

The Manifoldness of Traditional Knowledge: The Example of the Minangkabau Society in West Sumatra, Indonesia

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Abstract. In a fast-changing world, traditional knowledge is moved to the edge. In many fields of knowledge, there is no place for traditional knowledge. Often this wisdom is considered to be taboo and old-fashioned. However, it must be emphasised that it belongs to the cultural heritage of humankind. The authors intend to show the richness of traditional knowledge by focusing on one geographical area, namely West Sumatra. The essential fields of traditional knowledge in that area are illustrated and analysed. The authors focus on three types of traditional knowledge, namely philosophy, the judicial system, and traditional healing methods. They conducted qualitative research that included fieldwork and an analysis of relevant literature to deepen the knowledge. The main hypothesis was that the different spheres of traditional knowledge were interdependent. It was detected that the traditional Minangkabau culture has fascinating traditional knowledge that is worth to be preserved.

Keywords and phrases: Minangkabau, West Sumatra, traditional knowledge, traditional medicine, traditional philosophy

Introduction

Talking about knowledge often implies practical matters that are taught in schools. The curriculum of schools in many countries is based on secular knowledge that neglects societies' achievements that evolved over many centuries. In Indonesia, the local governments of the districts tried to buck the trend and incorporate local customs and cultures within the school curriculum. Consequently, the pupils got

an insight into the significant traits of their culture. However, this knowledge is quite specific and does not stress that the local culture generated the most suitable knowledge and wisdom in their geographical and societal situation.

Often traditional knowledge is associated with backwardness and as a hindrance to societal progression. However, it must be taken into consideration that traditional knowledge can somehow be a “starting point” for further research. This point is evident if we look at traditional healing systems. Some well-known medications originate from the discovery of plants that were used by traditional healers (Balick and Cox 1997, 39). Moreover, tradition considers that the way of living together should be organised in a way that fits the local social organisation.

In this article, the authors intend to show that rich traditional knowledge is multifaceted in nature. Nonetheless, the knowledge is interwoven. Philosophical knowledge might be a foundation for medical knowledge. For example, the traditional philosophy of the Minangkabau states that “Nature is a teacher”. Therefore, this article intends to illustrate the interdependency of different layers of traditional knowledge.

The authors chose to illustrate the traditional Minangkabau knowledge as it is fascinating and involves different fields of knowledge. It should be exemplary and show the richness of local traditions that evolved into a historical process within different periods and elements formed the local knowledge as it is nowadays.

Hypothesis and Research Objective

Before the authors started with the research, they had the impression that parts of the traditional areas of knowledge are interdependent, so they formulated the following hypothesis:

The different fields of traditional knowledge are interwoven. This assumption means that one sphere of knowledge might act as a foundation for the other levels.

The hypothesis had consequences for the formulation of the research objectives. They are as follows:

1. To illustrate fields of traditional Minangkabau knowledge as an exemplary type of the richness of traditional knowledge.
2. To carve out the interdependency of the different areas of traditional knowledge.

Literature Review

In the literature review, it must be considered that there are two types of literature. The first type describes the value of traditional knowledge in general, whilst the second type focuses on the research area of the authors.

A bestseller on the values of traditional knowledge was written by Jared Diamond (2012). In his book *The World Until Yesterday. What Can We Learn From Traditional Societies?* He made a homage to the importance of traditional knowledge. He remarks fascinatingly:

While social scientists can thus surely draw conclusions of academic interest from studies of traditional societies, all the rest of us may also be able to learn things of practical interest. Traditional societies, in effect, represent thousands of natural experiments in how to construct a human society. They have come up with thousands of solutions to human problems, solutions different from those adopted by our own WEIRD modern societies. We shall see that some of those solutions—for instance, some of the ways in which traditional societies raise their children, treat their elders, remain healthy, talk, spend their leisure time, and settle disputes—may strike you, as they do me, as superior to normal practices in the First World. (Diamond 2012, 9)

Diamond's book is intriguing as he moves away from a Eurocentric view and stresses the wide variety of local knowledge.

Another writer who stresses the importance of local knowledge is Davis (2009). In his book, *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World*, he offers astonishing examples of local knowledge. For example, the inhabitants of the South Seas were able to travel and navigate huge distances without possessing any modern means of navigation. By reading his book, the readers understand that traditional and ancient knowledge still matters and should be protected.

