

The Phenomenon of Ethnic Java Women as Weavers Hiou in Karang Rejo Village, Simalungun Regency

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Abstract—Working as a *Hiou* weaver is an alternative for Javanese women for family economic welfare. Javanese women learn to weave *Hiou* with a feeling of being aware, happy and proud because they can weave *Hiou* like Simalungun women. The woven products they make are of good quality, which makes the owners of capital keep empowering Javanese women so that they can still weave *Hiou*. This study aims to examine: (i) the phenomenon of Javanese ethnic women who work as *Hiou* weavers in Karang Rejo Village, Simalungun Regency; (ii) the reason Simalungun ethnic capital owners chose Javanese women as *Hiou* weavers; (iii) the efforts of the Simalungun ethnic group to empower Javanese women to remain *Hiou* weavers. The type of this research is qualitative with an ethnographic approach. Informants were the owners of capital and the Javanese *Hiou* weavers. The results of this research illustrate that initially there was only one Javanese woman in Karang Rejo village who worked as a *Hiou* weaver and now continues to grow to reach 80 people. All of them are able to produce *Hiou* with good quality so as to increase production and market demand. *Hiou*'s good quality makes the capital owners feel happy by providing convenience in work, one of which is to provide looms so that Javanese women can continue to weave *Hiou* in their own homes. Javanese women with full awareness and pride, besides being able to weave other ethnic traditional fabrics, they can also prosper their families.

Keywords—phenomenon, Javanese ethnic women, weaver, *Hiou*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional cloth is a physical form of the culture of an area that has the characteristics and variety of ornament and has a socio-cultural value for the people who own it. Traditional fabrics that still exist today make us see a wealth of real cultural heritage. Traditional fabrics originally functioned to warm the body, but now every traditional fabric has the nature, circumstances, functions and relationships with certain things [1]. The main use of traditional cloth is to show tribal identity or descent, as a protection tool that is spiritual and in the past as a means of connecting between humans and the gods to strengthen social ties [2]. One of the traditional fabrics that still exists today and is still used is the traditional Simalungun cloth called '*Hiou*'. *Hiou* is a woven fabric which is a special fabric for Simalungun ethnic which is always used in daily activities or in traditional ceremonies.

Hiou cloth is one of the local wisdoms owned by the Simalungun ethnic group. Local wisdom is usually reflected in people's life habits that have been going on for a long time. The sustainability of local wisdom is reflected in the values prevailing in community groups. These values become the grip of the community in a particular area which usually will be part of life that is inseparable and can be observed through their daily attitudes and behavior. Local wisdom better describes a specific phenomenon which will usually be a characteristic of the group community [3].

Weaving (*martonun*) *Hiou* activities can be said to be local wisdom because this weaving activity has been going on for a long time. This can be seen from the design of the Simalungun traditional house (*Rumah bolon*) which used to always have a special building for the empress to receive guests, rest and weave *Hiou*. The activity of the previous *martonun Hiou* was done by the empress (*puang bolon*) of the Simalungun kings. The use of *Hiou* cloth is still used today and has certain values and meanings for the Simalungun ethnic group. The *Hiou* patterns on the traditional fabric of Simalungun are *Hiou Nanggar*, *Hiou Suasa*, *Hiou Tinabur*, *Hiou Ragi Panei*, *Hiou Ragi Sapot*, *Hiou Ragi Siattar*, *Hiou Ragi Sattik*, *Hiou Ragi Rongga*, *Hiou Gobar*, *Hio Bulang-Bulang* [4].

The Simalungun traditional cloth *Hiou* can be worn in various forms, as a head covering, lower body cover, upperbody cover, back cover and others. *Hiou* in various shapes and motifs have different names and types, for example, *Hiou*'s female head cover is called *bulang*. *Hiou* cover the lower part of the body for women such as *Ragi panei* or used as everyday clothes called *abit*. *Hiou* in Simalungun's wedding and kinship clothes is referred to as *Tolu Sahundulan*, which consists of headgear, breastplate (clothes) and the bottom cover (*abit*).

Today the making of *Hiou* is not only done by the Simalungun ethnic group. In order to meet market demand, the making of *Hiou* created opportunities for Javanese to work as weavers both in courses and self-taught. However, not everyone is able to weave *Hiou* well. The study conducted by Niessen [5] regarding traditional Toba cloth (*Ulos*) illustrates that *Ulos* is the power and language of Toba women. At

that time only women had knowledge and were able to weave *Ulos*. However, it was unfortunate that after thirty years Niessen returned to the land of the Toba Bataks and had very rarely found women, especially young ones as *Ulos* weavers. With full concern Niessen then revitalized the tradition of weaving *ulos* by making and bringing in wood looms from Kalimantan and began teaching young women there to weave *Ulos*.

