

Indonesian Culture, Customs, and Social Life: Perspectives on Public Administration and Governance

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ABSTRACT:

This article aims to examine the culture, customs, and social life patterns of Indonesian society based on Koentjaraningrat's thoughts in his book, Socio-Cultural Anthropology. The approach used is a comparative historical approach through a review of books, scientific journals, and other relevant references. The results of the study show that Indonesia has a very diverse cultural wealth, with more than 300 ethnic groups, each of which has its own unique customs, languages, kinship systems, beliefs, and traditions that are passed down from generation to generation. The main topics of discussion include: (1) the diversity of culture and ethnic groups in Indonesia, (2) customs and kinship systems that exist in society, and (3) social life, religion, and universal cultural elements. This study emphasizes that cultural elements are interconnected to form a unity of life, so that an understanding of socio-cultural anthropology is very important to strengthen unity and preserve the cultural heritage of the Indonesian nation .

Keywords : Socio-Cultural Anthropology, Culture, Customs, Indonesian Society, Kinship System, Social Organization, Religious System, Socio-Cultural Change, Ethnic Groups, Koentjaraningrat.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely known as the world's largest archipelagic nation, boasting a rich and diverse culture, customs, and traditions. The presence of more than 300 ethnic groups with hundreds of regional languages spread from Sabang to Merauke makes Indonesia one of the most socially and culturally diverse countries in the world. This diversity is not merely a demographic fact, but rather a legacy that must be preserved and cared for by each future generation. Koentjaraningrat (2009) reminds us that culture is a collective legacy of a society whose sustainability depends heavily on the awareness and concern of the generations who inherit it. Amidst the rapid development of the times, this

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diversity also poses a major challenge in maintaining the unity and integrity of the Indonesian nation as a whole.

Sociocultural anthropology is a discipline that plays a strategic role in understanding and preserving the culture and customs that have developed within Indonesian society. This branch of science specifically examines humans from the perspective of their culture and social environment, thus providing a comprehensive and in-depth picture of human life as social beings inextricably linked to the culture that surrounds them. Koentjaraningrat (2009) explains that anthropology is a science that systematically studies humans and all aspects of their lives, from physical characteristics and societal structures to the culture they produce and develop. Based on this foundation, sociocultural anthropology is an indispensable scientific instrument for understanding the realities of Indonesian social life in a more comprehensive and measurable manner.

Koentjaraningrat is the most influential anthropologist Indonesia has ever had, with immense intellectual contributions to the development and advancement of anthropology in the country. Born in Yogyakarta on September 15, 1923, he devoted most of his life as a professor of anthropology at the University of Indonesia and produced numerous scientific works that became important milestones in the history of the development of social sciences in Indonesia. Koentjaraningrat (2009) argued that understanding Indonesian society as a whole is not enough by merely observing its physical aspects, but rather requires a deeper dive into the value systems, social norms, beliefs, and behavioral patterns that exist and develop within it. This view is what makes his thinking remain relevant and continues to be an important reference by researchers and academics to this day.

The book "Sociocultural Anthropology" written by Koentjaraningrat and published by PT Rineka Cipta Jakarta in 2009 has long been recognized as one of the main references in the field of social sciences and humanities in Indonesia. The uniqueness of this book lies in its systematic, comprehensive, and easy-to-understand presentation for a wide range of readers, from students to experienced researchers. Koentjaraningrat (2009) explains the basic concepts of anthropology in a coherent manner while inserting various real-life examples from the lives of Indonesian society, so that the distance between theory and social reality feels closer and easier to understand. The richness of content and depth of analysis presented in this book makes it a timeless work and continues to be relevant for re-examination in various social science research contexts.

Referring to the background description that has been explained above, this study was compiled with the aim of reviewing in depth the substance and content of the

book *Anthropologi Sosial Budaya* by Koentjaraningrat as an effort to broaden the understanding of culture, customs, and social life of Indonesian society. Moreover, this study also attempts to examine the extent to which the anthropological concepts formulated by Koentjaraningrat (2009) still have relevance to the socio-cultural conditions of Indonesian society in the modern era that continues to move and change dynamically. The results of this study are expected to provide a real contribution to the development of social sciences while encouraging the spirit of preserving the nation's culture so that it remains alive and known by future generations amidst the strong current of globalization that continues to erode local values.