Wolff (2001) wrote the book *Original Wisdom. Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing*. This book is remarkable as he dwells on traditional knowledge in the region of Southeast Asia, namely the knowledge of the *Orang Asli* community in Malaysia. The writer is quite critical of Western society:

Westerners are intolerant of other ways to organize society, other ways to be human. We cannot accept that others may value different ways of being. We seem to be stuck in the idea that all people must want what we value... (Wolff 2001, 4–5)

Wolff criticises the Western attitude of being Eurocentric. The consequences are quite dramatic as the Western people will not get any knowledge, “By judging others as less than ourselves, we cannot learn from them. That is sad because we throw away, suppress, and deny the accumulated wisdom of generations of ancestors” (Wolff 2001, 61). The viewpoint of Wolff is fascinating as he holds the mirror up to Western society and academicians. Often, they neglect that there is local wisdom and knowledge.

In a world where the effects of globalisation are discussed, local knowledge is on edge. Antons (2009) discusses the challenges for governments in how to deal with traditional knowledge as it is a form of intellectual property. Moreover, in Asia, there is still a substantial rural population that possesses different fields of traditional knowledge. Anton’s article is valuable as he shows that local knowledge is a topic in government policy on a national and international level.

Other books by scholars investigate different aspects of traditional knowledge. Nazarudin and A.S. Hardy (2017) edited a book that looks into different cultures and explains whether traditional knowledge is still significant. Some publications describe different aspects. A good example is a book that was edited by Salasiah and Norizan (2015). Other authors illustrate how different elements of tradition were integrated into the education system. One of the main objectives of such a book is to show the reader that there are still traditional elements within different sectors and that these fields are still significant. A similar book was edited by Salbani, Othman and Hamid (2014). In this book, an article describes the traditional architecture of the Minangkabau (Hardono and Azizi 2014). There are many spheres of knowledge, and architecture is one famous part.

There are not only books that discuss traditional knowledge in a “general way”. Some publications deal with aspects of the Minangkabau traditional knowledge. Yulika (2012) and Nusyirwan (2016) wrote books that describe parts of the philosophical system. Both authors look at the philosophical system of the Minangkabau from a different perspective. Nevertheless, there is an essential point that both authors stress, namely the importance of proverbs. Some proverbs are essential for the philosophy of life and are well-known to all people in West Sumatra.

A fascinating article about the way how to implement local Minangkabau knowledge in the field of education was written by Anwar, Aziz and Susanti (2019). The authors emphasise that traditional local wisdom has valuable positive benefits like politeness or mutual respect and could be a kind of “opposite pole” to the negative effects of globalisation.

Research Methodology

The research was conducted in two ways: First, there was qualitative research which was carried out in the interior of West Sumatra. It consisted of conducting interviews. The interviews were primarily unstructured. The representatives of the traditional culture and the intellectuals could utter their opinion. So far, the research was explorative as these experts could offer thoughts and ideas. Sometimes the researchers were not aware of the contents that were important for the local experts. Somehow the research became circular. The researchers talked to the local scholars and obtained some inspiration. Afterwards, the researchers went back home and started investigating the literature. This approach was helpful as there was the opportunity to deepen the authors' knowledge and get new ideas. The team went back into the field and gained new knowledge, the circular approach started again, and the knowledge gap between the "outsiders" and the local experts became closer step by step. Altogether the research lasted from 2012 until 2019, but the researchers were, as mentioned earlier, not always in the field. Sometimes the interviews were even conducted via WhatsApp or other means of communication. Such a concept had the advantage to explore traditional knowledge in depth. However, it must be stressed that in this article, the researchers offer an overview in order to see the spectrum of a traditional understanding of one society.

When one of the researchers conducted his research about the traditional healing system of the Minangkabau society, he discovered fascinating traditional knowledge in other fields. This assumption was explored by considering the literature and local experts' references. Furthermore, some of these experts were asked whenever difficulties arose regarding the understanding of certain publications. For example, the researchers contacted authors who wrote about traditional philosophy. One of the primary informants was Datuk T, a local *panghulu* (head of a matrilineage). He was famous in the area of research. Yahdi (pseudonym) was another well-known author in the area and could be asked about traditional customs.

There was no specific place where this research was conducted. The local experts were from all over West Sumatra. Some experts had an academic background and interpreted the local knowledge from different academic disciplines. For example, local categories of medical disorders were compared with biomedical concepts.

