu pucuk)*. If the problems can be resolved within the lower hierarchy, *penghulu pucuk* will only act as the legitimacy body. Because of this, the system followed by Koto Piliang system is also called 'hierachical democracy'.

Every custom discussion in Minangkabau including the custom ceremony *batagak pangulu*— will use *panitahan* or *pasambahan* system where the opening speech is addressed to discuss a particular issue. Custom speeches will be performed by a young man who has earned a degree or started a family to another young man from another group. Each will also address their speech in their respective groups. Following the discourses to the sitting *niniak mamak*, they will come to a resolution.

Every communal forum is commenced with an apology addressed by *sipangka* (the forum sponsor) to the *niniak mamak*, religious clerics, scholars and other people who deserve to sit in the forum. Using Habermas (1984: 101), the apology made by the *sipangka* can be viewed as a way to understand each other points of views before proceeding to the matters. The will to understand and to be understood is clearly *immanen* in the speech conducts and shared by all people. The medium that leads to understanding in a discourse

is the language. A language is a communication medium to achieve a reciprocal understanding.

According to Hardiman (2009: 36), the use of a language in a discourse in Habermas' perspective is to find the structure of communicative understanding and not a strategic action. In a strategic action, people do not use a language to understand, but to impose one's will to others which may also lead to a consensus.

The speech of *pasambahan* custom is commenced with addressing *balabeh mulo-mulo* (*belebas* at the beginning) which refers to an opening speech with a fixed structure to begin a *pasambahan* (a gift) including *pasambahan batagak pangulu*, as expressed in the following:

“Angku Datuk.....(disebutkan namanya), sambah dipuhunkan kahadapan Angku, sakali gawa baribu ampun, maaf dimintak gadang-gadang. Sambah sujuik jo simpuah, sabarek bungka nan piawai, naraco luruih main daun, indak basisiak jo basibak, indak bahinggo jo babateh, kok ketek indak basabuik namo, kok gadang indak babilang gala, ujuiknyo sambah nan taserak kapado hadirin kasadonyo. Dari sintuak ka saniangbaka, urang mamukek pagi pagi, dari ujuang taruih ka pangka, dari tengah sampai katapi, indak ba atok jo barompai, bukan bahinggo jo babateh, ketek indak basabuik namo, gadang indak bahimbau gala, ujuiknyo sambah nan taserak kapado hadirin kasadonyo ujuik nan hadir diateh rumah nangko. (*The next is And then, it will be a gift by the audience in accordance with the authority levels and functions such as niniak mamak, ulema, scholars and government officials*)

“Sungguhpun angku surang jo baduo nan tasambah di hambo, nak salangkok ganoknyolah baliu Niniak mamak, Alim Ulama sarato baliu caadiak pandai dan badan pamarentahan nan hadia di ateh rumah nangko, tampek ambo mangarang maantakan sambah jo salam, kurang ka tabilang ka diatok, pambilang pa atok pasambahan. Sambah tibo diangku Niniak Mamak nan balingka duduak salam tibo diangku sagalo guru, kasudahan sambah dimintak rela jo maaf kahaadapan angku Datuk(disebutkan namanya) (Rajo, 1993: 34).”

The speech part of *pasambahan* is also called *batang pasambahan* which contains the statement of appreciation and respects to the people who give speeches in the forum. The appreciations and respects are shown through philosophical expressions using metaphors in *pepatah petitih*, as written in Minangkabau adage:

“Nan tuo dihormati
samo gadang lawan baiyo
nan ketek dikasihani
tanaman suko dilambuak
manusia suko disanjung” (Hakimy, 1988: 44).

In the opening of *pasambahan*, there has not been any dialogal processes because the part does not address the goal of the discussion. The objective of the discussion is stated in the body of *pasambahan*. The body of *pasambahan* is delivered reciprocally in turn between the messenger of the forums. Every speaker will respond to the other interlocutor’s messages after repeating the previous messages. *Pasambahan* speeches are delivered by quoting the custom procedures on the purposes and background of the ceremony in the form of riddles, idioms and metaphors, such as the one in the *pasambahan* forum of *batagak pangulu*:

“kok dikaji maso nan dahulu, takalo langik tasentak naiak, takalo bumi tahantam turun, Nabi Adam mulo partamo (etc. telling the origin of the Minangkabau people and their customs) itulah warih nan dijawek, pusako nan kito tarimo dari niniak moyang kito Datuk Parpatiah nan Sabatang jo Datuk Katumanggungan saibu sa ayah.

