

Raso Pareso: Social Ethics, Social Exchange and Politics in Inter-Ethnic Relationship In Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia

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Abstract

Padang, West Sumatra, is noted to rarely experience mass violent conflict, although it is known to be a plural city, in which several ethnic groups reside together with the native ethnic group, namely Minangkabau. Indeed, this does not mean that Padang does not have problems. The issues of discrimination against ethnic Chinese post-2009 earthquake, as well as the application of Perda Syariah issued in mayor Fauzi Bahar's first term (2004-2009) that have resulted strong social tension between different ethnic and religious groups are amongst the most important problems to mention. However, unlike many other big cities in Indonesia, as Solo, Semarang, Medan, and Makasar, in which mass violence is easily exploded, the social tension in Padang is often successfully managed. In this regards, looking at the cultural aspects of Minangkabau society, in addition to the political economy perspective, is important, and raso pareso, the cultural practice of Minangkabau, applied not only by ethnic Minang, but also by the other minority ethnic groups, including ethnic Chinese, could not be avoided to discuss. The assertion of mutual-respect, tolerance, mutual understanding, evidence based argumentation, and long-term oriented behaviors in raso pareso has helped people from different ethnic groups to build peaceful social interactions. This has enabled, for instance, the building of trading relation between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese in the midst of long-existing problems of religious differences. In fact, raso pareso has not only been social ethics, more importantly, it has also been social exchange for enabling the building of consensus and commitment to share in trading, and in the other fields of social life. Nevertheless, raso pareso is also very political for becoming the bargaining tool for different ethnic groups in Padang through the politics of accommodation and the politics of recognition. Using the framework of social ethics, social exchange and politics, this paper discusses how the cultural practice like raso pareso, in addition to the political economy factor, could enable the peaceful encounters between different ethnic groups in Padang. Given the technical limitation, this paper is limited to discuss ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship.

Key words: raso pareso, social ethics, social exchange, politics of inter-ethnic relationship.

Introduction

Padang, West Sumatra, is one of the plural cities in Indonesia. About 10 percent of minority ethnic groups, consisting of ethnic Chinese, Javanese, Jambinese, Bataknese, Indians, Arabians, and Balinese, comprise Padang population amongst the 90 percent of native and majority ethnic, namely Minangkabau. The encounters of ethnic groups in Padang, West Sumatra is not something new. It has occurred since long time ago through trading (Dobbin 2008). As an old trading city, Padang became an intersecting point of different ethnic groups that had different economic professions, as housekeepers for Nias women, tailors and launderers for Indians, laborers and military conscripts for Javanese, shoe sellers and reparation owners as well as shopkeepers for ethnic Chinese (Abdullah 1978). Inter-ethnic encounters of the past trading activity can still be traced until currently, like through the remaining established China kampung in Pondok, Padang Selatan, Barat and Timur sub-districts, Nias kampung, Javanese kampung, Batak kampung, and Indian kampung in the other parts of Padang. What is interesting about inter-ethnic relationships in Padang is the relatively minimized mass violent conflicts, compared to the other big cities in Indonesia, as Medan, Jakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, Ambon, and Pontianak, in spite of the strong social tensions that often rise between them.

In addition to the political economy perspective understood as a framework of looking at individual behaviors and social interactions between different people as being economic oriented (Weingast and Wittman 2006) as some scholars often mention as the explaining factors of inter-ethnic relationship,¹ attention on cultural aspect that turns to be social mechanism that functions to manage social relations is important. In this case, focus on *raso paretso*, a Minang cultural value that asserts public deliberation, tolerance, mutual understanding, evidence based argument and long-term oriented decision (Nusyirwan 2011), which interestingly practiced not only by ethnic Minang, as the native ethnic group in Padang, but also by the other ethnic groups,² becomes important. *Raso paretso* has forced people not only to respect for the others, which can be referred as social ethics (Saint-Martin, in Saint-Martin and Thompson 2006: 5), but also to find out consensus of inter-ethnic relationships, that it can be said as encouraging social exchange between different

¹ As the research finding of Zulfan Tadjoeeddin, 2010.

² Interview with Gani, a Chinese figure, on May 2014, in Padang.

ethnic groups (Durkheim 1984). Indeed, *raso paretso* is also about politics of inter-ethnic relationship. It is about the politics of acceptance and accommodation amongst different ethnic groups as well as the politics of conflict avoidance.

Nevertheless, this does not mean to say that *raso paretso* could get rid of all potential of social conflicts. In daily life, issues of religious differences still become very contentious. The issuance of Perda Syariah (Syaria-by-law) even encourages wide criticisms. Yet, daily experience of people from different ethnic groups adopting *raso paretso* in their social relations that it helps them prevent from the potential of mass violence remains worth-considering. Elaborating cultural practices, which may encourage the practices of social ethics and social exchange, and may bring an impact on conflict minimization, or even, peace building is what this paper trying to do. Dealing with this, this paper will focus more on ethnic Minang and ethnic relationship, given the statistics of ethnic Chinese that is amongst the most significant compared to the others, and, in the context of Padang, relationship with ethnic Chinese is known to be the most contentious for the issues of economic competition together with the issue of religious differences. The discussion of the other ethnic groups takes smaller portion than that of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship in this paper.