Different Fields of Traditional Knowledge within the Minangkabau Society

Traditional knowledge is not only limited to one subject. On the contrary, many fields of knowledge are influenced by traditional wisdom. In this section, three different traditional knowledge fields are outlined to get an impression of the variety of traditional knowledge in Minangkabau society.

In local Minangkabau understanding, there are three main exponents of knowledge; they are the representatives of *adat* (the customary law), the *panghulu*, the Islamic scholars (the *ulama*) and the intellectuals (*cadiak pandai*) (Yulika 2012, 176–177). This classification clarifies that knowledge is an important asset of high value in Minangkabau society. So, it is not surprising that many intellectuals originate from West Sumatra: politicians, writers or Islamic scholars.

In recent years, the regional government promoted the local culture. The subject “Minangkabau Culture” in schools teaches important features of the culture. However, the readers are young children and teenagers. So, it is no surprise that more complex topics are not discussed. The traditional philosophical system is one of the more sophisticated topics that is only mentioned marginally in the schoolbooks.

Traditional philosophy

The traditional philosophy of the Minangkabau has different sources. The primary source is the so-called *pepatah-petitih*. These are phrases and proverbs that express the norms of society. Some of them can be stressed as they form a kind of philosophy that explains the meanings and values of life. A good character is essential for a good coexistence within the village community (Errington 1984, 70). It is said that they contain sayings of the founders of the Minangkabau *adat* Datuak Katumangungan and Datuak Perpatih Nan Sabatang. Yet, some of these sayings were also taken from traditional Minangkabau stories like the different *kaba* (traditional folktales).

In the field of philosophy, there are different subfields. In the philosophical system of the Minangkabau system, this is also the case. In metaphysical cosmology, there are certain questions that arise like “How do the cosmos look like?”, “How does the cosmos behave?” and so on. As a “second step”, the cosmos could teach people how to behave. However, before there is a look at the second step, it is useful on how the universe looks like.

The Minangkabau society is Islamic, so the worldview is shaped by the pillars of Islamic beliefs. These are the belief in the existence of God (Allah SWT), the belief in angels, the belief in the prophets, the belief in the scriptures that were sent down by God and the belief in destiny that was predestined. However, it must be noted that in there are elements of pre-Islamic origin in Minangkabau society. For example, there is the belief in certain ghosts or creatures that cannot be found in Islamic scriptures, or it is said that some traditional daggers (*keris*) possess a specific power.

The essential philosophical concepts refer to the way how to live properly and to a philosophy of nature. The central philosophical concept is that unfolding nature is a teacher (*alam berkembang jadi guru*) (Navis 2015). In Islamic theology, this concept can be found too. The incident of Qabil and Habil (the sons of Adam) can serve as an example. Qabil killed Habil and he did not know what to do with the corpse. So, Allah SWT sent a crow:

Then Allah sent a crow digging a grave in the ground for a dead crow, in order to show him how to bury the corpse of his brother. He cried, “Alas! Have I even failed to be like this crow and bury the corpse of my brother?” So, he became regretful. (Surah al-Ma’idah 5:31)

Nature can send calamities that teach lessons, such as rain or drought. Natural disasters can be considered a sign. These signs can be a hint and show whether Allah is satisfied with the behaviour of the village community. The researchers witnessed a ritual called *tolak bala* (ward off disaster). According to the villagers, in the past, the people left the village on a Thursday in the month of Rajab. They burnt incense and prayed to Allah SWT that no harm would strike the village. Nowadays, the religious character cannot be observed anymore. Nonetheless, many villagers leave the village and picnic in the nearby mountains.

The Minangkabau live in the so-called *Alam Minangkabau* (The World of the Minangkabau), which usually comprises the highlands of West Sumatra, and that area is the place of their origin. It is interesting to note that they use the term *alam* (means actually “nature”) and no other terms with similar meanings like *tanah* (land) or *bumi* (earth). According to Febri Yulika, the reason is that the term refers to nature and its role as a teacher (Yulika 2012, 60).

The philosophy of the Minangkabau does thematise not only nature but also man. How are men constituted? According to the traditional understanding, there are different types of people – clever people and not-so-clever people. When Errington (1984) conducted his research, he found out that the concept of proper behaviour

and well behaviour is crucial. This concept is called *baso basi*, and it is important for the way how to behave in certain situations. It rules how to address a person or pass by a group of people who chat in the street, and so on.