The phenomenon of making Simalungun traditional cloth which was done by Javanese ethnic women in Karang Rejo village became an interesting study. Javanese ethnic women in this village try to find information themselves and come to the owners of capital to be able to work as *Hiou* weavers. Starting from a Javanese woman who managed to weave *Hiou* then today almost eighty Javanese women are good at weaving *Hiou*. This Javanese ethnic woman started only as a housewife who took care of her child and husband every day. Javanese ethnic women choose to work weaving *Hiou* because they can do their work at home. Because the non-machine looms (ATBM) they use to weave *Hiou* can be provided by the owners of capital in their own homes. Thus, ethnic Javanese weavers *Hiou* feel comfortable working because they do not need to leave their homes and they can still take care of their household and children. Opportunities obtained by ethnic Javanese women in Karang Rejo village as *Hiou* weavers can be relied upon as a way to improve the economic welfare of their household [6].

Weaving skills owned by Javanese ethnic women make the capital owners (*toke*) feel happy because of the increasing quality of *Hiou* which is increasingly in demand by the public. *Toke* empowers Javanese ethnic women to continue to improve the quality of *Hiou* and remain passionate about working with them. In addition to providing ATBM facilities, *toke* also provides more promising benefits than Javanese ethnic women who have to work in the factory or at a skill site in Karang Rejo village.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study uses qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. The data collection technique observes participation in the field, in-depth interviews and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted openly so that researchers obtained in-depth data from the informants studied. Direct observation to the field by observing directly the activities of Javanese ethnic women as *Hiou* weavers in Karang Rejo village. This study uses an ethnographic approach [7]. Where ethnography is a research that tries to provide information about cultural explanations by learning and understanding about the lives of informants. With an ethnographic approach researchers study directly from informants who represent their subcultures. The main focus of ethnographic research is work to describe culture, understand the way of life and the views of informants. The criteria for the informants specified are as follows: (i) The owner of capital (*toke*) which is a Simalungun Batak ethnic group,

and (ii) Javanese women who are skilled at working as *Hiou* weavers.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In Karang Rejo village there are many food factories such as cracker factories, bakeries, manufacturing of chips that are produced at home and there are business skills such as bird cages and rowing that require workers. At first this Javanese ethnic housewife began to work to improve the home economy by working in the factory or other skill business in Karang Rejo village. Their husband's income is not sufficient on average for their daily needs and the cost of children's schooling makes ethnic Javanese mothers participate to work so that the family's economy increases. Earnings to become *Hiou* weavers can help improve the economic life of their household families.

Javanese women who become *Hiou* weavers must also get an agreement from their husbands so that ATBM that has been given *toke* is not in vain given. Before working as *Hiou* weavers, ethnic Javanese women in Karang Rejo village also worked as factory workers or worked in the city. Their work initially requires strong physical strength. Thus there is a chance that they can weave *Hiou* at home to make Javanese ethnic women switch to work as *Hiou* weavers in their own homes.

This weaving business was originally developed in 2008. The business owner (*toke*) of the traditional Simalungun cloth is known as "*Paul Weaving*". This traditional weaving business has been running for 10 years. One of the informants, named May Javanese woman, was the earliest to start a weaving business in her own home with two ATBM capitals. Because the income earned by May's mother can support her household, Ms. May's younger sister and other Javanese mothers who live in Karang Rejo village are also interested in becoming *Hiou* weavers. At first these ethnic Javanese mothers worked in the manufacture of bird cages and lanterns. However, because the income earned was considered too small, they began to turn into *Hiou* weavers. Javanese women turn to work as *Hiou* weavers because they consider this work not to be too draining, such as working in a factory or making bird cages or lanterns.

Another informant named Mrs. Alim began to be interested in learning weaving by seeing that the improvement in family welfare was May's mother's younger sister. Mrs. Alim began learning to weave directly with Mrs. May. Furthermore, Mrs. Alim's initial intention to do weaving was just to increase her husband's income, but weaving activities have now become a reliable job to increase the economic income of her household.

From Mrs. Alim's, weaving *Hiou* made Mrs. Nurhayati, her neighbor, also interested. In 2012, Mrs. Nurhayati's was also involved in *Hiou's* weaving activities. By the three weavers, there are currently 80

members of the business of "*Paul Weaving*" in the entire area of Karang Rejo village.

Today, not only Javanese housewives work as *Hiou* weavers but unmarried women (teenagers) can also weave *Hiou* in Karang Rejo village. Women who are still in school or who have finished school at Karang Rejo can weave *Hiou* inside order to meet their own needs or help their parents. The Javanese ethnic woman phenomenon weaving *Hiou* in Karang Rejo was marked by the emergence of ATBM in front of their own homes. When we visited Karang Rejo Village, ATBM was seen in a village with a majority Javanese population. Javanese ethnic women at first did not know that what they were weaving was *Hiou* or Simalungun ethnic traditional cloth. At the first, they thought that what they were weaving was woven cloth *ulos* from the Toba ethnic group, but over time they finally learned that the woven cloth was a Simalungun woven fabric. In addition, they were also consciously interested in learning the Simalungun culture that was involved in making *Hiou* woven fabric.

