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RESEARCH ARTICLE

REASONS BEHIND GROWING FIELD RICE DESPITE LOSSES

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to find the reasons why people continue to grow field rice despite the loss. This study uses qualitative paradigm with the acquisition of information through interviews and observations in a small village in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. A practice observed in this small, poor village is the starting point for this research: why these group of people still maintain their livelihoods by planting field rice, which clearly cannot economically sustain their lives in this modern era. It turns out they are unaware that they continue to be at loss and how they want to preserve the tradition that was passed on by their ancestors. The thing that makes them able to survive is none other than the spiritual capital embedded in the community. This article provides recommendations for agricultural field farmers in Indonesia to think about alternative livelihoods besides planting field rice. Therefore, they can get out of the cycle of poverty that has shackled them all this time.

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INTRODUCTION

Planting field rice is a tradition that has been carried out by people in the village of Semunte for generations. This interesting practice and the starting point of this research is that growing rice this way is not economically profitable, yet why the people still choose it as their main livelihood? It turns out that they want to preserve the tradition. Also they are unaware that planting rice does not bring any economic benefits. Even so, they can still survive in this demanded modern era. This happens because of the spiritual capital rooted in the community. Research on the tradition of cultivating field rice that continues even though it is at a loss is rarely done. Generally, studies done on the tradition of rice cultivation are related to the culture or its economic and tourism potential (Ahuja & Ahuja, 2006; Flynn, 2014; Hamid, 2010; Handayani, 2016). Furthermore, this research also relates spiritual capital as an asset that makes people to survive in the midst of poverty. Spiritual capital is typically associated with corporate economic, educational, and political benefits (Grace, 2010; Hijriah, n.d.; Naslmosavi & Jahanzeb, 2017; Smith, 2016). There is a study that discussed about survival mechanism but it is associated with social capital (Yunilisiah, 2014). While this research found that the principal behind people's survival is the spiritual capital.

The originality of this study was also obtained from the research site. To this day, there is no publication that comes from research in the village of Semunte. This village still has a lot of potential to be explored in research. Semunte is the name of a village located in Sungai Betung sub-district, Bengkayang Regency, Indonesia. Most of the people are Dayaks and live communally together for many generations. These sense of togetherness is also practiced in planting field rice. The process from planting to harvesting is usually done in communal work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The basis of this research is to know how devoted these people are to the practice of farming field rice even though they are losing money. Information are obtained through observations, in-depth interviews, as well as the involvement of researchers with interviewees at the location. The interviewees were chosen in accordance to the previous interviewee recommendations. This study is limited only to find the reasons people maintained the tradition of growing field rice despite the loss and the secret behind their ability to survive though their chosen livelihood is not profitable. This study is not to find solution to this problem because it will be a recommendation for future research. Some of the people interviewed were indigenous, some were newcomers. The Village Heads were also interviewed. These were done to support the fullness and validity of the data. The validity of the data were mainly supported by the triangulation method used,

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namely the collection of data through interviews, observations, and literature studies. The results of this research were obtained through an inductive process with qualitative methods and an ethnographic approach. Information were processed and analyzed to establish a theory which becomes the findings of this study.

SPIRITUAL CAPITAL IN SOCIETY

Criticism on political economy is really a criticism toward religion or spirituality as well (Anidjar, 2005). This statement reveals that spiritual capital is quite relevant to various aspects of life: social, political, economic, as well as cultural. In the corporate community, spiritual capital has even become an aspect of company management (Grochmal, 2016; Habisch & Bachmann, 2016). This happened because spiritual capital can guide managers and even auditors in their actions and decisions making (Naslmosavi & Jahanzeb, 2017). Likewise in the world of entrepreneurship, spiritual capital can play an important role (Alderson, 2011). It is said that spiritual capital, social capital, and other capitals are in fact complementing each other and equally needed (Malloch, 2010). Spiritual capital is rarely discussed compared to the other capitals, such as: financial capital, human capital, natural resources, and so on. In fact, spiritual capital is actually the one which can be found even in communities that are poor in terms of economic capital and human capital. Therefore, this spiritual capital has become increasingly important in the midst of poor and underdeveloped communities (Delgado, 2009; Knott & Schulz, 2012; Nihayatul Khusna & Suharso, 2019).