For society, it is incumbent to live harmoniously together. Therefore, people have to learn certain philosophical concepts that enable them to live well and peacefully together. These concepts are the following:

1. *Raso jo pareso* (feeling and checking): A human being has “feelings” that are inherent in his or her constitution. These feelings can lead the person to behave in a certain way. However, such behaviour cannot always be good and proper. A human can check the consequences that would result from his or her behaviour.
2. *Anggo jo tanggo* (budget and household): These terms refer to a budget (*anggaran*) that refers to the household (*rumah tangga*).
3. *Alue jo patuik* (the channel/procedure that is proper): This saying refers to the procedure (*alur*) that is proper (*pantas*). A person who wants to make something should consider following the right procedure. In daily life, for instance, this means respecting the local norms.

These three points are called *tungku nan tigo sajarangan* (the traditional cooking place made of stones and three bases on it). In Indonesian language, *tungku* means *landasan* (base) (Nusyirwan 2016, 63). It can refer to a person that lives in a household, but in general, it refers to the three important decision makers (the head of the matrilineages, the Islamic scholars and the intellectuals). If he or she wants to decide about a particular affair, it is necessary to check the consequences. The “three bases” help to find a proper way of behaviour.

It is essential to be a “real person” (*urang sabana urang*). The person must behave in a well-mannered way and shows that he or she is capable of living in society. It must be considered that a human being has *akal* (reason). This term means that a person has “intellect” and can make a proper decision. A person that just follows his or her *nafsu* (lust) is not using the *akal*.

Of course, some people do not want to live according to the rules that were set by the *adat*. The traditional system also has a kind of solution for that. The system of *merantau* (going outside) and looking for work there is widespread in West Sumatra (Naim 1985). Furthermore, some events seem institutionalised and allow a chaotic, mostly unstructured behaviour like the pig hunt (Errington 1984, 146).

The traditional philosophy also stresses the existence of God (Allah SWT). It is well-known that the most famous motto of the *adat* is *Adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah* (the *adat* is based on the sharia [Islamic law], the sharia is based on the Book of Allah, this means the Quran). However, this is not the only mention of sharia. There are more, for example, *syarak yang mengata, adat yang memakai* (the sharia that says, the *adat* that wears) (Hamka 2006, 168). There is an interplay between *adat* and sharia. The *adat* rules people's behaviour that should be according to Islam. Otherwise, the behaviour would be sinful. The correct Islamic way of life leads to paradise.

Another saying that emphasises the two main concepts is: *Adat yang kawi, syarak yang lazim* (the *adat* that is strong, the sharia that is common) (Hamka 2006, 169). This sentence uses two words that originate from Arabic: *kawi* can be derived from the Arabic *qawwiyy* (strong) and the other word is *lazim* (common). According to Hamka, this word consists of two parts (Hamka 2006, 169) *la*, which stresses that a person will be rewarded if he or she does that, and *zim* means that a person will be sanctioned if he or she is not doing it. In simple words, if a person does not act according to sharia, then he or she should be sanctioned.

The traditional Minangkabau philosophy shows that nature is the fundamental element that teaches mankind how to behave. However, there are rules and regulations that Allah brought, and these rules must be followed. The interplay between *adat* and Islam makes it clear. The Minangkabau philosophy is multifarious as it contains the sayings of the founders of *adat* and the religious sources of Islam, namely the Quran and the books that compiled the narrations (hadith) of Prophet Muhammad.

Traditional judicial system

In traditional and remote societies, the government's central law enforcement agencies are far, so it is not surprising that the local society must find solutions on how to solve conflicts. These conflicts could comprise criminal offences, land conflicts and others. For the living together it is of utmost importance that the harmony is maintained.

The *adat* is often called *hukum adat* (customary law) (Anwar 1997). The term "law" shows that it is also in charge of dispute settlement. A dispute is a typical event of the *nagari* (village community) which consists of some matrilineages and their subunits. Some positions of the traditional system are in charge of the "enforcement" of the law.