Every scientific discipline arose from the human need to understand itself more deeply. Anthropology addresses this need by placing humans as both the object and subject of its comprehensive study. The discipline's name is rooted in two Greek words: "kata" meaning "human" and "kata" meaning "science." Thus, anthropology can literally be understood as the study of humans in all their dimensions. Its scope is vast, ranging from physical and biological conditions to all the cultural products produced by humans throughout their lives. A leading Indonesian anthropologist emphasized that this science does not only view humans from one perspective, but also examines the diversity of physical forms of various community groups and the cultures they have built and passed down from generation to generation. Thus, anthropology serves as a bridge to understanding the richness and diversity of human life styles across the globe.

Definition of Anthropology

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Anthropology differs from other social sciences in its holistic and comparative approach. A holistic approach means that anthropology does not separate humans into separate parts, but rather views them as a unified whole encompassing biological,

psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. A comparative approach means that anthropology actively compares one human group with another to discover meaningful similarities and differences. Through these two approaches, anthropologists are able to develop a comprehensive understanding of why a society behaves the way it does. In-depth fieldwork is a key method in this discipline, where researchers immerse themselves directly in the communities being studied to observe and experience life from within. This approach makes anthropology a science rich in perspective and sensitive to the diversity of human experience.

Branches of Anthropology

Anthropology, as a science about humanity, has developed along two major, complementary paths. The first path focuses on biological aspects, such as the evolution of the human body, physical variations between groups, and the relationship between modern humans and their ancestors. The second path directs its study to the social and cultural life produced by humans throughout the history of civilization. Within this second path, there are three fields, each with its own focus. Archaeology excavates material remains of the past to reconstruct past life. Linguistic anthropology examines the relationship between language and the ways of thinking of a group of people. Meanwhile, ethnology compares cultures from around the world to discover patterns and unique characteristics that distinguish one society from another. These three fields work synergistically to form a comprehensive understanding of humans and their cultures.

Over time, branches of anthropology have expanded their reach, responding to new challenges and issues emerging in modern human life. Medical anthropology, for example, aims to understand how cultural backgrounds influence people's perceptions of disease and medical practices. Economic anthropology explores how communities manage resources and establish exchange systems aligned with local values. Urban anthropology examines the social transformations that occur when traditional societies encounter modernization in urban environments. This expansion demonstrates that anthropology is not a rigid and closed science, but rather a discipline that continues to evolve with the dynamics of human life itself, thus maintaining its relevance over time.

Understanding Culture

Koentjaraningrat (2009) explains that culture is essentially the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works born from the process of social life, where all of them are

acquired through a learning process and passed on from one generation to the next through a continuous socialization mechanism. In other words, culture is not something that is naturally present in humans, but rather a product that is formed, learned, and inherited consciously or unconsciously in social life. Culture also does not only concern physical objects that can be seen and touched, but also includes values, norms, beliefs, and ways of thinking that shape the identity of a community group. Therefore, culture is the main foundation that supports the survival of humans as social beings, as well as being a differentiator between one community group and another throughout the world.

Mosaic of Indonesian Culture

Human culture can be understood through three complementary layers. The first layer is abstract, encompassing the ideas, values, norms, and outlooks that live within the minds of every member of society. The second layer is evident in concrete actions performed repeatedly and regularly, such as rituals, ceremonies, and daily activities that reflect certain patterns. The third layer is concrete and tangible, encompassing various objects created by humans, ranging from simple tools to magnificent architectural works. These three layers do not stand alone, but rather influence each other and form a unified cultural whole within a society.

In cultural studies, seven universal components are recognized as the foundation of every culture worldwide. Language serves as a means of communication and a repository of knowledge between people. Knowledge enables societies to understand their environment and develop ways of surviving. Social organizations regulate relationships between individuals, ensuring a harmonious society. Tools and technology help humans cultivate nature to meet their needs. Livelihood systems determine how societies obtain their livelihoods. Religion provides spiritual meaning and answers fundamental questions about human existence. Art provides aesthetic expression and collective identity, distinguishing one group from another. These seven components are interconnected and work together as an inseparable system.