For that purpose, this paper is divided into five parts. The first part is introduction. The second part discusses theoretical framework used in this paper. This part explains the meaning of *raso paretso* from the framework of cultural practice, which then followed with the brief explanation of social ethic, social exchange and politics of inter-ethnic relationship. The third part explains the methods used for collecting and approaching data. The fourth part discusses the application of *raso paretso* in ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship from the perspective of social ethics and social exchange. Nonetheless, as inter-ethnic relationship also tells us much about politics, the discussion of *raso paretso* within ethnic Minang and ethnic relationship from the sense of politics is unavoidable. Finally, the fifth part will conclude the idea of *raso paretso* from the perspective of social ethics, social exchange and politics, as having been discussed earlier.

Conceptual Framework: Cultural Practice as Social Ethics, Exchange and Politics of Inter-ethnic Relationship

This part discusses raso paseso as cultural practice, which is connected with the perspective of social ethics, social exchange, and politics of inter-ethnic relationship. Such a connection is based on the assumption that cultural practice never stands alone. It exists to bind society with a series of code of conducts, and a mechanism of consensus in social relations, as well as to be an expression of politics amongst grass in daily relations. This part highlights the understanding of raso paseso from the framework of cultural practice, of social ethics, social exchange and grass root politics, and of inter-ethnic relationship.

Cultural Practice

Referring to Bourdieu (1977), practice is the acts of which, “their temporal structure, direction and rhythm are *constitutive* of their meaning” (9-10). In this sense, practice can be said as time, space, and contextually bounded. And, as entailing meaning, practice also has logic as “the driving force of the whole mechanism” of exchange (6 and 14). Cultural practice, as Bourdieu (221) asserts also tells us about the structure in society. How practice is perceived and reproduced is very much related to the perceived classes in society. Therefore, cultural practice could be very political and very much attached with political interest (63). In this case, taking into account de Certeau’s concept of strategy and tactic (1984), in which strategy is a way of those being sitting in power to dominate the structure, and tactic is a way of those in sub-structure to get freed up from domination, is worth-considering. Strategy is usually apparent, and tactic is usually hidden and on the watch for opportunities (xix).

From de Certeau’s idea, it becomes clear that cultural practice is something dynamic. And, interestingly, such a dynamic could be happened in the very daily life of community. The framework of cultural practice as Bourdieu and de Certeau underline, in which practice is meaningful, logical, and political, is helpful for understanding the practice of raso paseso in inter-ethnic relationship in Padang, West Sumatra. It is because raso paseso does not only talk about code of conduct based on Minang cultural value, but also reveals a contestation of interest, reflected in the politics of accommodating, adjusting and negotiating between different ethnic groups.

Below part discusses briefly raso pareso as cultural practice from the perspective of social and politics.

Raso Pareso as Cultural Practice

Raso pareso is of Minang teachings about life, social relations, and relationship with environment. It is amongst the most popular in society. Literally, raso means feeling, and pareso means to check. Simply, it will mean “to always check our feeling”. In practice, this is described as using rationality to get the emotion balanced; always putting empathy along with rationality; strengthening statement and claim with evidence; accompanying short term oriented decision with long term consideration; and synchronizing one’s interest with the others’.

As Nusyirwan (2011: 20) asserts raso pareso is an integrative understanding of social conduct, in which raso must be paired with pareso in daily social life in order to build a synergy. “Raso bao naiak, pareso bao turun” that means what is in heart (feeling) should be brought to the top (referring to head, an analogy of rationality), and what is in head (rationality) should be brought to the bottom (referring to heart, an analogy of feeling) as an expansion of raso pareso is an explanation of how always rethinking of what is being committed is strongly asserted in Minang community. Not only this, in Minang teaching raso pareso is also equipped with a teaching of “rancak di awak, katuju dek urang” that means sensitiveness to the others’ feelings, circumstances, and needs to clarify the synergy between individuals and community. It is a teaching about a mindset that says, “What is liked by us should also be liked by the others.”

Not only as a teaching, raso pareso is also a practice that is reflected in everyday social relations in Padang. As a cultural practice, raso pareso acts as a force for individuals involved in social interactions to make adjustment with the social environment, while aspiring their own wants. Minang people apply it to allow the social interaction with the so called ‘new comer’ Chinese, and ethnic Chinese adopts it for the purpose of social adjustment. Therefore, raso pareso is not only a Minang based value, that is fixed and static, but also an idea for (the lively) negotiation (and contestation). The idea of cultural practice as an exchange mechanism, and as a contestation of political interest, as Bourdieu and de Certeau underline above are

helpful to frame the discussions of raso paseso in the relationship of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese in Padang.