In most cases, there are minor conflicts. Some conflicts contain defamation of other persons or minor problems of debts. The main interest of society is to maintain harmony. Therefore, society tries to keep it on a small-scale level. Very often, one of the public coffee houses is the place where small-scale conflicts can be solved (Tanner 1969, 25). In the section about traditional philosophy, it was mentioned that society prefers to discuss matters that concern the village community. The aim is to reach a consensus. However, it can be possible that society reaches no consensus. In such a case, the problem will be brought to a higher level. For example, boy B stole a bicycle. The father of the victim might go to his house, but he denies having stolen it. In such a case, the father might contact a representative of the *suku* (matriclan) of his son to contact the family of B. They sit together in the house of B's mother, or the clan representatives (*panghulu*) contact the family of B in one of the coffee houses. Now, the case is public, which means it is at a higher level. It is possible that they cannot find a solution. Therefore, the case will be brought to the assembly of the community elders and the *panghulu*. The assembly will be held in the assembly hall (*balai adat*). The problem reached a high level and both parties will try to find a solution in order to save face. It is unlikely that the conflict reaches that level because the family of B wants to prevent that B is related to a crime like theft in the broader public. The course is similar to a ladder that goes up rung by rung. This pattern of behaviour is typical way of the traditional judiciary system (Benda-Beckmann 1984) and illustrates in the following *adat* saying (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1. *Adat* saying about the persons in the decision-making process

<i>Adat</i> saying (Minangkabau language)	Translation
Kamanakan barajo kamanakan	The nephews "have the <i>mamak</i> (oldest brother of the mother) as king"
Mamak barajo kapanghulu	
Panghulu barajo kapado alur dan patut. (Anwar 1997, 15)	The <i>mamak</i> has the <i>panghulu</i> as king The <i>panghulu</i> follows the (correct) channel and serves it.

Table 1 shows that elders and representatives of the clans should be respected, and these persons can be asked in affairs of the matrilineage or matters that endanger stability and harmony. Here, the way is to look for advice on a small-scale first before contacting representatives of a larger unit. For example, it is recommended to ask the *mamak* (mother's eldest brother first) before contacting the head of the matrilineage (the *panghulu*).

In the section that was mentioned before, a "typical" judicial case was described. However, there are judicial institutions that are needed to enforce the decisions. Therefore, there are certain positions like the *manti* who is responsible for the administrative affairs of the *suku* or the *dubalang* who is a kind of local policeman (Anwar 1997, 26).

The central idea is a harmonious way of life. The policy on the village level has an important way to maintain it: The people meet and discuss (*musyawarah*) and finally reach a consensus (*muafakat*).

Traditional healing system

Besides the Western medical system, there is a traditional healing system within the village communities. Two main healing traditions could be found during the research (Stark 2018, 139). There are healers whose approach is more related to Islamic Medicine, and on the other side, there are healers whose healing methods are more related to natural essences. However, it must be stressed that most healers use invocations for their treatment method. In general, it can be said that many healers use invocation plus plants as their principal way of treatment. Nonetheless, it must be mentioned that there are exceptions, i.e., there are healers who use no invocations or plants at all. Nevertheless, it can be said that most healing methods apply a threefold healing system, namely invocations, plants and the activation and strengthening of the life energy that is inherent in human beings.

Some diseases are more widespread than others. Yet, it must be differentiated between medical disorders of “supernatural” or “natural” origin. Furthermore, some diseases are considered to be not life-threatening, like worms or toothache, while others are severe, like Malaria. The authors chose the well-known plant *Si Dingin* as exemplary (as shown in Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Si Dingin* (young plant) (Bot. *Bryophyllum pinnatum*)

Si Dingin is famous for the treatment of a disturbance by an evil jinn. In that case, it is combined with other plants and sprinkled over the body of the patient (Stark 2019, 134). However, it is also used to treat fever. The patients relax and lie down while a plant's leave is put on his or her forehead.

The prescription of plants and the way of healing depends on the body's composition. Four elements constitute it: air, fire, water and earth. So, if a medical disorder is considered "hot", the aim is to cool it down. For example, if a patient is disturbed by evil jinn, then that medical disorder is considered hot as the jinn were created out of the fire. Therefore, the treatment must use a cooling element. Water has such attributes, and it might be sprinkled over the body of the patient. Sometimes, other ingredients are added to "strengthen" the cooling effect. Very popular are all types of limes. The healer might cut them and put them in the water.

Some traditional healers who were interviewed during the research had their own handwritten documents that helped them maintain medical knowledge. For example, a healer used divinatory methods to detect the origin of a medical disorder. He could see different patterns that appeared during the divination, and these patterns were compared with the sketches in his notebook.