The main role of spiritual capital is none other economic revival, according to the nature of the word "capital", that is something that brings profit. Although a considerable amount of research has linked spiritual capital to politics and social structures, in the end spiritual capital leads to benefits for society. An old and famous work of Weber, published in 1958, has raised the link between Protestantism and capitalism ethics (Smith, 2016). In his book, Weber explains the term "calling" in Protestant ethics, which is a call to achieve one's moral obligation in fulfilling one's worldly duties. This religious behavior is projected in daily activities. This calling is related to the Protestant belief in a destiny that determines only the chosen ones will receive salvation. As a result, this ethic encourages people to work hard, to be disciplined, and to be frugal in order to obtain wealth which is believed to be a sign of blessing from God. Thus, the expression "time is money" by Benjamin Franklin contains a spiritual aspect. This Protestant ethic is what ultimately encouraged one's economic behavior with the spirit of capitalism which resulted to an economic revival. These group of capitalist societies, which are often classified as modern industrial society, broke the ancient traditional economy that is in the status quo. Thus, they became the source of the dynamism and economic revival of industrial societies.

The economic revival in the eastern hemisphere also cannot be separated from the role of the spiritual capital of its people. Bellah's research showed a link between Zen Buddhism and economic ethics in Japan (Bellah, 2009). At the time of Ashikaga (1392-1573), the Zen monks played no small role in the economy. The sect valued productive activities and lived in radical simplicity and frugality. Unlike other Buddhist sects that asked for alms, Zen monks emphasized on hard work. Work is seen as something sacred because it is an expression

of gratitude for graces received. In later period, Confucianism, which has a great influence in Japan, can be used to illuminate the understanding of the relationship between the economy and the state. Confucius' premise was the unity of the economy and the state. This also characterized the Tokugawa rulers in giving their attention to the people's economy. The Confucian core economic policy was to encourage production and reduce consumption, so that people's welfare were fulfilled. This consumption reduction took both physical and mental forms. Physical consumption was limited by reducing expenses, while mental consumption was limited by reducing desire. In Indonesia, the values that developed in society seem to influence people's economic behavior as well (Geertz, 1977). Changes in the values of community life have begun to enter in family life, the education system, and various economic and political organizations; resulting in significant socio-cultural changes. Described by Geertz, these changes can be seen from the emergence of the commercialization process in the agricultural sector, the emergence of various companies that no longer grow from kinship ties, and the emergence of high appreciation for technical skills. It is these changes that are behind the quantum of economic variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An overview of the people in Semunte Village: The people of Semunte live in a village not too far from the town of Bengkayang. Each family has an average of about one hectare of land. Electricity and clean water are not always available over there. The residents there are generally living simply and not highly educated. Majority of the people are Dayaks and live from farming, in this case planting field rice. Agriculture is still done conventionally and its marketing also does not reach a high quantity because it is mostly for their own consumption. This kind of livelihood has been carried out by them for generations. And every year they hold a thanksgiving feast to celebrate the harvest season.



Figure 1. The Rice Field

Before the 19th century, the Dayak people were famous for their *ngayau* culture, which was to take the heads of people from other villages for their customary needs. Therefore, most of the Dayak people live in the highlands in the mountains to protect themselves from enemy attacks. That is why they cultivated rice in the fields and relied on rainwater. They are

¹ Tokugawa was a period between 1600 to 1868 in the history of Japan. The period was ended by Meiji (1868-1911).

having difficulties to grow rice in rice fields because such method requires a lot of water.