“Biriak-biriak tabang ka samak, di samak tabang ka halaman, jatuhah marahok masuk padi, dari niniak turun ka mamak, dari mamak turun ka kamanakan, adat bapakai kini, pertama hiduik bakarilahan, kaduo mati batungkek budi”

“Baa tatapek samacam iko kini, alah rapek mamak jo kamanakan sarato ibu jo bapo. Kok picak alah salayang, kok bulek alah sagolong, tatapek di mati nan batungkek budi. Siatolah baliu mati nan batungkek budi, Datuk Bareno dahulunyo kini bagala Datuk Majo Kayo. Itulah baliu nan kajadi payuang panji bandera basa dalam payuang nangko, kok pai tampek batanyo, pulang katampaik babarito, utang nan ka mambaiakan, piutang nan ka manarimokan manuruik sapanjang adat dalam nagari”

“Indak lai kinitu, lah rancak bana angku paiyokan kaapado baaliu nan basamo, mananti malah hambo”

“Karano kandak alah balaku, kok pintak alah babari hambo sugiro mampaiyokan, basaba manunggu malah angku” (Rajo, 1993: 33-34).

The explanation is taken from the body of *pasambahan* in example one (1) explaining the historical background of Minangkabau custom systems. It is reexplained in the second expression (2) by giving a normative foundation in the form of adages about the importance of *batagak pangulu* mechanism. The third part (3) explains about the emergence of a consensus consensus (agreement) form the discussion of *niniak mamak* that Datuk Majo Kayo is nominated as a *penghulu* with further explanations of his functions according to Minangkabau customs. The fourth part (4) indicates that every discourse performed by the proponent's side gives an ample discussion space for the opposing group before stating their agreements. The second party, as described in the fifth part (5) also performs an internal discourse before making a decision.

Based on the explanation, it is revealed that the epistemological aspect in the dialogs during the *pasambahan* speeches indicates that the tradition of discussion and consensus will be attained by every participant. The communication process also shows that there are interchange of ideas between the two parties. This process, according to Habermas is a communicative act to attain a resolution or consensus where the two parties. This process is what Habermas called as communicative action to get consensus after the two present rational arguments, defend their ideas and disagreeing and finally come to a common platform agreed by the two parties.

The communicative actions performed in *batagak pangulu* results in consensus which is rationally accepted by all participants because there are deliberate endeavors to express ideas in a free atmosphere. There are also inter-subjective acceptances and acknowledgements to the validity claims that show that the meanings of the interests of each party are true, correct, and honest which in Habermas said to be *wahr*, *richtig*, and *wahrhaftig* as reflected in the expressions of the following *pasambahan*:

“Duduak surang basampik sampik, duduak basamo balapang lapang, dapek basamo dipaiyokan dapek surang di bulati, dek karano kami duduak baduo batigo, nak dibawo kato baiyo, mencari bulek nan sagolong, picak nan salayang, saba mananti malah datuak.”

(the expressions accept all conditions with willingness but all must be decided in the forums)

“Tantangan sambah jo titah angku tadi, diamba gadang dianjuang tinggi, tapi dek adat kato baiyo, pusako gayuang basambuik, bajalan nak baiyo, bakato bak bamolah jo baliu angku nan duduak basamo, supayo rantak nak sadaram, lenggang nak sarayun, picak nak satapik, bulek nak sagolong, direntang kato jo rundingan, mananti datuak sakatiko.” (respects to niniak mamak in line with the sacred legacy that has been accepted and the agreed custom provisions based on the request of the accepted guests)