Some diseases appear more frequently. However, it has to be considered that there are illnesses that can be classified as either paranormal or natural. Often supernatural disturbances have the possibility of a "next" level of treatment. For example, if a person is disturbed by a jinni and the family of the patient consult a *dukun* (traditional healer). He or she will start with the first level of treatment, which comprises the usage of specific plants. In the case of jinn possession, the healer uses *limau kambing* (a type of lime) and its leaves and *jari angau* (bot. *Acorus Calamus*) (Stark 2018, 203). The plants will be put in water, and after that, the patients will shower with these plants. If the treatment is effective, then this is fine. However, if the patient is still possessed, the healer must use plants of "stronger" levels. Altogether, there are three levels. This way of treatment is also used in other medical disorders. In general, there is a Level 1, and there is the possibility of using Levels 2 and 3.

The traditional healing system is closely related to the folk belief of the Minangkabau. Sometimes some creatures could disturb people, and such beings can be located at certain places or just move around to trouble people.

The traditional healing system is closely connected to the element of nature. Nature provides remedies and the way how to treat sick persons. Some plants use the prefix *si* like *Si Dingin*, *Si Kumpai* and others. It resembles the way how to talk about specific people. For example, we can say, "Si Ani went to the market" and the prefix *si* is used for a "friend" or a person whom we know well (refer <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/si>, accessed on 20th December 2021). It is also often used in front of plant names, but this shows a certain bond to the elements of nature.

Other fields of traditional Minangkabau knowledge

In this article, the authors chose three fields of traditional Minangkabau knowledge. However, it should be mentioned in a brief way that there are other fields of traditional knowledge too. The reason is to show the manifoldness of traditional knowledge.

Traditional historiography is a field that is well-known in West Sumatra. The Minangkabau history is written down in the so-called *tambo* (traditional historiography). There are numerous versions. Nonetheless, they share similar traits. The connectivity to nature can be seen in the following incident (Sjarifoedin 2020, 43–44) – Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great) had three sons: the first one was Sutan Maharaja Alif, the second one was Sutan Maharaja Depang and the third was Sutan Maharaja Diraja. Iskandar Zulkarnain sent his sons to different places to take care of that area. Sutan Maharaja Diraja landed at the foot of Mount Merapi and founded the first settlement. This event shows the bond between nature and the establishment of a new culture.

In the traditional arts and literature field, West Sumatra is a region that is rich in different forms of arts. The martial art form *pencak silat (silek)* can be found in different areas. The so-called “tiger style” (*silek harimau*) is famous. Interestingly, the fighter imitates moves that originate from the tiger so that we can say again nature serves again as a teacher. Furthermore, there is a huge variety of dances. Sometimes music and traditional literature are interwoven. There are plenty of traditional stories (*kaba*).

In the traditional architecture field, there are exciting publications about traditional architecture (for example, Ng 1993; Hardono and Azizi 2014). The form of the roof resembles buffalo horns. Moreover, it is the place of residence to a sub-lineage of a greater matrilineage that is called *paruik* and means stomach, which shows that they are the descendants of one mother. These two examples should illustrate that the concept regarding nature prevails here too.

Findings

In the previous sections, three different areas of traditional knowledge of the Minangkabau society were described. The hypothesis stated that these three elements are interwoven and interdependent. In this section, this assumption will be examined. As a precondition, it is essential to filter out most features of these fields. First, the main feature of the traditional philosophy was that nature is a teacher. The other important component of traditional philosophy was the

maintenance of harmony. If we consider that traditional philosophy serves as a foundation, then it can be said that the main ideas also influence the other spheres of local knowledge.

The maintenance of balance is crucial for the way of life; this includes the penal law and the healing system as well. For example, if there is a criminal case in the community, then the priority is to solve the problem and restore balance. Should that be impossible, there is the danger that living together is no longer possible. Maybe, matriclans might be under constant suspicion and the consequences for the village community could be severe. The marriage rules are exogamous. This means the partners have to marry a person from another clan. If one clan refuses to participate in the system or if it refuses to marry a person from a certain clan because the other clan is suspected of harbouring criminals, the whole system is in danger. Therefore, the main aim is to restore harmony as soon as possible.

The healing system assumes a balance of the four elements of water, air, earth and fire. A medical disorder can disturb that balance. The healer has to use the basic guidelines from the philosophical concept. For example, he or she has a feeling (*raso*) that some plants can serve as a medication. However, he or she has to check that (*pareso*). We can say the healer has to follow the concept of feeling and checking (*raso jo pareso*). If the healer would not behave that way, it could be dangerous for the patient. The traditional fields of knowledge can be illustrated graphically, as in Figure 2.

