

# Local Wisdom Transformation of Custom Society (A Case Study on Banokeling Communities in Banyumas Regency)

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## Abstract

Modernization and its influences have recently touched various community levels, including communities of custom society and consequently affected the existing local wisdom which has become their life guidance for hundred years. This research aimed at examining the dynamics and transformation of local wisdom existed in the custom society in the middle of modern era development. This research was conducted in Banyumas Regency, precisely on Banokeling custom communities in Pekuncen Village, Jatilawang District. A descriptive-qualitative method was conducted by having in-depth interviews with Banokeling Custom followers and figures as well as Banyumas cultural observers. The research results show that, Banokeling custom communities were highly adaptive to various modernization influences. The local wisdoms were not suddenly disappeared in response to the developing modernization, yet continuously existed with certain adjustments following the recent development. However, there were some forms of local wisdoms which originality was continuously maintained, such as religious identity, clothes, custom houses, and various rituals held routinely. This research concluded that there was local wisdom transformation in Banokeling custom communities, yet the transformation happened in the framework of adaptation with the recent development.

## Keywords

transformation; local wisdom; custom society

## INTRODUCTION

Human civilization has continuously developed. Various products of technology have also been recently created signing that humans' life has continuously changed and developed known as modernization. In facts, modernization has changed various aspects, including the cultures of humans throughout the world. This can be interpreted that the influence of modernization, in various forms, has globally reached various commu-

nity levels in various areas previously untouched by modernization. Moreover, the custom society which previously known as 'guardian' of tradition, has been frequently exposed by the continuously developing modernization and its traditional identity has gradually been faded away.

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When discussing the relationship of modernization with custom society, it cannot be separated from local wisdom. In facts, custom society has local wisdom in various forms and types, starting from the common to specific daily activities with special purposes, such as custom ritual, ideology, philosophy, and others. All local wisdoms become the custom society's life guidance, in their relationship with other humans, environment, and God. Custom society and local wisdom are inseparable (As'ari & Hendriawan, 2016). The local wisdom belonging to a custom society contained a variety of knowledge from the ancestors which can be used to face the uncertain dynamics of civilization in the future (Salim, 2016). In the context of custom society, local wisdom is greatly essential and beneficial as a part of their life. Local wisdom can be considered as the soul and identity of custom society. As local knowledge system, one custom society distinguishes itself from the others (Suyanto & Mujiyadi, 2015).

Unfortunately, due to the massive modernization, local wisdoms in custom society have experienced transformation. Various forms of local wisdom, both in community and environmental management as well as daily activities should adjust with the continuously developing modernization (Indrawardana, 2013; Nurhayanto & Wildan, 2016). In some locations, transformation has reached the existence of various traditions although the transformation is in different levels, such as in the custom society of *Kasepuhan* Sukabumi, West Java (Azri, 2018).

The dynamics and transformation of local wisdom happen in various custom societies throughout Indonesia, including in Banokeling Custom communities, Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province. Banokeling has many unique traditions correlated with their belief to the Almighty God (Purwana, 2016.) which is actually a unique combination between Islam, Hindu-Budha, and local religions, therefore, many people consider it as *Islam Kejawen* (Islam which is influenced by Javanese traditions) (Rachmadhani, 2015). From the perspective of Hindu, there are series of rituals providing

various offerings (known as *sesajen*) in the form of various foods similar to those offered in Balinese communities. Furthermore, these local traditions are realized in *slametan* rituals in particular times, based on the calculations of Javanese calendar system known as Aboge calendar. Meanwhile, the Islamic values are implanted in their belief to the Almighty God and the prophet Muhammad as the God's messenger as well as series of prayers used in rituals by reciting Al-Qur'an verses just like those used by Islam believers (Muslims) in general.

The most interesting element of Banokeling custom communities is their persistence in performing their traditions in various ritual forms. In one year, more than 20 types of rituals are performed by Banokeling custom communities, both in small and large scales. All rituals are packages in sacred and harmonic situations. The sacred of each ritual is shown where the followers of Banokeling communities always wear the customary clothes all in black (*beskap*) and head covers known as '*blangkon*'. Meanwhile, the harmony is shown from their mutual cooperation (known as *gotong royong*) among Banokeling followers in preparing the processions of each ritual, such as preparing the place, food, and other duties.

