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COMPARISON OF CULTURAL VALUES IN THREE INDONESIAN SUB-CULTURES

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to compare the cultural values of power distance and collectivism among three Indonesian sub-cultures: Javanese, Sundanese, and Chinese Indonesians. Since most research in the field of cross cultural management in Indonesia bear the problem of culture generalization, it is vital to investigate cultural values at the sub-cultural level. Research focusing on sub-cultural level is able to explore the nuances and distinguished characteristics among ethnic groups or regions; especially in a culturally-complex country such as Indonesia.

To compare cultural values, this study utilizes Value Survey Module 08 instrument and adopted its calculation formula. A total of 260 respondents were involved, with the composition of 100 Chinese Indonesian, 100 Javanese and 60 Sundanese. The Value Survey Module 08 questionnaires were distributed through a quasi-snowball sampling method to companies located in Central and West Java.

The analysis of quantitative data revealed the variation of power distance and

collectivism scores among the three sub-cultures. This finding reinforces the argument that each Indonesian sub-cultures is unique, and give evidence that measuring culture in culturally-complex society through the aggregation of national data is inaccurate. Implications for theory and practice were also discussed.

Keywords: cultural values, power distance, collectivism, sub-cultural comparison Indonesia.

Comparison of Cultural Values in Three Indonesian Sub-Cultures

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1. Research Background

The aim of this study is to compare the cultural values of power distance and collectivism among three Indonesian sub-cultures: Javanese, Sundanese and Chinese Indonesians. Although being the fourth largest country in term of population, Indonesia's culture is far more diversified with over 1,300 ethnic groups compared to China, India and USA

(Statistic Indonesia, 2011). With such ethnic composition, it is hard to determine which ethnic group that could be used to represent "Indonesia's national culture".

Since 1980s, many research in management shows that national culture has great consequences to all aspect of organizational management. Researchers such as Hofstede (1980, 1991); Laurent (1983); Adler (1983); Inglehart and Baker (2001) stated that management and organization practices does not lead to uniformity because of the cultural influence in each region. Laurent (1983) reported that among there is still differences of perspective and behavior in management practices among Europeans. In Hofstede's research (1980, 1991), countries with different cultural dimensions' score demonstrated different behaviors both in society and organization.

The behavior of the people and organizations in a country is greatly influenced by the dominant culture (Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996; Schein, 2004). In the case of Indonesia, Javanese culture is often considered "dominant", and is considered as the national culture of Indonesia (Antlov, 1994; Yudianti and Goodfellow, 1997; Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Mann, 1996).

The opinion that Javanese culture is the representation of Indonesia's culture is challenged in this study. Although it is factual that Javanese is the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, Javanese is only one out of hundreds Indonesia's ethnic group. Furthermore, the Javanese ethnic group is only dominant in Java Island – the smallest among Indonesia's five big islands. The claim that Javanese culture is the representation of Indonesia's culture is invalid, since other region in Indonesia or other Indonesian ethnic group might not share the same values and beliefs as the Javanese.

To demonstrate the claim, this study compares the cultural values of power distance and collectivism among three Indonesian sub-cultures: Javanese, Sundanese, and Chinese Indonesian. Javanese and Sundanese were chosen because it is the largest and second largest ethnic group in Indonesia, and both ethnic groups is dominant in Java Island. The Chinese Indonesians were chosen based on the fact that 8 out of 10 richest Indonesians are Chinese Indonesians (Forbes, 2015). Those three ethnic groups will be compared using Hofstede's cultural framework of power distance and collectivism using Value Survey Module 08 instrument. Consequently, the research question in this research is:

Do Sundanese and Chinese Indonesians shares the same cultural values with the Javanese?

2. Theory
2.1 Hofstede's Framework
Based on a research involving 160,000 respondents in 50 countries, Hofstede found that national culture can explain differences in attitudes and values related to organizational behavior (Perdhana, 2015). Hofstede defines national culture as *"the collective mental programming of the people of any particular nationality"*. According to Hofstede, people in

particular nation have a collective national character that will reflect their cultural mental programming.