Social Ethics, Social Exchange and the Politics in a Cultural Practice

From the perspective of Durkheim's functionalism (2003), this paper sees that cultural practice may bring particular advantage for society, be it social solidarity, social harmony or social cohesion. However, the question is, how does cultural practice do it? This paper argues that it may happen when cultural practice is functioned as social ethics and social exchange. As a social ethics, cultural practice becomes the reference of behavior of individuals that they could be socially accepted. As an agreed social ethics, cultural practice at the same time also becomes a spot of social exchange about what is accepted and not, what is shared and taken, and what can be negotiated.

By definition, ethics is the science of conduct (Gilman 2004: 2), and social ethics is the science about the conduct of human behaviors in social relationship (3). Ethics is also mentioned to be the source of morality for containing a set of values to be a conduct, principles, and attitudes reference of individual behaviors in social environment (Niebuhr 1932: 79). As being set to yield social cohesion (Niebuhr 2002: 4), ethics can be said to be by nature social. However, Niebuhr reminded, as social cohesion will not be created merely because of ethics, but also because of coercion, ethics needs power, and therefore, ethics becomes very political (79). This is because human being is naturally an interest attached creature, and logic behind ethics is actually also a representation of interest. Social ethics in social relation, therefore, is like rule of the game for action and reaction in human's complex condition, which requires mutual (and off course coerced) patience and tolerance (Gilman 2004: 88).

As a rule of the game, social ethics is intrinsically connected with social exchange. It is because, in social ethics people are forced to share mutual understanding about what is allowed and is not in playing the game, and therefore mutual understanding and shared willingness are required. Meanwhile, it is clear that mutual understanding and shared willingness are identical with social exchange. As Durkheim (2003: 200) asserts, social exchange is about reciprocal or bilateral relations. Molm, Collett and Schaefer (2007: 206), strengthening Durkheim, argue

that reciprocal characteristics in social exchange broaden the solidarity of bonds between two different parties. Indeed, the meaning of solidarity of bond in this case is not only integration. A shared understanding of not violating each other between those socially being diametrical stance, either due religious, ethnicity, or language differences, could also be seen as solidarity.

Durkheim, however, reminds us that a true exchange is hardly established, because, repeating the above-written argument cited from Bourdieu and de Certeau, human being is full of interests. In fact, a true exchange requires equality, and establishing a true equality is unlikely happened, because the social construction about social classification of community members, either based on economic possession, status of origin, status of occupation, and so forth, always exists in human beings (2003: 123), unless an outsider force take a role to manage. Therefore, social exchange, as social ethics, requires politics in its operation that will force those getting involved in exchange relation to conduct exchange equally. And, this power does not always happen in the tangible form, as the government institution. Power could exist through unwritten consensus, like an agreed cultural value and belief. Therefore, social exchange in this matter might as well be the politics of accommodation and recognition. The terms are mentioned as ‘the politics’ because they are not an accommodation or recognition per se; they rather a way to reach a consensus to accommodate and recognize one another.

Ayirtman (2007: 17) asserts “accommodation” refers to the existence of rights and opportunity that enable social inclusion. Meanwhile, “recognition, referring to Fraser (in Frasser and Honneth 2003: 10) is, “an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it”. The politics of accommodation practically is about to listen to others. Meanwhile, as Thompson (2006: 7-8) underlines, the politics of recognition is about to providing opportunity. It encompasses three common characteristics, namely dealing with identity, be it religion, ethnicity, race, language, and so forth; asserting equality and inclusion; and, being encouraged by a feeling of unvalued or overlooked. For asserting social inclusion equally, “accommodation” and “recognition” therefore are closely interlinked.

Materials and Methods

This paper is part of my ongoing dissertation project in Inter-Religious Program, Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICSR), Gadjah Mada University, on inter-ethnic relationship in the situation of natural disaster. The project is based on a fieldwork in Padang, West Sumatra, conducted on October-December 2013 and April-June 2014, and was preceded by a research on discrimination against ethnic Chinese post-2009 earthquake recovery in 2010. The first project provides a basis of analysis of inter-ethnic relation, especially between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese in Padang, for the second research project, and the second project is a deepening for the first one. Therefore, both projects are closely linked. However, for the purpose of this conference this paper focuses rather on particular aspects of community, namely Minang cultural value, in addition to the political economy factor, that is influential in ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship.