At glance, there are some changes in the existence of Banokeling people. Yet, various rituals were annually held; the traditions are continuously maintained; the customary houses still strongly stand, etc. when observed deeper, there are some local wisdom transformations both in their rituals and life styles. Thus, this paper tried to reveal the local wisdom transformations happening in Banokeling custom communities, Banyumas Regency.

## METHODS

This research used a qualitative method. The research location was centered in Pekuncen Village, Jatilawang District, Banyumas Regency where Banokeling custom communities still exist until now. The target of this research included Banokeling elders and followers around Jatilawang District and Ba-

nyumas cultural observers who well understand the history and development of Banokeling communities. The research samples were collected using a purposive sampling technique that the participating informants were highly trusted with valid information. Therefore, the selected informants included the top leaders (known as *juru kunci*), customary figures, village heads and local youths. The interviewed Banyumas cultural observers were Ahmad Tohari, a well known 74-year-old man of letters from Tinggarjaya Village, Jatilawang District. The data were collected using several techniques consisting of in depth interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), documentation and observation. In depth interview was conducted by obtaining the information from the Banokeling top leaders (*juru kunci*) and customary figures related to the history and identities of Banokeling communities from time to time. The interviews were also conducted by obtaining information from Banyumas cultural observer related to the existence of Banokeling communities from the cultural perspectives. Meanwhile, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted by involving Banokeling communities, Pekuncen Village Head, public figures, and youth representatives to discuss the dynamics of local wisdom existence in Banokeling communities. Meanwhile, observation and documentation were conducted to figure out various rituals followed by the Banokeling custom communities and document them in the forms of videos and photographs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A Brief of Banokeling Custom communities' Life

Banokeling custom communities do not commonly live in otonomous areas like the other custom communities throughout Indonesia. They only live in several hamlets of Pekuncen Village, Jatilawang District, Banyumas Regency. Besides, the distance of Pekuncen village from the Capital District is relatively close which is approximately 5 km. It means that Banokeling custom communi-

ties are not in remote areas far from the city center and should be reached in hours. From the Capital District of Jatilawang, Pekuncen Village can be reached only in 10 minutes by motorcycle. The roads to Pekuncen Village are good, widely paved, and easily accessed. Along the roads to Pekuncen Village, we are welcomed by the green panorama of large rice fields and hills from both right and left sides.

Banokeling Custom communities live in several parts of Pekuncen Village. However, not all Pekuncen people are the members or followers of Banokeling custom communities. Based on the information obtained from Pekuncen Village Head and referring to Pekuncen Village Profile, only 70 percent of Pekuncen people are the followers of Trah Bonokeling Descendants. Moreover, Pekuncen people are newcomers or local people with different belief with that of Banokeling custom communities. Although having different belief and faith, Pekuncen people live in peace without any conflict with Banokeling custom communities.

In addition to Pekuncen Village, the followers of Banokeling custom communities are also spread in some other areas in the neighboring regencies adjacent to Banyumas, such as Cilacap, Banjarnegara, Purbalingga and other areas in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta and even Papua. The followers of Banokeling custom communities living in areas outside Banyumas are those migrating for working purposes or getting married with outsiders and then living in their husband/wife's residence which is even outside of Java. Although many Banokeling descendants are recently working outside of their town, but they are annually obliged to go home in Pekuncen Village, for "*Unggahan*" rituals commonly held on Friday at the end of *Ruwah* month based on the Javanese calendar or a week before Ramadan month.

Many people assumed that Banokeling custom communities are a part of society with *Kejawen* Islamic belief, believing in Islam, but never performing the Islamic worshipping rituals, especially prayers. According to the elders and figures of Banoke-

ling custom communities, their religion is Islam, without any additional information, such as Kejawen, Abangan, or other types of Islam. The members of Banokeling custom communities are Muslims without exception. The traditional Banokeling customary figures said that the claim saying that Banokeling custom communities had Kejawen Islam was just a false assumption because they did not really understand Banokeling people. Banokeling traditional customary figures were even ready to provide evidence that they are Muslims. One proving that they are Muslims is that when one of Banokeling followers is going to hold a wedding procession, he/she still has to say two *shahada* statements, like Muslims in general. In addition, when a Banokeling member died, the entire corpse handling processes and burial was prayed using the Al-Qur'an verses based on the Islamic Sharia.