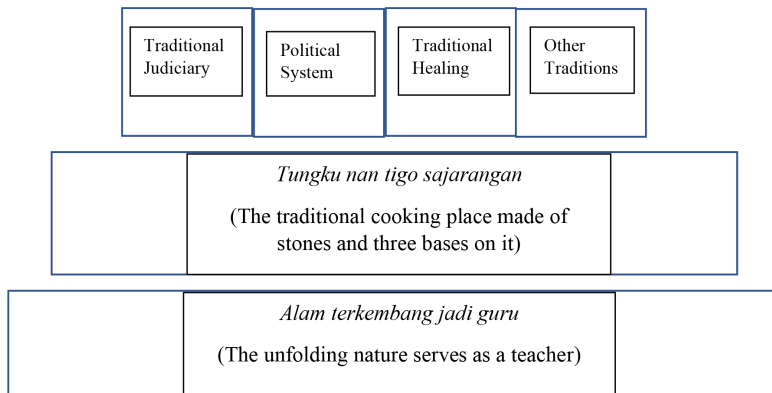


Figure 2. The interdependency of the fields of traditional knowledge

In Figure 2, it can be seen that nature serves as a teacher for all the other types of traditional knowledge. In traditional medicine, this is obvious. The healer learns from the healing quality of plants. Some healers even stressed that they observed

sick animals and how they behaved. It cannot be seen at first glance in the other traditional spheres of knowledge. However, in the traditional judiciary, all people should get along, and that must prevail. In nature, all animals and plants live in their habitat and act according to their instinct. But men have *akal* and can behave appropriately so that no chaos will appear. The other fields of knowledge also learn from nature, like, for example, the *silat* fighter who learns from the movements of the tiger.

The second level is the so-called *tungku nan tigo sajarangan*. Many scholars refer to it merely as the rulings of *adat*. Yet, if we look at the other fields of knowledge, it can be seen that the three elements are also prevalent. The healers behave and check the way of healing and consider the consequences. The *panghulu* will behave in a similar way and so does the *silat* fighter.

A concrete example should illustrate how the decision-finding process was influenced by the two main parts, namely the idea that nature is a teacher and the practical implementation of *tungku nan tigo sajarangan*. A person might be ill and goes to a healer. The healer is quite close to the elements of nature as he or she plants medicinal herbs in the garden. Now, the healer chooses a specific plant. The efficacy of the plant must be checked. In general, this is the former experience. Should there be no improvement in the healing process, the healer can go to the next level which involves other medicinal plants. A similar course of action will be applied in the other field of traditional knowledge.

What is not part of the scheme in Figure 2 is the fact that many fields of traditional knowledge have an approach to start from a “small-scale” event to a larger one. In the judicial field, it is obvious but also in traditional healing. The healers use more effective plants that cannot be found easily, involving many people. The way of acting is like a ladder, it is tried to keep matters on a low profile, but if this is not possible, the next level must be reached.

Conclusion

In this article, it became obvious that the Minangkabau society has broad traditional knowledge, and it could be only outlined briefly in order to get a general overview. However, some of this knowledge is endangered. For example, when the researchers conducted their research amongst traditional healers, most of these healers were already aged, and some even passed away without any students during the research process. So, it can be concluded that this type of knowledge will disappear. Some healers had study notes that were written down, but there

were only a few people who could read and understand them. Often these notes were written in the Minangkabau language by using Arabic letters.

Traditional knowledge reveals a lot about the way how a society and its people think and perceive the world. Both the elders and the youngsters have their place within the society, but with the erosion of traditional values, the situation of parts of the society becomes vulnerable.

This research illustrated the variety of traditional Minangkabau knowledge and the interdependency of different concepts. The reason is that certain philosophical ideas served as the basis. The most important one is the idea that the unfolding nature serves as a teacher (*alam terkembang jadi guru*). This idea shows respect for nature and the environment, and it also displays that men are part of the world and should behave properly.

Nowadays, many villages are exposed to elements from outside that influence traditional knowledge. For example, in the field of traditional healing, people started to use modern biomedical categories that replaced the original terminology. It would be interesting to see how far traditional knowledge can adapt or maintain its heritage.

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