The spiritual life of Indonesian society cannot be studied narrowly through the perspective of only the major religions. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism are widespread and influence various aspects of life, but in many remote areas, local beliefs still coexist alongside formal religion. Belief in ancestral spirits, natural forces, and supernatural beings remains a tradition passed down through generations in some communities. These two belief systems often coexist without mutually negating each other, creating a unique and multifaceted religious expression within Indonesian society.

This reflects the rich spiritual dimension of this nation, which defies a single categorization.

Culture, in essence, never stands still. The encounter between one culture and another opens up opportunities for the entry of new elements through exchange and dissemination. In the subsequent process, these foreign elements are processed and adapted until they blend with the local identity without losing their distinctive characteristics. Furthermore, when two groups interact intensely enough, the boundaries of cultural differences can gradually fade, forming new shared patterns. On the other hand, society is also capable of creating change from within through fresh discoveries and ideas born from the creativity of its own citizens. All of these processes demonstrate that culture is a living entity, constantly in motion, and able to adapt to changing times and the ever-evolving needs of humanity.

Method

This research uses a comparative historical approach to gather and process the necessary information. This approach allows researchers to trace how ideas in anthropology have grown and developed over time, while also examining the similarities and differences in perspectives among various scholars who have studied this field. This approach is considered most appropriate for the research objective, which is to outline and present the main ideas in Koentjaraningrat's book, *Antropologi Sosial Budaya*, in a coherent and easily understood manner for the general reader.

This research relies on two complementary data sources. The first source is Koentjaraningrat's main work, published by PT Rineka Cipta in Jakarta in 2009, which serves as the primary reference throughout the discussion. The second source includes various supporting books, academic journals, and articles relevant to the anthropological theme and the socio-cultural dynamics of communities in the Indonesian archipelago.

Data collection was carried out through three interrelated systematic stages as presented in the following table.

No	Stages	Activity	Results
1	Inventory	Browse and collect all references related to the study topic	A complete list of primary and secondary sources

2	Classification	Sorting and grouping data according to the theme and sub-themes of discussion	Data that is neatly arranged and easily accessible by category
3	Analysis	Carefully examine the contents of the source using content analysis techniques.	Conclusions that are in-depth and can be justified academically

Results and Discussion

Cultural Wealth and Diversity of the Indonesian Archipelago

A study of Koentjaraningrat's thought reveals that understanding humans as a whole is not enough by merely examining their physical and biological conditions. As emphasized in his work, "to understand humans completely, we must understand the social and cultural aspects that shape human behavior and ways of life" (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). In other words, humans are creatures who cannot be separated from the social environment and cultural heritage that shape their ways of thinking. Anthropology exists as a discipline that bridges the understanding of both the biological and cultural dimensions in an integrated manner. This holistic approach is what makes anthropological studies different from other sciences that only view humans from a particular perspective, so that the resulting picture is more complete and closer to reality .

Indonesia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, home to over three hundred ethnic groups spread from Sabang to Merauke. Koentjaraningrat noted that "the various ethnic cultures in Indonesia, from the Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Minangkabau, Bugis, Dayak, to the various ethnic groups in Papua and Maluku, each have their own unique customs, traditions, and value systems" (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Each ethnic group brings its own uniqueness in terms of language, traditional ceremonies, kinship systems, and how they view nature and life. This uniqueness is not merely an identity decoration, but reflects local wisdom that grows from each community's long experience in interacting with its environment. Nevertheless, all of this diversity remains bound within a solid and indivisible national framework.

Indonesia's cultural diversity holds enormous potential that has yet to be fully recognized by the wider public. Koentjaraningrat emphasized that every element of local culture contains noble values born from a long process of human adaptation to the natural and social challenges of their surroundings. These values did not emerge spontaneously,

but rather are the result of collective reflection and experience passed down through various media such as folklore, traditional ceremonies, and oral traditions. In the increasingly complex context of modern life, cultural heritage such as this can actually serve as a source of inspiration in addressing various emerging social issues. Therefore, preserving and studying culture

4.1 Spiritual Harmony and Cultural Integrity in the Life of Indonesian Society

The spiritual life of Indonesian society cannot be understood through a single religious lens. Koentjaraningrat asserts that "Indonesian society's religious system is very diverse, where in addition to the major religions, there are also various local beliefs and animism that are still practiced today" (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). This view is in line with Haviland's thinking, which states that "anthropological studies are not sufficient to focus on the biological aspect alone, but must include social and cultural aspects as a whole" (Haviland, *Cultural Anthropology*). Local beliefs that exist side by side with formal religion reflect the layers of the inner life of Indonesian society that cannot be simplified into a single categorization. This spiritual heritage continues to be preserved and passed down from one generation to the next as an inseparable part of the identity of the community concerned.