Banokeling custom communities said that in performing Islam, they do not 'nyantri', but 'nyandi'. The term "nyantri" means practicing the Islamic Sharia as based on the Islamic pillars starting from reciting the *Shahada* statements, doing prayers, zakat, fasting, and hajj. Meanwhile, the term "Nyandi" means practicing Islam but not doing the prayers due to different understandings related to the meaning of prayer. Banokeling people believe that the term "shalat (Prayer)" must be distinguished from the term "laku (conduct)". According to Banokeling people, prayer (*sholat*) is a practice which can be started, stopped and started again at any time, such as trading activities, farming, etc. Meanwhile, the term "laku (conduct)" is a practice that must be daily performed in life, may not be stopped or interrupted, such as not hurting others, respecting parents, respecting fellow human beings, helping others, loving peace and harmony, etc.

#### Local Wisdom Transformation in Traditional Rituals

Banokeling custom communities cannot avoid the recent development. Therefore, Banokeling custom communities strive to maintain their existence to keep up with the

recent era. Banokeling custom communities' ways of life seems to continuously adapt to various external cultural influences, especially modernization. Thus, Banokeling custom communities have made some adaptive steps to various forms of modernization influences. One example is separating aspects that can be changed to meet the recent development, yet those aspects must be authentically maintained, even when against the modernization. Several maintained aspects include all kinds of traditions to respect their ancestors implemented in various rituals or traditional ceremonies, starting from the ceremonial procedures and equipment. Meanwhile, several aspects which are allowed to change are related to certain social systems, such as marriage and technology ownership with the specified restrictions made by the custom. It means that there are local wisdom transformations in Banokeling Custom Communities in various aspects which can be considered as Banokeling custom communities' strategies to survive and fight against the recent development.

Banokeling custom communities still consistently perform various traditional rituals. In one year, there are more than 20 rituals performed both in small and large scale. For the large-scale rituals, it is usually followed by all Banokeling decedents and followers, including those who migrated outside of Pekuncen Village areas. No wonder, if at the moment of a large-scale ritual, Pekuncen Village turns into the center of crowd since visited by thousands of Banokeling followers from various regions. Meanwhile, the small-scale rituals are usually held by a small part of the communities, especially within the scope of *bedogol* (a part of custom communities who are specifically in charge of certain matters such as religion, government, and others) in Banokeling communities. For the small-scale rituals, sometimes only tens or maximally hundreds (not thousands) of people participate in the rituals.

Some rituals usually held by Banokeling traditional communities include *Unggahan* Ritual to welcome the incoming Ramadan month. *Unggahan* rituals are

held one week before Ramadan month, or usually on Friday at the end of month before Ramadhan. The essence of this ritual is gathering the fellow members of Banokeling custom communities and making a pilgrimage to the cemetery complex of Mbah Banokeling. Mbah Banokeling cemetery is located in the northern part of residential areas and in the hilly areas sacred by the local residents. In the cemetery complex, besides Mbah Banokeling cemetery, there is another sacred cemetery and believed to be Mbah Banokeling's loyal guard in the past. The respect given to Mbah Banokeling's loyal guard is also held in traditional rituals in certain months with small-scale rituals.

As mentioned above, the unique of *Unggahan* ritual is the presence of Mbah Banokeling descendants from various regions reaching thousands of people. They usually stay for a few days in Pekuncen Village until the *Unggahan* procession is over. Some decedents even spent their time in Pekuncen Village during the Ramadhan month until Eid El Fitr. This is because a few days after Ramadhan Month, there is also a large-scale ritual with a concept similar to *Unggahan*, known as *Turunan*.

For Bonokeling followers coming from outside of Pekuncen areas, including those from different regencies, are required to come to Pekuncen Village on foot without using any footwear in which the distance can be tens of kilometers or can be reached within a day. Banokeling Followers and descendants who still followed the *Unggahan* processions on foot included those coming from Cilacap, Purbalingga and Banjarnegara.