In addition, it is difficult to find abundant water on the mountains. People who live on the valley are fortunate enough to be able to grow rice in rice fields. However, for those who live on the slopes of the mountains, inevitably they have to plant rice in the fields. While their income from planting field rice are very minimal, they are usually trying to find additional income by incising rubber or planting corn. Since growing field rice is their main line of work, which often takes all day to do, any side jobs that can provide substantial profits cannot bear maximum results because they are done when the farmers have spare time. The people in Semunte Village portrayed a good representation of the villagers around Bengkayang and the mountainous areas in West Kalimantan in general. For many generations, they have inherited the custom of their ancestors to plant field rice and throw a traditional festival every year after harvest.

Growing field rice do not generate profits: The Semunte people can harvest rice about 600 kg per one hectare of field in a year. For families who are lucky enough to own up to two hectare of rice fields, the maximum yield that they can produce in a year are 1.2 tons. During this process, the community has the habit of *Kuma*, which is collaborating with neighbors to work on the fields. They usually have *Kuma* three times a year: during land clearing, seeds planting, and harvesting time. There are about 20 people who helped out in each *Kuma*, and they are either paid with a wage of IDR 50,000 or with five kg of rice. During the thanksgiving feast for the harvest, also known as *Gawai*, each family uses about 50 kg of rice. Therefore, the maximum yield a family can produce in a year is 1,200kg minus 50 kg equal to 1,150kg or 1.15 tons.

The harvested rice are usually milled for self-consumption for a year. However there are those who grinded them to sell and proceeds from the sale are used to buy rice for a year. Thus, the results of the farmers' hard work for a year are only enough to meet the needs of rice in their household. Details on the calculations are as follows:

-) The selling price of rice grains is IDR 4,000 per kg. A family that harvest 1.15 tons in a year gets IDR 4,600,000.
-) *Kuma* is three times a year and 20 people are needed for one *Kuma*. The wage for a person is IDR 50,000. Therefore, the annual spending on *Kuma* is IDR 50,000 x 20 people x 3 times *Kuma* = IDR 3,000,000.
-) The net annual income is IDR 4,600,000 – IDR 3,000,000 = IDR 1,600,000.
-) In other words, the farmer's monthly income is IDR 1,600,000 / 12 months = IDR 133,000.
-) The farmer's net income per month is calculated to be IDR 133,000. These low of an income will not be sufficient to support other expenses like education, health, and so on.
-) Similarly, the calculations below are for those who choose to buy rice for a year instead:
-) A kilogram of rice costs IDR 11,000. Each household needs about 50 kg per month. For one year, they need 50 kg x 12 months = 600 kg of rice.

-) One *Kuma* needs 20 people and each person is paid by 5 kg of rice. The annual spending on rice for *Kuma* is 20 people x 5 kg x 3 times = 300 kg.
-) *Gawai* will require 50 kg of rice.
-) The amount of rice needed for personal consumption, *Gawai*, and *Kuma* is calculated to be 950 kg. Therefore, the total money spent on rice for a year will be IDR 11,000 / kg x 950 kg = IDR 10,450,000.
-) The money generated from selling rice grains is IDR 4,000 x 1.2 tons = IDR 4,800,000. As a result, a family will not have enough money to buy rice for a year.
-) If farmers choose to buy rice, they have to bear considerable losses since there will be no more money left.
-) Since growing field rice cannot be relied on to support their living cost, many people seek additional income by incising rubber and planting corn. Unfortunately, cultivating rice is a job that requires their full attention. As a result, the yields from their rubber incision work and corn crops will not be optimal. One may wonder why these farmers keep planting field rice as their main livelihood.

Reasons behind people still planting field rice despite losses: In many areas in West Kalimantan, there is a tradition that has been passed down for many generations and must be preserved until now. It is called *Gawai* which is an annual festival to give thanks on a bountiful harvest. The rice need to be planted and harvested every year so the people can carry out this tradition. A family that is obliged to celebrate *Gawai* is called *Rukun*. Moreover, *Kuma*, a communal work on the fields, is a tradition that cannot be eliminated as well. This is a noble custom for the community because it reflects on fraternity, cooperation, and care for one another. *Kuma* has always been identified with fields. Therefore it is impossible for people to give up their livelihoods of planting field rice if they want to uphold *Kuma*. In ancient times, growing rice for the Dayaks was very beneficial. Not only it can fulfill the need for rice at home, but it also used for bartering. Nowadays rice cannot be traded anymore. Besides, there are also many needs that did not exist in the past, such as the cost of transportation, education, health, communication, etc. Apart from tradition, nota lot of peoplerealize that planting field riceis not profitable. Therefore, they still chooseitto be their main livelihood because they have already accustomed to such practice for many generations. Another reason is because of their lack of knowledge, education, and skills. It can be said that farming, especially planting field rice, is what they are good at. Apart from that, there is not much they can do to make a living.