To compare the cultural values of the Javanese, Sundanese and Chinese Indonesians, this study utilize Hofstede's dimension of power distance and individualism/collectivism. Power Distance is the extent to which less powerful members of organizations/institutions accept that power is distributed unequally. This reflects the values of the less powerful members in society and also those who have more power (Perdhana, 2015).

Collectivism is the tendency of people to join in a group or collective and taking care for one another in exchange for loyalty among them. Its opposite, Individualism, is the tendency of people to watch themselves and their close relative only. Hofstede's measure the degree of individualism into two poles of continuum: the lower the degree of individualism means that people are tending to be collectivist. Collectivism is the tendency of people to join in a group or collective and taking care for one another in exchange for loyalty among them (Perdhana, 2015).

To measure the power distance and collectivism score, this study utilize Value Survey Module 08, an instrument developed by Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov and Vinken (2008). The calculation formula for power distance and collectivism dimension are as follows:

Table1. Calculation Formula Score for Power Distance and Individualism/Collectivism

$$\text{Power Distance} = 35(m07 - m02) + 25(m23 - m26) + C(pd)$$

$$\text{Individualism} = 35(m04 - m01) + 35(m09 - m06) + C(ic)$$

2.2 Javanese Perspective on Power Distance and Collectivism

In relation to the cultural dimension of power distance, there are several Javanese cultural values that should be taken into attention. The first Javanese value is the principle of respect. Javanese people, both in speech or behavior, have to respect other people in accordance with their social status (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). Individuals should know when to honour and respect people in higher position, while responsible and acting as father/mother to those in lower positions (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). This action also reflected in the use of language and gesture when someone talks to other people in higher (using *Javanese krama)* or lower (using *Javanese ngoko*) position.

The principle of respect is based on a view that "all social relationship are hierarchically ordered, and on the moral imperative to maintain and express this mode of social order as a good in itself" (Geertz, 1961). Everyone should know their position and place on the society. Those who in higher position should be respected and these people should responsible, acting

like parents to those who in lower position (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). Quoting Mulder (1978) that "ambition, impoliteness, and personal wishes for material gain and power are sources of disruption, disharmony and contradiction that should be avoided and repressed", the Javanese must accept, satisfied and be responsible for their status as such conditions will lead to social harmony (Magnis-Suseno, 1997).

The second Javanese value related to power distance is the feeling of *wedi* (fear)*, isin* (ashamed) and *sungkan.* In a Javanese family, children were taught when they have to feel fear (*wedi*), shame (*isin*) and *sungkan*. For example, when children playing with their friends and then they come home late, they have to feel *wedi*, even before they face their parents, because they have made mistake disobeying their parents for coming home late. They have to feel *isin* when they act improperly (i.e: noisy, quarreling, behaving outside the norm) in front of strange people. *Sungkan* is almost similar with *isin*, but it is more associated with behavior patterns of etiquette (Geertz, 1961), for example when other people offer some food to a child, they must politely reject it at first. The people who offer the food will also politely offer the food once more, and then the child is allowed to accept it. Both people know that this is a Javanese etiquette of *sungkan*, therefore they have to understand when to use the expression of *sungkan*.

The last Javanese value related to power distance dimension is "father figure". As mentioned earlier, the Javanese believed that all social relationship is hierarchically ordered. Individuals should know when to honor and respect people in higher position, while responsible and acting as father/mother to those in lower positions (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). Someone in higher position will be considered as "Bapak" (fathers), who "neither elected nor appointed and takes responsibility for his children not just for a limited time; a fathers obligations and authority last as long as his life" (Antlov, 1995). In addition, Mulder (1994) stated that "a leader is *Bapak*, a father and reliable patron who should be honoured and followed, whose whim and wish is a command, and who cares for his subjects *(anak buah)*".

As the feedback for the leader as "*Bapak"*, subordinates have to be obedient and thankful for what he does for them. Superiors want their subordinates to show obedience, or in Javanese word; *"manut"* (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). Ungrateful subordinates will be considered as *"kurang ajar"*, ill-bred (Antlov, 1995), and those who go in their own way, who are ambitious and compete with the leader are considered as "rebellious *(duraka, mbalelo)*" (Mulder, 1994).