The seven elements of culture formulated by Koentjaraningrat have been proven to be present in the daily lives of Indonesian society. As he noted, "the seven universal elements of culture are interrelated and form a unified whole system, so that changes in one element will affect the others" (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Geertz reinforced this idea by stating that "the diversity of more than 300 ethnic groups is not a divider, but rather forms a strong national identity" (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*). These seven elements—language, knowledge, social organization, tools of life, livelihood, religion, and art—work like interdependent organs in the body. When one element shifts due to modernization or external influences, the other elements also adapt to maintain the balance of the overall cultural system.

The diversity of kinship systems spread throughout Indonesia is a clear testament to the rich cultural heritage of this nation. Lévi-Strauss noted that "the differences between patrilineal, matrilineal, and bilateral systems reflect living cultural values that are passed down from generation to generation" (Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*). The patrilineal system, which places the paternal line as the primary axis, the matrilineal system, which prioritizes the maternal line, and the bilateral system, which recognizes both parties equally, each emerged from a community's long experience in responding to its environment and social needs. These differences are not a sign of

division, but rather a reflection of the richness of human thought in building a dignified and sustainable order of life together over time.

This article offers a perspective not found in the research of Saifuddin (2005), Spradley (2007), or Ihromi (2006). These three researchers developed their findings through direct involvement in specific communities, limited to a single social group. As a result, cross-cultural comparisons were largely excluded from their frameworks. This article takes a different path, relying on a comparative historical approach to read Indonesian culture on a broader scale. Based on Koentjaraningrat's thinking, this study explores how belief systems, kinship patterns, and seven cultural components intertwine and shape Indonesian social life. Thus, the resulting picture is far more comprehensive than previous studies, which only touched on a small portion of the nation's cultural mosaic.

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The novelty of this article lies in its alignment with the ideas developed by Geertz (1973), Haviland (2002), and Lévi-Strauss (1963). These three scholars consistently maintain that humans cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as beings whose social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions operate simultaneously and inseparably. They also agree that the diversity within a society is not a burden that weakens, but rather an asset that reinforces the uniqueness of a nation's identity. This article aligns with this idea because it also emphasizes that the diverse belief systems, kinship patterns, and cultural components that exist within Indonesian society are actually a glue that strengthens social relations and strengthens collective awareness of who this nation is and where it comes from.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on Koentjaraningrat's book, "Social and Cultural Anthropology," it can be understood that Indonesian society possesses a rich and diverse culture, which is one of the nation's main characteristics. This diversity is evident in various aspects of life, such as ethnic groups, regional languages, customs, kinship systems, social values, and beliefs that develop in each region. These differences do not become barriers, but rather shape the unique identity and character of Indonesian society. Through the study of sociocultural anthropology, this diversity can be studied in greater depth, thus fostering mutual respect and understanding between community groups. Therefore, anthropology plays a crucial role in maintaining, documenting, and preserving cultural heritage so that it remains alive and can be passed on to future generations.

Suggestion

Understanding to Indonesian culture needs Keep going developed , especially among generation young , so that they capable recognize , appreciate and care for diversity that becomes characteristics typical Indonesian nation . Various culture areas , such as customs customs , language , arts , etc values traditional , is inheritance valuable thing to have preserved so that it does not eroded by currents globalization and development increasingly advanced technology rapidly . Through good understanding to culture , society can grow attitude tolerance , mutual respect and appreciate the existing differences in life daily . Anthropological studies social culture also provides outlook important about method public live , interact , and maintain identity its culture . Therefore that , knowledge about Indonesian culture can made into as base in strengthen unity and oneness nation . With maintain and preserve diversity culture that is owned , it is hoped created life harmonious , peaceful society , nation and state , and prosperous for generation Now and the next generation come .

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