“Sapanjang kato datuak tadi, nan tatumpu ka ambo sananglah hati mandanganyo, pandai bana datuak babilang dari awa sampai akianyo, satitiak indak nyo hilang, sabarih indaknyo lupu, licin badindiang camin, kok datanyo balantai papan, aluihnyo mangulik dasun. Nah bak sibisu barasian, taraso lai takatokaan tidak, jo kok talalai manjawabnyo, ampun jo maaf kami mintak, apolah sabab karanonyo, ambo rang ketek mudo mantah, angan angan banyak nan cewang, pikiran banyak nan ragu, biduak untuang pandayuang hati, niek nak sampai kalabuhan, ambo tak pandai mangamudi, alun sikola dihaluan, ba’a nan kapambarinyo, sasuai bak kato undang, kok tagamang mintak dijawab, kok licin lai batungkek, samantaro manjapuik jawaban nyo nak ambo baiyo, io kamamak nan salingka duduak, sananglah datuak manantinyo.”(the wordings have been very pleasant and mindful from the beginning to the end, calming the minds, non-offensive, non-intimidating so that the discussions reached an agreement) “Dipaiyo dipatidokan, dipaukua dipajangkokaan disauak aia nan janiah dimintak kato nan bana kapado baliu nan hadir, duduak sabalah Sutan manantikan.” (the agreement will bring mutual benefits)

The communicative actions in every communal forums in Minangkabau reflects the epistemological element of the communal discussions to always in one mind and one word *saiyo sakato* regarding the collective practices in Minangkabau customs, as shown in the following expressions:

“Bulek aia dek pambuluah
bulek kato dek mufakat
bulek lah dapek digolongkan
picak lah dapek dilayangkan” (Hakimy, 1988: 79).

According to Rosa (2003: 230-235), the discussion and agreement traditions in the communal forum ceremonies among Minangkabau societies especially those

outside the area or *rantau* has become weak nowadays. It is so much different from the ones in *darek* areas which still implement the patterns of the communal forums in its custom practices. The differences might have been caused by the cultural differences between the two areas. *Darek* areas still embrace the dialogal cultures as can be seen in its institutions.

On the other hand, the culture in *rantau* areas is more monologous and hegemonic, so that the dialog discourses are subtle. This kind of culture affects the reductions of the dialog forums reflected in *pasambahan* speeches since most parts of *pasambahan* speeches are *bungo pasambahan* containing the romantic stories of *tambo* Minangkabau which aims to enrich the aesthetical values of the speech, so that the opposing interlocutors will only accept the speech as ‘the truth of Minangkabau *tambo*’ without providing any rooms to question the content of the text. It shows the hegemony and centralistic culture in the communicative conducted in *rantau* areas.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Minangkabau custom philosophy finds itself on the provisions of religious and natural laws, reflected through the expression “*adat basandi syara’ syara’ basandi kitabullah, alam takambang jadi guru*”. The cosmo-centric understanding of the philosophy *alam takambang jadi guru*, is not meant to make the nature as an objective knowledge or as knowledge of nature. The nature, however, is made into an analog to generate the provisions of values and conducts within the social interactions in the Minangkabau society. Because of this, all of its teachings and philosophies are etched within its idiomatic expressions in the form of *pepatah petitih* which emulates the shapes, the characteristics and the life of the nature.

The philosophy in Minangkabau customs places the knowledge as the synthesis between empirical and national aspects. The knowledge, according to the philosophy of Minangkabau customs, is not grounded on merely observable and rational aspects (*pareso*), but also conscience (*raso*), so that it results in the findings of new understanding or knowledge. The such is called *raso pareso* epistemology. In western philosophy, such concepts are labeled as the logics of conscience by Blaise Pascal, and Vernunft by Immanuel Kant,

and intuition by Bergson. The Islamic philosophy addresses this concept as *Irfani*.

The relevance between the epistemological studies of the philosophy of Minangkabau customs with its communal forum practices lies in the dialogal processes performed by the Minangkabau society when making resolutions to problems through the communal discussions. The communal forums will only be fruitful if it generate consensuses or agreements and if it also provides spaces for public disagreements. The two discussion systems encountered within Minangkabau society give ample opportunities to the two adherents to open dialogs in the forums to come to resolutions.

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