Spiritual Capital is the key to survive: It is quite difficult to understand logically how a family with an income just below IDR 500,000 per month can survive in this modern era. The Semunte people can survive because they are living in harmony and full of enthusiasm at work. Even though they are living in poverty, a warm and joyful atmosphere can be felt whenever they gathered. It turns out that shared spiritual values have become the strength for them to survive. The practice of *Gawai* is none other than the value of gratitude. It seems that this sense of gratitude is what makes them accept their way of living. It curbs any desires to go beyond one's own means. Thus, they can live a more comfortable life for not demanding too much. The spiritual values embodied in the tradition of *Kuma* are communal work, fraternity, and kinship. These

values also present in their daily lives. For example, when someone is experiencing difficulties, the other residents immediately help without any hesitation. Despite they are living in poverty and cannot live adequately like modern society in the city, they can still survive and are generally quite happy in the spirit of fraternity and togetherness. These spiritual values benefit the community, in this case to help them survive. Spiritual capital can be said to be the key for the community to survive in poverty in this modern time.

Suggestion

Although the Semunte people can survive, it is not enough for them who now live in modern times. Many of their young people cannot afford to get higher education because their parents do not have enough money. They also rarely go to places that are far away because they do not have money and vehicle. When someone is sick, it is impossible to get good health care due to lack of funds. Hopefully with these findings, they are made aware to start looking for alternative livelihoods. The local governments also need to provide various trainings and guidance that can help them to find other alternatives to meet their life necessities. Things like these cannot be allowed to continue.

Conclusion

People in the village will normally preserve their ancestral traditions that bring economic benefits (Haryanto, 2016). However, it is different with the people of Semunte. Although it is not profitable, they are still continuing their tradition of growing rice. There are several reasons why they continue to cultivate field rice as their main occupation, namely:

-) There is a tradition to be thankful after harvest season, called *Gawai*, that must be preserved for many generations. This custom will be impossible to do without any rice being harvested. This is why they keep planting field rice.
-) They have a *Kuma* tradition that they really like because it fits with the Dayak community's way of communal living. *Kuma* is a tradition of a communal work on the fields that they inherited from their ancestors as well. For the community, *Kuma* is one tradition that cannot be eliminated. Therefore, a field is needed if they want to preserve *Kuma*.
-) The lack of insight, education, and other skills make them unable to seek other livelihoods. Growing field rice has been something that they have accustomed to for generations. It became the only option that occurred to them when finding their main livelihood. There are quite a lot of people who do not realize that planting rice is not economically profitable. They are only focused on planting rice without ever calculating how much profit they can get.
-) They grow field rice because they generally live on mountain slopes where there is no water, making it impossible to open rice fields.

It turns out they can still survive. Even in poverty, they stay as a harmonious society in strong bonds of togetherness. The key that makes them survive is none other than the spiritual capital embedded in the community through living out the spiritual values they believe in, namely the value of gratitude and togetherness.

CLOSING

Growing field rice is a common practice that is easily found in various villages in the mountainous areas of West Kalimantan. The people there have already accustomed to it, so it never occurred to them if planting field rice is profitable or not. After calculations were made, it turns out that such practice does not bring any economic benefits. The people continued to grow it because it is a tradition that needs to be preserved for generations. However, this turned out to have quite a broad economic impact because most people who live in mountainous areas in West Kalimantan choose to cultivate field rice as their main occupation. Therefore, further research is needed to seek other alternatives that are more profitable and how these people can gradually escape from the feeling of being obliged to plant field rice every year.

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