In life, the Javanese consider gives high regards toward social relation. They believe that a person cannot live without the others, thus, they have to always sharing as much as possible with others (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). The manifestation of such believes can be observed in the concept of *"gotong royong"* and *"musyawarah"*. *Gotong Royong* is a philosophy based on the view that people must help each other, work together to achieve mutual benefit; whereas *musyawarah* will refers to the fact that every opinion should be respected, a decision should be made only after a consensus or compromise achieved (Magnis-Suseno, 1997).

3. Method

With the consideration that not all of the respondents having good proficiency in English, the Value Survey Module 08 (Hofstede et al., 2008) were translated into Indonesian. Five Indonesian graduate students who are having good proficiency in English had participated in pilot testing to confirm the accuracy.

Respondents of our surveys were middle managers working in 7 Javanese owned and 5 Chinese-Indonesian owned companies based in Central Java province, Indonesia. The Sundanese samples originated from 5 companies in West Java. All questionnaires were distributed through a quasi-snowball sampling method. In each company, researchers asked the Human Resource Department to distribute the questionnaire to managers who met the criteria. Specific for the Javanese and Sundanese samples, all respondents identified themselves as "Javanese" and "Sundanese". In Chinese-Indonesian owned companies, Chinese-Indonesian respondents sometimes did not want to identify themselves as "Chinese-Indonesian". They prefer to call themselves "Indonesian". Such condition is understandable, considering that in the past, Chinese-Indonesian was argued to suffer from discrimination from the New Order government (Tan, 2008).

All companies participating in this research fulfil certain criteria such as having at least 300 employees and minimum net asset of 1 Billion Rupiah were applied. In our surveys, participated Javanese and Chinese-Indonesian owned companies were operating in manufacturing, financial, healthcare, telecommunication, mining, construction and trading sectors. Sundanese companies were all operating in the manufacturing sector only.

For the purpose of this study, all employees who were in charge of ten or more subordinate were considered as middle managers. The managers should also have worked in the company for at least five years.

For the data collection, researchers made contact with the Human Resources Department of each company by e-mail. After the permission is granted, researchers come in person and handed over the hard copy form of the questionnaire. A cover letter was provided to explain the purpose of the study and specific directions how to fill the questionnaires. Managers were asked to voluntarily participate in evaluating their cultural values. They were permitted to complete the surveys up to three weeks time during their working hours. Respondent's identity were kept confidential and anonymity were assured. Completed questionnaires were put in enclosed envelope, were returned to Human Resources Department in the surveyed organizations to be collected by researcher. As the final results, researchers were able to collect 100 responses from Javanese samples, 100 responses from Chinese-Indonesian samples and 60 responses from the Sundanese samples.

The calculation of the cultural value score of power distance and collectivism were based on Hofstede et al.'s VSM formula. The utilization of VSM score enable this study to compares the cultural values of the Javanese, Sundanese and Chinese Indonesians.

4. Result and Discussion

The calculation results of this study are presented alongside the cultural value scores of power distance and individualism/collectivism according to Hofstede et al. (2010) result. It should be noted however; that the scores of this research cannot be directly compared with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) scores because of the difference in respondent criteria, sample size, and implementation time of the research. Thus, this study can calculate its own dimension scores for managers in Javanese, Sundanese, and Chinese-Indonesian companies. The calculation in this study was based on the data provided by a matching sample of managers, and can only analyse and evaluate the relative differences and tendencies of these scores with Hofstede et al's (2010) scores.

Table 2. Results of work related values of managers working in Javanese companies, Sundanese companies and Chinese Indonesians companies

CULTURAL VALUES	JAVANESE	SUNDANESE	CHINESE-INDONESIANS	HOFSTEDE (2010)
Power Distance	53.60	59.1	64.95	78
Individualism / Collectivism	48.95	32.85	36.00	14

The power distance score of the three groups of respondents is not as high as Hofstede's power distance score of Indonesia. According to Hofstede (2001), the lower level of power distance can be explained; especially because "dependence on the power of others in a large part of our world has been reduced over the past two generations" (p. 121). The decline in the power distance score is mainly caused by the increase of liberation and emancipation movement, political trends, and the increased educational levels in many countries. All these aspects give contribution toward the lower score of power distance.