In addition to *Unggahan* and *Turunan* rituals, there is also a ritual called *Perlon Kyai Gunung*. This ritual is a mutual cooperation activity to clean and tidy up the cemetery of Mbah Banokeling's confidants, named Kyai Gunung. In addition to clean the plants and weeds, the cemetery area is also usually repainted. Those in charge of cleaning the cemetery are men, while women are in charge of preparing food in the traditional houses. After cleaning the cemetery area, everyone involved in this activity then continued

eating together. The unique is that all food served in the *Kyai Gunung perlon* ritual is a donation from the community members to fulfill their vows (promises) when they succeeded in doing or getting something, such as a family member who recently gets a job, recovers from illness, graduates from school, etc. Therefore, in every *Perlon Kyai Gunung* ritual, there are dozens of goats and chickens that are slaughtered and processed in various forms of cuisine to be eaten together during the ritual.

Furthermore, there is '*muji*' ritual held every Friday night during *Suro* month. This event is held in *balai pasemuan* (meeting hall) with a sacred atmosphere. All people (including guests/researchers) participating in this activity are required to wear black clothes and head covers in the form of *blankon*. The meeting hall also feels 'mystical' since only using *sentir* lighting (Javanese traditional lamp). Even in the middle of ritual, the lights must be turned off and consequently the atmosphere is very dark. All what are heard are only voices of the members of Banokeling custom communities chanting with Javanese praises. This event lasts approximately eight hours from 8 p.m. until dawn. These series of activities began with *sungkem* from the younger to older generations of Banokeling custom communities, and then continued with *muji*. *Muji* is an activity to sing traditional Javanese songs or praises together. The event was interspersed by having a meal together in the form of *Tumpeng* (cone-shape yellow cooked rice) held before midnight. In *muji* ritual, there is also a ritual of lowering the "sacred tambourine" (*Rebana Keramat*) which is said to be lowered and beaten only once a year.

In addition to the large-scale rituals held once a year as described above, there are also rituals performed in accordance with *pasaran* or calculation of days based on the Javanese calendar system, known as *Senin Pahingan* ritual. This ritual is a series of activities begun by having a gathering activity at *balai pasemuan* (meeting hall). *Senin Pahingan* ritual is not only attended by the Banokeling custom communities, but also

the local government elements, such as the District Heads and Village Heads to socialize various government programs, including ideas from Banokeling custom communities on various development issues and other issues in Pekuncen Village. The peak of *Senin Pahingan* ritual is praying and eating together in the area of a large tree complex in the southern part of residences belonging to Banokeling custom communities. This ritual is different from the other rituals in the type of food served. If in the other rituals, the food served can be in various forms of processed food, yet in *Senin Pahingan* ritual only *ketupat* and *tumpeng* are provided without side dishes. The *ketupat* are the small ones called "*kupat slamet*" as a symbol of a salvation request to the Almighty God.

Although various rituals are still held and there is no change in the procedures for the implementation, if we figure out more deeply, there are several aspects are different or have undergone transformations, such as rituals in Banokeling custom communities which have recently used modern technology which was previously considered by the Banokeling custom communities as a violation to the custom, the use of footwear in joining *Unggahan* ritual, etc. In the past, if there were Banokeling descendants and followers coming from outside of Pekuncen area to join *Unggahan* ritual, they had to walk using their barefoot. Their journey to Pekuncen Village from their original place was tens of Kilometers and took hours, even one full day, such as those coming from Mandiraja District, Banjarnegara Regency, Adipala District, Cilacap Regency and Purbalingga Regency. For a comparison, if you use a motor cycle from Pekuncen to Mandiraja, it takes 1.5 to 2 hours. When on foot, maybe three or four times longer. Therefore, the recent policy made by the elders of Banokeling custom communities, they are allowed to wear '*sandal jepit*' as their footwear for walking to join *Unggahan* ritual and not considered a violation to the custom. The reasons expressed by the Banokeling traditional elders are highly rational, because now the roads leading to Pekuncen Village are all paved so that if they walk barefoot, it

is feared that those will hurt their feet and unable to join the traditional rituals. Even though sandals are allowed, there are still many Banokeling followers who walk barefoot to join the ritual. They actually wanted to honor their ancestors whose intention was stronger in facing the conditions than those they are facing now.