The research uses qualitative methods. Direct observation and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Direct observation was done in two traditional markets and *Kampung Cina* (China town), which is called Pondok. Visit to traditional market is important because there we could find out the operation of the politics of economic territory. Surrounding the city center, there is Pasar Raya, the biggest traditional market of Padang city. Previously, there is no differentiation on ethnicity that could run trading activities in that market. Lately, the government made unwritten regulation that Chinese are not allowed to open their stalls in that market. Chinese trading center later were spread during the main streets of Pondok and some smaller markets in Pondok, as in Pasar Tanah Kongsi. Direct observation has allowed the researcher to identify how the politics and policy work in inter-ethnic relationships in Padang. In-depth interviews were done with traders from various ethnicities, including Minang, Chinese and Javanese, sellers, students, teachers, Chinese residents, Minang residents, journalist, academics, legislature, the government apparatus, Chinese central figures and Minang central figures. Besides considering the social backgrounds of respondents, interviews also consider variations of gender, religion and ages of the respondents. There were about 30 people being interviewed the first and second project respectively.

Results and Discussion: Raso Pareso in Ethnic Minang and Ethnic Chinese Relation, a Framework from Social Ethics, Social Exchange and Politics

A Chinese man is sitting in his pork stall in a traditional market, named Pasar Tanah Kongsu.³ Next to his stall, about five meters to the west, is a mosque provided for Moslem traders and sellers surrounding Pasar Tanah Kongsu. The man is surrounded by Minang, Chinese, Indian, male and female traders. They shared smile, information, connection, transaction and conversation in that small, yet, clean and socially conducive market. Chinese and Minang buyers are all mixed in that market as well to have transaction with whoever sells what they need. Pasar Tanah Kongsu, in spite of its position in the corner of Chinese kampung (Pondok), has provided an interesting picture of inter-ethnic relationship in Padang, especially between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese that is usually portrayed as full of social tension, discrimination and dispute.

The story about pork stall and mosque in Pasar Tanah Kongsu is a good start to reveal another picture of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship in Padang. Ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship are usually described to be in diametrical distance for a set of difference both ethnic groups have to deal with. Differences in ethnicity/race, language, political stance, and more importantly religion, added with stigmas and labeling, become the separating line between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese in Padang. Ethnic Chinese is mentioned to be rich but mean and greedy. These are something that are culturally difficult to accept within Minang environment. As society that is strongly bounded with the concept of extended family, caring and sharing are something inevitable in Minang community.

Religion also becomes a sensitive issue in the relationship of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese. Although the phenomenon of religious conversion in Chinese community—to embrace Islam—looks increasing in current time, the equation of ethnic Chinese with non-Moslem remains strong. In real life, there is still difficulty for ethnic Chinese to be accepted to live in kampung. Religious difference is the main reason mentioned by ethnic Minang of their rejection towards ethnic Chinese in their kampung. Therefore, staying in a house complex is an alternative choice for the ethnic Chinese to deal with the issue of housing that gets more difficult since the

³ The author thanks to Ferawati who helped the author to identify such an interesting phenomenon when conducting direct observation in Pasar Tanah Kongsu.

2009 earthquake together with the issue of the increase of population in Pondok. Indeed, since the concept of housing complex is close to the idea of individualist life, it retains the social distance that exists between different ethnic groups.

During the 2009 earthquake and the recovery periods in the aftermath, the ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship also got difficult for the pressing issue of discrimination against ethnic Chinese in emergency situation. The difficulties in accessing to rescue team's assistance to deal with victims that were trapped in the ruined buildings, to gain side dish cash (uang lauk pauk), and to receive permission to fix the broken churches and temples are amongst the issues that caused the perception about discrimination to rise. On the one, ethnic Minang and the city government felt that ethnic Chinese were rich enough so they did not need any help. They believed that ethnic Chinese could help their own selves. In addition, some ethnic Minang said the problems that ethnic Chinese mention were actually not related to discrimination. They rather saw them as the typical pathology of bureaucracy that are slow in performance which showing their inability to differentiate the disaster and 'business as usual' governance. The similar view was exposed by a local NGO and a scholar focusing on Disaster Management in Padang that saw the issue of discrimination against ethnic Chinese is only media blow-up. Some people even saw this as an indication of ethnic Chinese being too spoily to the government, although they are rich enough to tackle the post-disaster adversaries by their own. Despite the unclearness of the discrimination problem, the issue in fact has made the relationship of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese harder than before. Disaster did not encourage reconciliation between the two.

Nevertheless, the hard situation of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese relationship is not the only picture we can see in Padang. Experiences of Tanah Kongs market (Pasar Tanah Kongs) community, in which community members from different ethnic and religious backgrounds could peacefully interact, is one of the interesting phenomena to elaborate. Pasar Tanah Kongs was formed in the early 19th century⁴ by fish traders and distributors which were mostly Chinese. Pasar Tanah Kongs is amongst the three oldest traditional markets in Padang besides Pasar Mudiak (in the up-stream of Arau river/Batang Arau) and Pasar Gadang (in the

⁴ "Sejarah Berdirinya Pasar di Kota Padang", www.padang.go.id/aplikasi/halskpd3.php?kode=20 retrieved 23 September 2014 at 11:00 am.

down-stream of Batang Arau). While the other two markets have no longer existed, Pasar Tanah Kongsu could remain function to date, in spite of its up and forth. The reconstruction of the market after the 2009 earthquake seems to help it revitalize its function after a long slow activity. Pasar Tanah Kongsu has successfully become an alternative for Pasar Raya, of which reconstruction has not yet finished even after about 5 years of the earthquake.