Suryadinata (1978), stated that Confucian values of vertical and horizontal social order are reflected in Chinese Indonesians. People are expected to understand their position in the society and obey their role, supposing that the Chinese Indonesian society is considered to have high power distance.

On the other hand, Javanese people also famous for their view regarding status and social order. One of the example regarding this issue is the view of the Javanese that people who are doing manual labor are considered having low status; while those wearing proper dress and give attention to personal hygiene will be considered having higher status (Hofstede, 1982). Also, Javanese are famous for their high respect and obedience toward authority (Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Mulder, 1984) and hierarchy (Mulder, 1978). The behavior of Javanese people rest on the principle of respect (Magnis-Suseno, 1997), the principle of obedience (Mulder, 1994), the principle of fear and hesitation (Geertz, 1961) and the concept of father's figure (Antlov, 1995; Magnis-Suseno, 1993; Mulder, 1994).

The most interesting fact from this finding is that the power distance level of Javanese managers is the lowest compared to the other groups. This finding contests the general belief that Javanese culture is always associated with high power distance. The power distance in Sundanese and Chinese-Indonesian society are higher compared to the Javanese.

High power distance normally linked with a strong tendency for authoritative leadership style (Shane, Venkataraman & MacMillan, 1995). Authority is defined according to positions that indicate a vertical hierarchy, and people in the top position consider themselves to be separate with those in lower positions (Tuleja 2009, p. 107). Decision-making tends to be over-centralized because superiors treat it as solely their responsibility. Subordinated are viewed as incapable of contributing to decision-making (Begley et al., 2002). As a result, subordinates are likely to continue accepting centralized power and dependence on superiors for directions. Personal initiative by subordinates is not values and they are only expected to implement procedures obediently. Based on the result, the higher score of power distance from Sundanese and Chinese-Indonesian managers implies that they have tendencies toward authoritative leadership style.

Low individualism (or collectivism) is a common theme in literature on Indonesia (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). This study, however, found that managers in Javanese owned companies put less value on the group and more on the individual compared to Sundanese or Chinese-Indonesian managers. The result implies that managers in Javanese owned companies have a higher tendencies to spend more time for themselves and their families; which; according to Hofstede et al. (2010) is the indication of individualism. For managers working in Chinese-Indonesian companies, spending time for families and themselves is not too important, therefore, it gives managers working in Chinese-Indonesian companies higher collectivism score.

5. Conclusions

This study found difference in the power distance score among the group of companies, where managers working in Sundanese and Chinese-Indonesian owned companies demonstrate a greater acceptance toward the inequality of power distribution compared to

managers working in Javanese owned companies. Nevertheless, the power distance of managers working in all companies is not as high as the power distance of the Indonesians (Hofstede, 2010). The decline in power distance score compared to Hofstede's score of Indonesia reflects the change in political and especially education sector that has been happen over the last three decades in Indonesia.

At the same time, managers especially from the Javanese owned companies are showing tendency toward individualism, compared to the Sundanese and Chinese-Indonesian managers. Although managers working for Chinese-Indonesian companies show a stronger collectivist attitude, there is a significant difference compared to Hofstede et al. (2010) result which stating that Indonesia demonstrates a very strong collectivist attitude. The findings suggest that Indonesians is advancing toward an individualistic society.

The limitation of this study is the generalizability. Although this study can be used to represent 96 million Javanese people in Indonesia, 37 million Sundanese and 7 million of Chinese-Indonesian; however; still only focus on 3 out of hundreds of cultural groups in Indonesia. With all of its complexity, a proper measure of Indonesian national culture can be very complex in term of time and costs. Further study to compare other sub-cultural group in Indonesia is encouraged; with priority given to other large ethnic group such as Makassar, Padang, Aceh, Madura and Ambonese.

Finally, the finding of this study reinforces the argument that Indonesia's culture is unique and varied. Measuring culture in a culturally-complex country such as Indonesia cannot be conducted with generalization approach since it will lead to false and inaccurate result. As an addition, future research on Indonesia's sub-culture needs to consider applying qualitative technique to uncover the unique cultural characteristics of the observed ethnic group.

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