The other use of modern technology can also be seen from their permits related to the use of various documentation facilities, such as smartphones and other electronic devices in various ritual events. If in the past those would not be allowed to bring their electronic devices in every ritual event, now Banokeling descendants joining the rituals are allowed to bring their electronic devices with certain restrictions. Therefore, it is not surprising that nowadays there is often a phenomenon of Banokeling descendants taking their selfie photos in the middle of ritual events and then uploaded them on social media. Even at certain moments, many tourists have also joined the *Unggahan* rituals and documented these activities with sophisticated electronic equipment, either using cameras, drones or others.

In addition, the other transformation of Banokeling custom communities is related to the ways they view outsiders or guests in their various traditional rituals. If in the past their rituals were quite sacred and did not allow outsiders to follow or document the rituals, today, it is no longer prohibited. It means that Banokeling custom communities have allowed their communities to be exposed outside of their areas. They empower one of their own members, a YouTuber, to document various aspects related to Banokeling. In addition, the Banokeling custom communities have collaborated with outside parties to document their ritual activities in Banokeling.

Those having collaboration with Banokeling custom communities come from various parties, including government institutions, universities, schools and private parties as well as journalists from inside and outside the country. Cooperation has been made in various forms, such as making videos, publishing books, articles in scienti-

fic journals and others. Banokeling custom communities have also been recently more careful in responding to various publications related to Banokeling, because if there is inaccurate information, they usually try to clarify and straighten the inaccurate information. Banokeling custom communities have also received several visits from educational institutions, especially universities to conduct studies, such as Jenderal Sudirman University, STAIN Purwokerto, UGM Yogyakarta including the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) from Jakarta and other institutions.

### **Local wisdom transformation in the community system**

Similar to the other custom societies in Indonesia, Banokeling custom communities have a variety of local knowledge, both related to the relationship of humans with the other humans (social) and humans to the surrounding natural environment. They believe that harmonious relationships with the other humans should also be implemented when interacting with the surrounding natural environment to best maintain the balance of nature with a variety of the belonging local knowledge (Sari et al., 2020).

In its relationship with the community system or social life, there are various rules in governing the members of Banokeling custom communities. In the past, those rules were strictly enforced. However, in the last few decades, these rules have slowly transformed to meet the recent development. To some people and even to Banokeling custom communities, these transformations, in certain aspects, have positive nuances. The transformation of rules in governing the community system included the perspectives on marrying other people outside of Banokeling custom communities, opportunities to migrate, and related to the educational world.

In marriage, the recent Banokeling descendants and followers are allowed to marry anyone, including people outside of Banokeling custom communities. Meanwhile, in the past, Banokeling people were only allowed to marry their fellow members

of Banokeling custom communities. The changes in policies allowing the community members to marry non-Banokeling people have indirectly spread the belief of Banokeling custom communities to various regions, even outside of Java. This is because many Banokeling followers, after marrying other people from outside of Banokeling, eventually move to the other places following their husbands or wives, yet still firmly maintain their Banokeling belief.

After permitting the residents of Banokeling custom communities to marry others from outside of their regions, this also impacted on the issues of population migration or movement. If in the past, Banokeling custom communities were only concentrated in Pekuncen Village, now Banokeling followers have spread in various regions, not only in Banyumas areas but also in various parts throughout the archipelago. Based on the information obtained from the elders of Banokeling custom communities, Banokeling residents who moved from Pekuncen Village were caused by two reasons. First, they violated the customs and consequently expelled from Pekuncen Village. Second, their own wishes after undergoing the customary consultation processes and then approved by the custom communities. But now, the migration rules have been loosed by Banokeling custom communities who have recently become more open.