As a matter of fact, Pasar Tanah Kongsu is not only helpful to be an alternate market for people in Padang. Further, Pasar Tanah Kongsu has turned to be a media for inter-ethnic encounters, sharing and connection, which is contributive to Padang social investment. Hanura Rusli, a Chinese figure in Padang, said that traders and buyers from Minang, Batak, and Chinese blend together in the market to conduct economic transaction. He said, “Pasar Tanah Kongsu that consists of Minang and Batak traders is a safe place to trade”.⁵ This is a bit different to Pasar Raya that is managed exclusively to be West Sumatran natives’ place of trading. Because Pasar Tanah Kongsu is designed to let people from different ethnic groups to take part in trading, and thus inter-ethnic relations could happen almost every day, it encourages social bonding between different ethnic groups. A Minang trader in Pasar Tanah Kongsu described,⁶

In this market (Pasar Tanah Kongsu), different ethnic groups are unified. There is no problem. There is no dispute about ethnicity, or about Moslam and Christian differences. In fasting month, non-Moslems are also welcomed to open their stalls. There is no prohibition. Social cohesion is good [original interview: *Kalau di sini (Pasar Tanah Kongsu), antar suku menyatu, nggak ada masalah, nggak ada tengkar masalah suku, ya sama dengan orang Muslim dengan orang Kristen, gitu. Misalnya kan buka puasa, kalau orang non-Muslim kan jualan, bebas nggak ada larangan. Jadi itu persatuannya kuat.*]

Another trader, who is a Chinese, added, “In this place (Pasar Tanah Kongsu) ethnic Minang and ethnic Tionghoa (Chinese) are integrated. There is no differentiation. This is Chinese are, but Moslems are allowed to enter. We help each other here, like when there is robbery. Ethnic Chinese also helped the robbed traders [Original interview: *Kalau disini orang minang sama orang Tionghoa bersatu, nggak ada*

⁵ Interview on 17 May 2014 in Padang.

⁶ Interview on 18 November 2013 in Padang

*beda-beda. Di sini kan daerah orang Cina, tapi orang Islam yang masuk, disini kita saling tolong menolong saja. Misalnya jualan ada perampok, orang Cina yang nolong].” She is confirmed her fellow Chinese, who said, “if people are good to us, we will also be good to them [original interview: *kalau orang itu baik sama kita, kita juga baik sama dia*].”*

When Jakarta was facing a high pressure of mass violence against ethnic Chinese during the 1998 political transition, Padang was also contaminated. However, what is interesting in Padang is during that hard time the situation was relatively controllable. Hanura Rusli described,⁷

(During reformasi era) there was no crucial problem. The situation was relatively safe. Yes, there was tension in the first weeks or the first month. Not only felt by ethnic Tionghoa, the same fear was also felt by the other ethnic groups. All the people organized their selves to conduct neighborhood security responding to the various rumors spread in society. Although the target (of violence, as occurred in Jakarta) was Chinese’s houses, the participants of neighborhood security included all ethnic groups. It is unlike Jakarta, where all people escaped from the upheaval. Here, people together with ethnic Chinese got involved in neighborhood security. About two weeks after Tanah Kongsu became empty, people questioned their selves, what the hell is this? Padang did not have correlation with Jakarta. The problem was in another place. Padang was not Jakarta. They got used to connect each other, but then suspicion amongst them existed. The role of city government is also important to the unions for giving advices to them not to address suspicion one another [Original interview: *(Pada masa reformasi) Tidak ada masalah, aman-aman saja. Ketegangan ada, seminggu, atau sebulan saja. Bukan saja etnis Tonghoa, tapi semua masyarakat. Mereka ronda jaga-jaga kan banyak sekali isu berkembang. Meski yang disasar rumah etnis Tionghoa, tapi yang melakukan ronda semua etnis. Nggak kaya Jakarta, yang pada lari. Sama-sama orang Ronda dengan etnis Tionghoa. Justru dua minggu paska tanah kongsi sepi, ribut mereka. Apapula ini tidak ada urusan, bukan di tempat lain ini, bukan di Jakarta. Mereka sudah biasa seperti itu, lalu tiba-tiba ada kecurigaan. Peranan dari Pemko juga besar ke perkumpulan banyak beri pengarahan agar tidak timbul saling curiga*].