The weaving of *Hiou* was previously only done by Simalungun ethnic women, now it can be done by Javanese ethnic women. *Hiou's* weaving skills are obtained by ethnic Javanese women both from courses and self-study from their relatives or neighbors who are already proficient. The costs incurred from *Hiou's* weaving course with women who are experts are around IDR. 150,000 for each person. The Javanese ethnic *Hiou* weaver who resides in Karang Rejo village has become a member of the "*Paul Tenun*" business owned by the Simalungun ethnic woman.

The number of business weaving members "*Paul Tenun*" now amounts to 80 and 72 members are Javanese ethnic women. The owner of the *Hiou* weaving business chose Javanese ethnic women because their woven products were considered to be of higher quality, neat and strong. Javanese women are also considered skilled in weaving and have a diligent, meticulous and not easy to give up attitude which is certainly needed in weaving *Hiou*.

The most striking thing about *Hiou's* weaving is that Javanese women who work on *Hiou's* type of shawl or sarong are neater and stronger because if there is a broken thread, these Javanese women can neatly reconnect without damaging *Hiou's* beauty own. In general, broken threads become an obstacle for weavers because if they are not connected neatly and strongly and affect the results of *Hiou* fabric.

Hiou fabric is not neat and strong, it will certainly reduce the quality of *Hiou* on the market. As said by the *Hiou* business owner, if the weavers are ethnic Batak before handing over the results of the *Hiou* scarf or sarong they use it first for their customary party. After being used, then it is returned to the *toke*.

Javanese ethnic women are also called *partonun*. Usually the name *partonun* is given to

ethnic women who work as weavers. But this also applies to ethnic Javanese women in Karang Rejo village. The capital owner has the criteria of the weavers who are considered good by seeing the first fabric weaving of *Hiou* weavers. If the weavers only deposit two fabrics per two weeks, the *Hiou toke* will pull ATBM from their homes. Javanese women who work as *Hiou* weavers feel happy and proud when they can weave traditional Simalungun Batak ethnic cloth which is not their culture. Because not all Simalungun women can do *Hiou's* weaving activities. This has become a separate phenomenon not only for Javanese ethnic women but for the Simalungun ethnic group who are astonished that even Javanese can weave and learn the Simalungun ethnic customs in weaving. In addition, Javanese ethnic women feel happy and proud because the results of the weaving can be used by the Simalungun ethnic group, especially in their customary events.

Business owners who are the Simalungun ethnic group have various ways to make Javanese women who work as *Hiou* weavers grow and their businesses continue to grow. As for their efforts in empowering ethnic Javanese women weavers, among others: *First*, providing a decent wage. Javanese women who work as *Hiou* weavers get a decent wage compared to working in the factory. Working as a *Hiou* weaver can be more profitable. Weaving ethnic Javanese women can get IDR.400,000-800,000 for two weeks. The *second*, unspecified time. The *Hiou* weavers can work after the homework is finished or they are weaving bias while taking care of the child. Usually *Hiou* weavers work from morning to evening when their husbands go home from work. *Third*, get a bonus. Business owners (*toke*) always give bonuses to their members in the form of THR which depends on how long they work and the amount of deposit.

Besides that *toke* always invites the weavers to vacation by bringing their own family. The purpose of inviting weavers to vacation with their families so that the weavers remain excited again when working. *Fourth*, family relations. The owners of capital (*toke*) do not have a distance from the weavers, they are like the big family *Paul Tenun*. *Toke* always spends time every day coming to cut and *poke* (put threads) into every ATBM whose threads have run out so that the *toke* and the weavers keep their intimacy, even though there is only the way *toke* goes through its members who always monitor the weaving activities of *Javanese* women in Karang Rejo village. *Fifth*, does not require capital. *Hiou* weavers do not need special capital in work. *Toke* which prepares ATBM, threads and all weaving needs. The production of *Paul Tenun* weaving business woven by Javanese ethnic women has produced *Hiou* fabrics with good quality so that production to various other areas such as Batam, Bandung and Jakarta.

IV. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Javanese ethnic women who worked as *Hiou's* (*partonun*) in Karang Rejo village

occurred because of the desire to improve the family's economic welfare. Becoming a *partonun* begins with seeing the development of the economic life of the other *partonun Hiou* families from one person to eighty people. Javanese ethnic women choose to work as *partouun Hiou* because this weaving work can be done at home so they feel comfortable not needing to leave home while being able to do housework and care for children. Besides this work is considered they do not require a lot of energy compared to their previous jobs and their income can be relied on in improving their household economy.

Javanese ethnic women in Karang Rejo village feel proud and happy to have *Hiou* weaving skills which are actually not from their own culture but from the Simalungun ethnic group. They have consciously learned the Simalungun ethnic customs when they weave. The owners of capital (*toke*) choose Javanese ethnic women as *partonun* due to *Hiou's* quality improvement.

The results of Javanese ethnic women's woven fabrics are considered to be more neat, smooth and strong. Because Javanese women in weaving have a skillful, meticulous, diligent attitude, they are not easy to give up and are honest. The capital owner who is a Simalungun ethnic group empowers Javanese women weavers to continue working in the "*Paul Tenun*" business by providing decent wages, less fixed time, giving bonuses, fostering family ties and providing capital in *Hiou* woven fabric.

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