

Conference Paper

Description of the Acculturation Process of Tuak Consumption in North Toraja

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Abstract

Rambu Solo' and *Rambu Tuka'* are traditional parties in Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. At these traditional parties, hosts typically provide alcoholic beverages, such as *tuak*. Lembang Embatau village has a plantation that produces *nira*, the main ingredient in *tuak*. Not only is drinking *tuak* part of Torajan life; moreover, other tribes living there have adopted this practice. This ethnographic study was aimed at exploring the acculturation process of *tuak* consumption in North Toraja. Interviews were conducted with 12 informants selected purposively based on their experience with *tuak*. The informants consisted of residents of Embatau Village who drank *tuak*, as well as migrants, community leaders, and health providers. Source and technique triangulation were used to ensure the validity of the data. The results show that *tuak* is an absolute requirement at traditional parties because it is considered to be associated with honor, is believed to enliven the atmosphere, and is used by hosts to express gratitude to guests attending parties. Consumption of Torajan alcoholic beverages has undergone an acculturation process as traditional parties also feature other alcoholic beverages (beer). As well, particular kinds of alcoholic beverages are associated with the socio-economic identity of the hosts of traditional parties. Hosts with high socio-economic status usually provide beer at parties. If *tuak* and beer are served at traditional parties, people tend to mix them. In conclusion, cultures from other areas have influenced and shaped this local community's culture of alcoholic beverage consumption.

Keywords: acculturation, tuak, ethnographic, Toraja

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Received: 21 January 2018

Accepted: 8 April 2018

Published: 17 May 2018

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 2nd International Meeting of Public Health 2016 Conference Committee.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The country of Indonesia has a great variety of tribes and cultures with different backgrounds and unique customs that express their identities. These cultures that have enriched Indonesian culture have entered the country in many ways, including

acculturation, or the cultural process that results from prolonged contact between two cultural groups [10]. Drinking alcohol is considered to be a bad habit and can cause health problems if done to excessive and continuously [7]. Many studies have documented the impacts of drinking alcohol [17]. Excessive alcohol consumption damages the human body, especially the heart and brain [1]. Consuming alcohol can also cause addiction, drunkenness, and a lack of self-control [14]. Alcohol, however, has become part of much of the long journey of the human life [13]. In Indonesia, it is easy to find various types of alcohol, such as *tuak*, *arak*, *sopi*, and *badeng*. These are often consumed by people, including Indonesians, and doing so has become part of habit and culture.

One region where the consumption of alcohol persists is North Toraja [5]. At traditional parties, such as *Rambu Solo'* and *Rambu Tuka'*, the hosts serve alcoholic beverages, such as *tuak* [3]. Consequently, there is a high prevalence of alcoholic consumption in Toraja [8]. Consuming *tuak* is a practice not only among Torajans but also other tribes. This study, therefore, was conducted to examine the acculturation process of *tuak* consumption in North Toraja.

2. METHODS

Data were collected in November and December 2014 in Embatau Village, Tikala District, North Toraja. The aim of this qualitative, ethnographic study was to describe the acculturation process of *tuak* consumption. Qualitative studies with in-depth interviews serve to learn about the informants' point of view and explore the purpose or observe the process of a phenomenon [6]. In this study, primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 informants consisting of migrants, community leaders, health providers, and Embatau Village residents who drank *tuak*. The informants were selected through purposive sampling. In addition, observations were performed to ensure the validity of the data, and source and technic triangulation were used to increase the data validity. The narrative data were subjected to content analysis.

The 12 informants consisted of seven native residents who drank *tuak*, two migrants who consumed *tuak*, two prominent community leaders, and one health officer; there were nine men and three women. The oldest informant was 71 years, and the youngest was 17 years old. Regarding education level, two informants had completed primary school, two junior high school, six senior high school and two undergraduate studies.

3. RESULTS

In the interview results, IR, an Embatau villager who has consumed tuak since he was 10 years old, states that tuak is an absolute requirement at traditional parties, and it is believed that parties are not fun without *tuak*. Most people believe that those who drink speak more fluently, say what they feel and can rekindle parties.

"Tuak is an absolute rule at traditional parties for the reason that parties are not fun if there is no tuak. Most people who drink tuak speak more fluently and express whatever they feel." (IR, 51 years old, *tuak* farmer, November 28, 2014)

The informants also say that serving *tuak* at parties expresses the hosts' gratitude to the guests.

"Tuak is an expression of gratitude from the host to the guest." (AN, 17 years old, Teenager, December 2, 2014)

ML, who was interviewed in the morning during a conversation with his friends in the *lumbung*, says that *tuak* is associated with honor at traditional parties. In his opinion, persons gain an extraordinary reputation that increases their dignity by consuming *tuak*.

"Tuak is a beverage honor of honor." (ML, 71 years old, community leader, November 29, 2014)

In addition to *tuak*, other alcoholic beverages, such as beer, are usually served at traditional parties. At those with both beer and *tuak*, though, the most-consumed beverage is *tuak*.

"Usually, there is beer (Bintang beer), but the highest number of beverages and the most frequently consumed beverage is tuak." (BN, 25 years old, *Tuak* seller, November 29, 2014)

Unlike BN, IK says that the number of alcoholic beverages consumed, such as beer and *tuak*, depend on the socio-economic status of the host.

"If the host is a rich one, they can buy as much as possible. But if at a party, there are tuak and beer, the numbers of beers and tuak drunk depend on the economic ability of persons." (IK, 27 years old, IRT, November 27, 2014)

Adding to BN's and IK's opinions, YL, a community leader who also consumed *tuak*, says that in ancient times, *tuak* was the only alcoholic beverage usually served at traditional parties. Now, though, alcoholic beverages other than *tuak* are available.