The experience of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese cooperation to guard Padang during the political transition is, indeed, an interesting example to discuss, because this poses different insight of the relationship of ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese in

⁷ Interview on 17 May 2014 in Padang.

Padang in general. The similar experience also happened when Padang was hit by an earthquake in 2009, in which Minang traders in Pasar Tanah Kongsu were equally listed as recipients of aids from Chinese cultural unions (kongsu). Albert, a Chinese man that was elected as parliamentary member in 2014 election said that his kongsu also distributed some aids to Minang traders in Pasar Tanah Kongsu. During the emergency periods, the Churches and temples in Pondok also played crucial roles for providing staple foods and health facilities to both ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese in Padang.

The mutual relationship between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese in trading, neighborhood guard, and post-disaster recovery, seems to be an explanation of why in spite of the strong tension arises because of ethnic and religious differences, mass violence between the two is hard to occur. Being asked about this, Gani, a Chinese figure in Kampung Arau, explains *raso paseso* applied by ethnic Minang in social relations, is also adopted by ethnic Chinese in their social life.⁸ How did ethnic Chinese apply this? Albert explains,⁹ first ethnic Chinese opens their selves in wider social environment so they are no longer trapped in economic sector. Expanding role in politics, as Albert asserts, will help ethnic Chinese to make contribution to society. Second, ethnic Chinese takes a role in tackling social problem, like in 2009 earthquake recovery. Third, which has been practiced since 1950-1960s, is to adopt Minangkabau language. Forth is to open communication with the other ethnic group.

Confirming *raso paseso* as Albert has explained, a trader in Pasar Tanah Kongsu that is a mixed Medan-Javanese descent described, “It is an ability to socialize; not to differentiate. I have been trading in here (Pasar Tanah Kongsu) for about 20 years. I have not found rude comment addressed to me [original interview: *Kita harus pandailah bergaul tidak Membeda-bedakan, kalau saya kan udah hampir 20 tahun disini, belum ada yang bicara kotor sama saya*].” Another female Minang trader added sharing as the most important component. She said, “We do not have any problem (with social relation). We have our own faith. Our destination is the same, our God is the same. When Eid Adha is coming nearby my house, I share the meat (with non-Moslem). The Chinese is just friendly. I have been here since a child. I have never heard rude words. The most important nature in here is honesty [original

⁸ Interview on 20 May 2014 in Padang.

⁹ Interview on 20 November 2013 in Padang.

interview: *Nggak ada (masalah), dia kan punya agama masing-masing, jurusannya kan sama, Tuhannya kan sama. Misalnya ada Hari Raya Qurban di dekat rumah saya, saya kasih juga daging qurbannya. Orang Cina orangnya akrab. Disini dari saya kecil saya tidak pernah dengar bahasa kotor. Sifat disini itu yang penting kejujuran].*”

Sirmis, a Minang man in Pasar Raya stressed caring as the important part of raso pareso. He said, “Visiting the sick neighbors is raso pareso. It is like to maintain the feeling of your counter parts [original interview: *Kalau misalnya kamu sakit, saya jengukin. Itu orang Minang punya raso pareso sama artinya sama sungkan gitu*].” In addition to caring, Sirmis stressed reciprocity. He said, “In raso pareso, people keep good relationship. They do not undermine each other. Things depend on us. If people are good to us, then we could be good to them [original interview: *Istilahnya dalam raso-pareso itu orang itu baik nggak ada pandang begini. Begini itu mah tergantung orangnya kalau orang baik ke kita, kita juga baik ke orang*].”

From the interviews, it can be seen that raso pareso is counted important in Padang social life, not only by Minang community but also by the other ethnic groups. The application of raso pareso could be various, but the stressed point in social relations is the same, namely mutual understanding. Some crucial points, which can be underlined about raso pareso are as the following. Firstly, raso pareso in practice includes the values of adaptation, respect, tolerance, sharing, caring, solidarity, and reciprocity. Secondly, all of these values are expected to end up in one destination, namely social cohesion and conflict minimization. Indeed, raso pareso does not stand alone. Dealing with this, looking at the concept of “kato nan ampek” becomes important. By definition, “kato nan ampek” is the four-word rule that asserts social adjustability in social environment. “Kato nan ampek” consists of “mendaki”, “menurun”, “mendatar”, and “melereng” (Diradjo 2009: 334-339). “Mendaki” is to speak and behave politely to the elders (335). “Menurun” is to speak with love to the younger (335-336). “Mendatar” is to respect those that are equal in age or in social status (337). “Melereng” is to speak implicitly, like to daughter/son’s mother/father-in-law (338). Amongst the four, “melereng” is the most popular, as can be seen in Minang *pepatah petitih* (proverbs), for being considered to be the most polite way to communicate.

