

# Cultural Hybridity in Parenting in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Indonesia is one of the countries in the world with a quite dense and culturally diverse population, represented by more than 200 ethnicities. Consequently, cultural values tend to influence parenting. It is widely known that cultural values influence parenting ideals and practices. Not only local cultural values, global parenting values also influence Indonesian parenting practices through parenting books, parenting magazines, and parenting sessions in the offline and online media. All these factors have caused the traditional culture and global culture to coalesce. Drawn upon the literature research, this article aims to discuss the relationship between local and global cultural values in parenting in Indonesia. The literature shows that there is a cultural resistance to Western indoctrination about parenting, however, further research needs to be conducted to unpack how local and global cultural values coalesce, creating a hybridity and influencing parenting in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Children, parenting, globalization.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting has been shown to affect child development, including the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development [1], [2]. It has, for example, been proven to have an impact on children's academic and social readiness [3] and internalization of moral values in adolescents [4]. More specifically, one study shows that maternal parenting results in better emotional development in children [5].

Traditional cultural values are still strongly upheld in Indonesia, including in parenting. The cultural values of a region tend to influence parenting [6]. Indonesia is an archipelago located in Southeast Asia, consisting of more than 17,000 islands. According to the 2010 Central Bureau of Statistics census, there are approximately 1,340 ethnic groups in Indonesia [7]. Thus, parenting cultural context in Indonesia is very diverse. Research on parenting in specific cultural contexts in Indonesia has been conducted in Kampung Naga, Garut, West Java [8]. There is also research on the influence of culture on child development and parenting in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara [9], infant breastfeeding behaviour in Bugis ethnic group in Pekkae [10], and character education based on local wisdom in Aceh [11]. However, the increasingly globalized world has brought about new cultures through television, internet, magazines, etc. which have to some extent influenced parenting in Indonesia. Local culture and global culture negotiate with each other and produce grey or hybrid areas [12].

Based on the existing literature, this paper argues that it is difficult to distinguish which one is traditional and which one is non-traditional in the contemporary practices of parenting in Indonesia. Parenting practices in Indonesia today are hybrid, resulting from the interaction between the traditional and global cultures to interact and negotiate with each other [13], [14].

## 2. INDONESIAN CULTURES

Indonesia is one of the countries located on the Asian continent, more specifically the Southeast Asian region. Indonesia has many differences from other countries in Asia, in terms of religion, ethnicity, and colonial experience, but it also shares some similarities, such as climate and cultural characteristics. The country particularly shares some socio-demographic and cultural characteristics with other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand [15].

There are similar cultural elements among these countries, such as the traditional ceremonies and social attitudes. In terms of social attitudes, the cultures in these Southeast Asian countries demand that younger people respect their elders, and they prioritize collectivism over individualism [16]. As one of the most diverse countries in the world, Indonesia comprises at least 250 indigenous ethnic groups. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics [7], the Javanese make up the largest and most dominant ethnic group at around 42% of the population,

followed by Sundanese, Sumatran, and Madurese as the largest non-Javanese ethnic groups in Indonesia. The majority religion adhered to by Indonesians is Islam. However, there are five other religions that are officially recognized by the Indonesian government, namely Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism [7]. Though highly diverse, Indonesia is united with the motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" which means unity in diversity. The motto describes the unity and integrity of the nation and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia which consists of various cultures, regional languages, races, ethnic groups, religions, and beliefs.

### 3. TRADITIONAL CULTURES IN PARENTING

Learning is a self-transformation towards better Culture can be defined as a unique information system that is believed to provide benefits and serve as a life goal as well as a guideline for regulating and controlling daily life in a particular group or society [6], [17]. Parenting is believed to be a medium for internalizing cultural norms and values to children. Local culture used as a guideline for life also has strong implications in parenting practices [6].

As in many other countries, in Indonesian cultures, parents have a higher place than the children. They should be respected and the respect should be shown through gestures and special hierarchical language. They believe if people do not respect parents, their lives will be in trouble. For example, it is widely believed that someone who is disrespectful to his/her parents may be cursed to have a child born with disabilities [18]. In addition, children must fulfil their obligations towards their parents as part of their life cycle. This responsibility is also known as *bakti* or devotion [19], which is one of the ways to express gratitude for parents' sacrifices in raising and educating them. Devotion is done by always avoiding being rude and disobedient to parents, and consistently praying for their well-being. Traditionally, children are expected to never argue with their parents even if they have different perspectives, because doing so will make the children seen as impolite [19].

Many parents argue that the application of traditional cultural values is important in parenting to ensure children have good manners [19]. For example, parents in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, talk about the threatening powers of evil spirits to their children to prevent their children from doing undesirable things [9]. Sundanese people will put their toddlers to bed by carrying them in their arms and swinging them while humming *kakawihan* (Sundanese songs) which contain advice to their children to grow up to be good and useful people [20].

The pregnancy woman and birth of a child are something special and meaningful for a family. Therefore, some people usually do traditions to welcome those moments. In Javanese and Sundanese cultures, when a woman is pregnant there is a traditional ceremony of *njuh bulanan* that is held in the seventh month of the pregnancy [20], [21]. Once the child is born, there is the placenta burial tradition. The placenta is placed in a clay pot, given some spices, and then buried. The placenta grave is covered with a bamboo fence stacked with a basket and kept illuminated for 35 days. The ceremony is aimed to, among others, make the child grow into an intelligent, brave, and kind-hearted one [22].