"In ancient times, there were no beverages at traditional parties, except tuak."
(YL, 65 years old, community leader, November 29, 2014)

Tuak consumption in migrant communities also occurs due to environmental influences, such as offers and invitations. The influence of the social environment can cause informants to consume *tuak*. AG, a migrant from Bekasi who is a *sitor* (pedicab driver), says that he consumes *tuak* due to invitations from his neighbor. AG is in Embatau village because his wife is a Torajan. Although he had been in Toraja for only about nine months, consuming *tuak* had become AG's habit.

"My neighbor always invites me to drink tuak. I accepted, and it has become my habit." (AG, 28 years old, migrant, December 4, 2014)

A similar reason is also expressed by an informant from Makassar who feels uncomfortable turning down hosts' offer to consume *tuak*. VB also drinks *tuak* to show respect for traditional parties as a guest. Gradually, consuming *tuak* has become VB's habit.

"Torajans often offered tuak, and I felt bad ignoring them." (VB, 19 years old, migrant, December 4, 2014)

4. DISCUSSION

Consuming alcoholic beverage at traditional parties and in daily life has become a habit in several regions of Indonesia, especially North Toraja. The study results show that *tuak* is an absolute requirement for traditional parties. People who drink *tuak* are believed to be able to express everything they feel. These results are in line with those from a study conducted in the community of Central Maluku, finding that *sopi* is the most important drink to the people of Central Maluku and is served at every party, including those for death, thanksgiving, and the birth of children [15].

Other consumers of *tuak* also explain that it has to be served at traditional parties because it is associated with honor. In ancient times, *tuak* was always served at parties to show respect for the guests. Freud (2002), in his theory of human personality consisting of the id, ego, and superego, argues that commonly, humans today still follow habits or traditions embraced by ancient peoples. *Tuak* has special meaning to North

Toraja society because it can be used to express familiarity, gratitude, and friendship. Accordingly, Goal and Husin (2013) show that the *tuak* beverage continues to be part of Batak Toba tradition. *Tuak* is a medium or a tool used in interactions to build strong bonds of community solidarity among the Batak Toba. Alcoholic beverages are used similarly throughout the world. A study in Nepal finds that there, alcohol serves social and religious purposes in rituals, and in low-income areas, alcohol is used as medicine, for energy, and even to benefit the household kitchen [2].

Another study result shows that beer is also served as an alcoholic beverage at traditional parties. Most informants say that they consume *tuak* by mixing it with beer because they prefer to taste of mixed alcoholic beverages. However, mixing some beverages called *oplosan* can cause health problems. In severe cases, people have died due to *oplosan* consumption. *Kompas* newspaper reports that in first week of december 2014, there were 34 people died, and 121 were hospitalized after consuming *oplosan* in Garut, Sumedang, Bogor, West Java, and Jakarta [16].

Serving beer and *tuak* at traditional parties is related to the hosts' socio-economic status. The number of alcoholic beverages increases if the host is wealthy. However, if there are both *tuak* and beer at a traditional party, *tuak* is consumed most frequently. The informants consume alcoholic beverages not to become intoxicated but to participate in customs in Torajan society. Consumption of certain alcoholic beverages can become entrenched in some areas. Similarly, Naibaho (2012) finds that drunkenness is associated with the Japanese drinking culture centered on *sake*. This Japanese traditional drink has an alcohol content around 20%, and this high level creates the impression that Japanese people become intoxicated easily.

The process of acculturation described by Koentjaraningrat (2009) has various meanings. This social process occurs when a group of people with a particular culture are confronted with elements of a foreign culture and gradually accept and incorporate them into their own culture without losing its distinctiveness. It can be said that acculturation occurs when groups of people with different cultures meet and make contact directly and constantly, leading to a change in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups. In this study, not all the migrant informants consumed *tuak* initially, but they gradually came to consume it. For instance, in the study results, when Torajans invite migrants to parties where they are offered *tuak* in honor of the guests, the migrants consume it and eventually became used to it.

Toraja has a very strong culture with norms, and customs that social change cannot easily be erased. At first, drinking only *tuak* was native to Torajan culture. However,

amid the passage of time and the development of science, other cultures have influenced the consumption of other alcoholic beverages at Toraja traditional parties. This is shown by the study result that in ancient times, *tuak* was the only alcoholic beverage served at traditional parties, but today, other alcoholic beverages are also served.

In the *Kompas* newspaper, UI health anthropologist Sri Murni says that many ethnic groups in Indonesia have traditions of consuming alcoholic beverages made from local ingredients, especially *nira*. In the past, these drinks were commonly reserved for elders at special rituals. Under colonialism, foreign cultures introduced drinking alcoholic beverages to celebrate joy [11].

5. CONCLUSION

The study results support the conclusion that an acculturation process has occurred in the *tuak* consumption behavior of North Torajan society. The native informants report that they have recently started to sometimes consume beer (new culture) at traditional parties but have not eliminated the old tradition of consuming *tuak*. The acculturation process extends to migrant communities. They were unfamiliar with the culture of drinking *tuak* in their hometowns but were introduced to it after coming to Toraja and interacting with this group of people with a different culture. Consequently, migrants have also come to consume *tuak* at traditional parties and in daily life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is thankful to all the research informants and the government of North Toraja, which approved this study. The author is also grateful to the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) for funding the author's education.

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