Not only in daily relation can “raso pareso” (and off course “kato nan ampek”) be applied; it can also be seen in wider scope of social and political life through dialogue. The long lasted conflict of Islam and adat through Padri war that was finally resolved through dialogues between adat leaders and Islam scholars, instead of through the colonial government intervention as Hadler identifies (2009: 24-26), which resulted in the unified concept of “adat basandi syarak and syarak basandi adat” in the end (Hadi 2013: 8) is an instance of how “raso pareso” is reflected. Similarly, the decision to end separatist movement through PRRI and to integrate with the Indonesian government (Kahin 2005) also shows us how Minang applies their “kato nan ampek” in their political life. The strong tradition of dialogue, inspired by the cultural values as described in “raso pareso” and “kato nan ampek”, has taken part in forming the cultural assertiveness amongst Minang. As a result, Minang becomes popular for its long and deep discussions, instead of open conflict and, moreover, mass violence.¹⁰ The rare violent conflicts in Padang (and the other West Sumatran regions) as presented previously confirms AA Navis (in Hadi 2003: 8) that states Minang society does not like being in war.¹¹ It is not exaggerating, therefore, should it is said that dialogue is part of Minang tradition.

Indeed, this does not mean to say that Minang cultural values as raso pareso is an automatic solution for problems in social relation. They are rather the stimulator for public openness to dialogues. Confirming Tanner (1969: 24), “Law, religious and customary principles, and new values are not simply guidelines for dispute settlement, but become, often in the context of protracted discussion and deliberation, the currency of symbolic barter.” Therefore, instead of mentioning as a guideline, cultural value like raso pareso might be well understood from the framework of social ethics. First, its practice or application might be contextual and not fixed. Meanwhile, guideline assumes a strict instruction that is fixed and not negotiable to different context. Secondly, despite its varied application, its underlined values,

¹⁰ Erniwati in an interview on November 2013 in Padang asserted, Padang community can take days just to discuss the problems in their social environment in kampung meeting. She confirms that in general Padang people do not like to get busy with conflict and violence. They rather choose to have several days of discussions and dialogues.

¹¹ Indeed, AA Navis’s view is not the only one representing the interpretation of Minang tradition. Hadi (2013: 8-10), for instance, sees the dialogue underlined by AA Navis as closer to the defeated mentality of Minang, instead of their wisdom. Apart from Hadi’s criticism, Minang preference on dialogue instead of open war/conflict in fact has contributed to the shape of Minang land today as a peaceful land, in spite of its social and political complexity.

namely mutual understanding remains. In this case, *raso paseso* can present in the form of being sensitive to other, being considerate, being tolerable, being respectful for others, outweighing evidence based argument instead of narrow assumption, and long-term oriented behaviors, as can be seen in ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese experience in Pasar Tanah Kongsu and Pondok area. Although varied in application, yet the core value of *raso paseso* namely mutual understanding remains getting entailed within.

As social ethics, *raso paseso* does not only bind ethnic Minang, but also the other ethnic groups involved in the social interaction, including ethnic Chinese. In Minang society, new comers are welcomed, but are obliged to obey the cultural regulation set up in Minang community. The political sense of *raso paseso*, therefore, becomes undeniable. As Tanner (1969: 22) underlines, “Newcomer (*urang datang*) lineages attach themselves to early settler (*urang asali*) lineages, usually to ones with the same generic *suku* name (such as *suku Koto*, *suku Pisang*) as themselves. A newcomer lineage then comes under the leadership of the *panghulu* of an early settler lineage and is considered part of that *suku*; but members of the newcomer lineage cannot normally succeed to the *suku* title, i.e., cannot become *panghulu*.” Based on interviews, ethnic Chinese is basically let to reside in Padang, and to conduct their daily activities.¹² Ethnic Minang will not kick them out despite a set of differences the two ethnic groups have to deal with, as in terms of ethnicity, religion, and economic competition, he adds. However, he emphasizes, all these things are not free of charge. He said, there is a requirement that needs to abide, namely not to undermine Minang religion (and tradition), as religion is deemed to be the heart of Minang identity.¹³ The *adat* entitlement to ethnic Chinese, for instance, is allowed to do, as long as it does not include “*Datuak*”, which is the highest entitlement in Minang community. Ethnic Chinese may be entitled with “*Datuk*” if only they are willing to convert to Islam.¹⁴ This means that being part of ethnic Minang community is possible, as long as the new comers are willing to accept Minang code of conduct, including those that relate to religion. As a matter of fact, although

¹² This is unlike some villages and districts in Java that explicitly reject the coming ethnic of ethnic Chinese in their localities.

¹³ Interview on 19 May 2014 in Padang.

¹⁴ Interview with one of LKAAM figures in 19 May 2014 in Padang.

religion still becomes the separating line between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese, the ability of ethnic Chinese to adjust with Minang environment has helped them to survive in Padang. Speaking Minang and behaving, like Minang culture has set up through *raso pareso* are amongst the strategy ethnic Chinese has applied in social life in Padang.