In Banjarmasin, to welcome a baby there is the *mangarani anak* ceremony, which is a series of *aqiqah* ceremony (slaughtering an animal as a sacrifice for God), *bata-smiyah* (name-giving), and *tapung tawar* ceremony (the procession of giving blessings by rubbing a child's forehead and sprinkling it with *tutungkal* water mixed with *buburih* oil and spices [23]. These rituals or ceremonies are full of values, both religious and socio-cultural ones. People from this ethnic group believe that the ceremonies are an attempt to avoid undesirable things or to ward off misfortunes that may occur during pregnancy. These traditional rituals contain some elements of Hinduism and Indonesian mythology.

### 4. GLOBALIZATION AND PARENTING STYLE

The influence of globalization on the local cultural values in parenting today is inextricable. Globalization is the spread of ideas, meanings, and values throughout the world in certain ways [24]. Development in infrastructure, transportation, and telecommunication, including the internet, is a major factor in globalization which increasingly encourages economic and cultural interdependence. Within seconds, the latest information from any part of the globe can be accessed via electronic media. Legrain [25] reveals how world boundaries have disappeared, and people are increasingly being pushed to become one global community.

The infiltration of Western culture has resulted in an increased assimilation between Indonesian and Western cultural values. This cultural transformation has changed Indonesian people's perspectives regarding proper parenting and the best parenting strategies to prepare children to face the new era of globalization [25]. The values of Western culture have entered Indonesia through various media, one of which is *Ayahbunda* magazine. *Ayahbunda* aims to provide parents with useful information regarding the development of children aged 0–5 years by adopting parenting advice from the West. The western values can be seen from the articles the magazine produced which are largely based on research by child development experts conducted in the West (especially in the United States) [26]. There are also

parenting websites that are easily accessible, *kids' health, zero to three, family education*, etc. In addition, there are many western-influenced training on parenting such as the Triple-P (Positive Parenting Program) and Mindful Parenting [27].

Parents are aware that they must be more democratic and give more freedom to their children. Democratic parenting is a kind of parenting that pays attention to and respects children's freedom. In democratic parenting, parents are willing to listen, explain, and negotiate with their children. It is also characterized with warmth but is balanced with a firm attitude shown by parents regarding the rules they have made together with their children and implemented consistently [28], [29].

Independence is also another dimension highlighted in western parenting practices; for example, children have been trained to sleep separately from their parents since the age of five months [30]. The democratic values and independence will make children more independent and confident [31]. According to the western psychological doctrine, feeling ashamed and emotionally inexpressive can cause serious problems in child development, especially in social interactions, self-regulation, and academic achievement [32]. Similarly, many education practitioners consider that being passive in class will contribute to poor academic achievement [33]. Apart from self-confidence, the large focus on memorization in learning must also be considered, because it is not very relevant to the modern environment that requires innovation, critical thinking, and problem solving.

## **5. CULTURAL ASSIMILATION IN PARENTING IN INDONESIA**

Children are acculturated to certain cultures by their parents and by others who raise them. Historically, the cultural identity of Indonesia has been influenced by several countries such as India, Malay, Arabic, Chinese, and European countries [34]. Despite the influx of global influences, parents in Indonesia have continued to carry the traditional cultural identities in their daily lives, including in childcare. This phenomenon is reflected in their parenting practices that instil cultural values in their children.

The parenting style adopted by most Indonesian people today is a hybrid style that combines traditional and global cultures. The hybrid style is due to easy access to knowledge about parenting through magazines, the internet, and training on parenting [24]. In addition, parents are increasingly curious about parenting because they want to provide the best for their children [35]. While applying global values in their parenting, parents continue to carry out traditional rituals related to childcare. These traditional rituals survive because of the beliefs passed down from one generation to the next [34].

The combination of traditional and global cultures in parenting is a cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity is a process characterized by efforts to combine two or more cultures into a cultural form that still relies on local culture although not completely while absorbing foreign cultures, also not completely [36].

Cultural assimilation is inevitable. Local people try to open space for new elements from the west [37]. However, this effort is also a strategy to sustain local identity to progress and develop in the face of the irreversible flow of transformation. Local communities no longer position Western or global culture as a threat to the sustainability of their local cultures but as a challenge that must be constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed not for the sake of global cultural hegemony, but for the sustainability of the local cultures [38].

The global culture is not completely intact, creating gaps in the structure where local communities can deconstruct it and maintain, incorporate, or mix elements of their local cultures to form a new and mixed culture [38]. This process also applies to parenting style, causing a fusion between local and global cultures which then creates a hybrid culture.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The paper has revealed the extent to which global culture can integrate with traditional culture in the context of parenting. Indonesian cultural values seem to have a strong influence on the family, particularly in parenting and childcare. In the current era of globalization, traditional culture is still preserved, as shown by the large number of families continuously carrying out traditional rituals related to child rearing, starting from pregnancy, welcoming the birth of a child, and after the birth of a child.

But at the same time, parents also get influence from global culture through family magazines, the internet, electronic media, etc. and apply this new culture in their parenting. Ease of access of information on the one hand and the legacy continuously passed down from generation to generation on the other have led to a hybridization process that allows local and global cultures to interact and negotiate with each other in the context of parenting and childcare. Traditional rituals or ceremonies that are still carried out in parenting are actually an unconscious form of resistance, an attempt at challenging hegemonic discourses with their culture which at the same time can also result in an expansion of the existing global discourse.

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