The other transformation happening in Banokeling communities is related to their perspectives on the educational world. There are many followers and descendants of Banokeling custom communities who are able to graduate from their secondary education and even higher education. Many Banokeling young generations have even been accepted and studied at some reputable universities in Banyumas, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Jakarta and other big cities. Most Banokeling followers have stated that education is an investment in the future for their family, especially for the related individuals. This is different from the perspectives of Banokeling communities in the past who considered education was less important and they did have time to receive any formal

education. Banokeling young generations in the past were directly involved in assisting their parents working in the rice fields or migrating to the other cities for working and seemed ignoring the issues on education.

Achievements in the field of education have also impacted various types of jobs belonging to the recent Banokeling followers, both inside and outside of Pekuncen Village. If the elders of Banokeling custom communities were still struggling with the agricultural world, the young generations of Banokeling custom communities have recently had various jobs, such as State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in regional and central levels, educators (teachers/lecturers), entrepreneurs, traders, etc. There is even a well-known young entrepreneur, Pujiyanto (33 years old), a franchise product owner of Banyumasan T-shirt branded with “*Kaos Ngapak*”. The owner of this “*ngapak shirt*” brand is a Banokeling descendant and recently active in developing MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) nationally throughout Indonesia. His t-shirt business which was first established in Purwokerto has now opened several branches in different places, such as in Purbalingga, Cilacap, Kebumen and several other areas.

### Local Wisdom Transformation in the Perspective of External Culture

Since 2015, the Government of Banyumas Regency has planned to make Banokeling custom communities as one of cultural tourism destinations in Banyumas. Banokeling is believed to become one asset to develop the society through the local wisdom-based tourism (Priyono & Dadan, 2016). Based on the data and facts, when Banokeling custom communities held large-scale rituals such as *Unggahan*, commemorating *Suro (Muharram)* month, *sedekah bumi* (offering given to earth) and other rituals, always invited people from outside to come and witness these rituals. Not only coming to visit and watch the rituals, some academicians also conducted their studies and journalists captured the ritual moments

in Banokeling. The plan to develop Banokeling into a cultural tourism destination will certainly impact Pekuncen people and Bonokeling custom communities, especially related to the threats to their cultural existence.

At the initial plan, Banokeling was socialized as a tourism destination to the custom communities. Many Banokeling followers were worried and did not agree with the plan. They previously thought that the plan would threaten the existence of Banokeling custom communities, but now they have wisely responded to the plan. They no longer rejected the program to make Banokeling as a cultural tourism destination, with a condition that the plan did not change and destroy the traditions existing in Banokeling custom communities. It means that government or any other party should not interfere in the existing rituals and traditions in Banokeling, especially related to the ritual procedures, processes, and rules existing in Banokeling.

Banokeling custom communities have also synergized with the government by forming community groups (known as *Kelompok Masyarakat/ Pokmas*) related to the plan to develop Banokeling into a cultural tourism destination. Those community groups consist of Banokeling custom communities and figures as well as the government of Pekuncen Village. These community groups have an important role as vehicles to exchange ideas between Banokeling custom communities and the government related to various matters on cultural tourism, either from the aspects of tourism substance, facilities and infrastructure as well as promotion. Although the community groups have just been established in 2016, they were able to bridge the interests of both government and Banokeling traditional communities related to which cultures are allowed and not allowed be used as tourism commodities. Those conditions implied that Banokeling custom communities are not antipathetic but elegantly respond to the incoming foreign cultures.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of local wisdom in custom communities is inevitability although there are certain levels and different aspects belonging to one community and the other communities. In custom communities of Banokeling Banyumas, the transformation of local wisdom happened in several aspects, such as customary rituals, social orders, and community attitudes to the incoming foreign cultures. Those transformations were empirically the adjusting steps made by Banokeling custom communities in facing the recent development. It was explicitly interpreted as the changeable local wisdoms, while some others were maintained and might not be disturbed by anyone with any reason.

Sociologically, the transformation happened in Banokeling custom communities was not adequately obtrusive because the typical characteristics which became the community identities have been strongly attached, such as religious identity, traditional arts including symbolic identity of mysterious Banokeling people. Thus, further studies on social changes happening in Banokeling custom communities involving the social changes in all custom society life aspects and those in certain periods considered influencing the dynamics of Banokeling custom communities existing in the past until now.

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