Yet, *raso pareso* is not only being social ethics in Padang inter-ethnic relationship. It is also a kind of social exchange. It does not only define how social relationship should be conducted, but also encourages sharing and reciprocity. The acceptance of ethnic Minang towards ethnic Chinese, and conversely, the adjustability of ethnic Chinese towards ethnic Minang's code of conduct will not happen without social exchange. Both ethnic groups exchange their understanding about what is and what is not acceptable each other. Somehow, the code of conduct will sound like differentiation, but it actually helps ethnic Chinese make negotiation with ethnic Minang, and to minimize resistance. Such an understanding helps both ethnic conduct mutual relations like in trading. Territorialisation in trading, in which ethnic Chinese is prohibited to open stalls in *Pasar Raya*, for instance, may sound discriminating against ethnic Chinese. As a matter of fact, it actually helps ethnic Chinese to remain being acceptable in Padang. Territorialisation has been a mode of negotiation responding to the strong pressure from Minang traders towards the dominating role of ethnic Chinese in Padang economy. The negotiation, indeed, looks minimalist. However, compared to the other regions that reject the coming of ethnic Chinese, as happens in Bantul and Sumbawa, such a negotiation is still helpful to maintain the peaceful relations between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese. The absence of mass violence in Padang during *reformasi* in the midst of massive violence against ethnic Chinese in Surakarta, Jakarta, Medan and Semarang is an indication of the reciprocal relations between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese that strongly features the practice of social exchange. Ethnic Minang knows that not only ethnic Chinese that is in need for ethnic Minang. They also know that they are in need for ethnic Chinese.

Indeed, such a situation is not only about social matters. It is all also about politics. A set of requirement, unwritten regulation and the policy of territorialisation is a kind of strategy of ethnic Minang as the majority and 'native' population in

Padang to secure their cultural, social and economic resources and capital. Meanwhile, the non-offensive response of ethnic Chinese towards the strict requirement for living in Padang, the policy of territorialisation in trading, and limitation in religious life, is not merely an expression of weakness. Confirming de Certeau (1984) it is also a tactic to deal with the majority's strategy to dominate 'the battle of field'. In this case, Chinese's non-offensiveness is a hidden, or more precisely, soft tactic to survive and gain access to Padang's social and political life. Raso paseso is a field where the 'strategy' of the Minang majority and 'tactic' of Chinese minority meet up to bargain. The 'permission' to reside in Padang and conduct social and economic activities, despite some limitations applied, is a kind of accommodation both ethnic groups agreeing with. Similarly, the confession of the significant role of ethnic Chinese in Padang social and economic life is a kind of recognition, which inhibits (seemingly limited) acceptance of ethnic Minang towards ethnic Chinese. Social accommodation and recognition as a result of social bargaining—through the exertion and adoption of Minang cultural value—reflects that raso paseso is not only a social and cultural matter. It is more importantly a political idea.

Conclusion

In spite of the plurality of its population, Padang, West Sumatra, is noted to be relatively rare experiencing mass violent conflict, as compared to the other big cities in Indonesia. Indeed, this does not mean that Padang is free from problems. Padang has faced crucial tensions on inter-ethnic relations, as can be found in the issue of discrimination against ethnic Chinese post-2009 earthquake, as well as due to the application of Perda Syariah issued in mayor Fauzi Bahar's first term (2004-2009). However, unlike many other big cities in Indonesia, as Solo, Semarang, Medan, and Makasar, such a tension is often successfully managed that it does not expand to be mass violent conflict. In this regards, scrutinizing the possible explaining factors is crucial. In addition to the political economy perspective that is prominent in the discussions of inter-ethnic relation, attention on the cultural aspect is important. Raso paseso, the cultural practice of Minangkabau, applied not only by ethnic Minang, but interestingly also by the other minority ethnic groups, including

ethnic Chinese, is interesting to elaborate. It has been a reference for people from different ethnic group in Padang to interact for asserting mutual-respect, tolerance, mutual understanding, evidence based argumentation, and long-term oriented behaviors. This has enabled, for instance, the building of trading relationship between ethnic Minang and ethnic Chinese in the midst of long-existing problems of religious differences. Raso pareso, in this sense, has acted not only as social ethics but also social exchange. It has not only been a code of conduct for people from different ethnic groups, but also has enabled them to build consensus as well as to commit sharing in trading, and in the other fields of social life. Yet, raso pareso could also be political for becoming the bargaining tool amongst different communities in Padang through the politics of accommodation and the politics of recognition. Raso pareso has functioned not only as social ethics inter-ethnic relationships in Padang. It is in fact has been a media of social exchange and politics of inter-ethnic relations, that play crucial roles in forming the conducive encounters between different ethnic groups, besides the factors of political economy.

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