Philanthropic and ecological values of Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition in Tambakboyo Village, Tawangsari District, Sukoharjo Regency

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Abstract. The Javanese tradition is manifested in various forms, one of which is Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition in Tambakboyo Village, Tawangsari District, Sukoharjo Regency. This annual tradition is a cultural heritage that help to maintain environmental balance. This study seeks to describe the philanthropic and ecological values of Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition. This research was a case study with traditional event as the object. The data sources were the Merti Desa Tambakbayan events, documents, and interview results with informants. The obtained field data showed the existence of philanthropic and ecological values in Tambakboyo community. These values can be seen from the traditions of having feast and exchanging meals together, and joint activities to clean up the environment around the village regardless of social status. These attitudes are essentials, especially when some members of the society are experiencing economic difficulties due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

1. Introduction

Local wisdom is an essential value in the life of the Javanese people. It governs the local attitudes related to the relationship between living things (including humans) and the surrounding environment. Local wisdom is manifested in the forms of knowledge collection, practices, and beliefs that evolve through adaptive processes (adjustments) that are passed down from generation to generation through culture [1]. Local wisdom shows the local cultural identity as well as knowledge about how to maintain one's existence in the community. Local wisdom can be seen from various kinds of cultural and traditional activities that involve many people and bear positive effect on life [2]. Local wisdom is also present in the phenomenology of the Javanese society who still believe in and carry out their traditions to date. The diversity of cultures and traditions that exist in the contestation of Javanese life is a clear evidence that local wisdom is still upheld in their lives.

Local wisdom is the knowledge, way of life, or strategies that are conceptualized with local policies and manifested in the form of community activities in overcoming life problems [3]. One of the signs of local wisdom based on local policies is the implementation of community traditions with values about the essence of life and compassion for others (philanthropic values). People care for each other in the society because they have compassion. Compassion is an essential element in the lives of individuals as the members of the community [4]. The compassion value of community members makes them willing to work together in traditional activities. The philanthropic value is the main aspect in the way of life
that nurtures the spirit of sharing and compassion. These values strengthen the sense of unity and
togetherness in the Javanese society.

The Javanese people have various kinds of local wisdom in the form of community traditions. One
of them is Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition in Tambakboyo Village, Tawangsari District, Sukoharjo
Regency, Central Java. Tambakbayan tradition is an annual ritual ceremony that is held to pray for safety
or repel any future danger. This is done to keep the village safe, peaceful, and free from any disturbances,
either the mystical or non-mystical ones. In addition, this tradition is also a way to express gratitude to
God who has given abundant sustenance and prosperity to the community. The tradition is also held to
honor the ancestors so that they are always at the villagers’ side.

The Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition is not merely a ceremonial tradition of a village community
that is held without purpose. This tradition has positive values of their local wisdom. The local wisdom
in Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition indicates the values of caring for the environment (ecology),
compassion for others (philanthropy), culture, religion, and social humanism. These values are
interesting to study because they are in direct contact with the community and are manifested in
traditional activities. Therefore, the author aimed to identify and describe the implementation of
philanthropic and ecological values of the Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition in Tawangsari District,
Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java Province.

2. Methods
This study is a qualitative descriptive research using methodological and theoretical approaches. The
methodological approach in this study is an ethnographic method that examines phenomena and
traditional events carried out by a group of people in a society [5]. Qualitative descriptive research has
a procedure that generates descriptive data in the form of written and oral data from people or
communities whose behaviors are observed in their natural environment [6]. Qualitative research utilizes
various natural methods to understand phenomena experienced by the research subjects such as
behaviors, perceptions, motivations, or actions in a holistic manner. Descriptive method collects data in
the form of words and language in certain natural contexts. Qualitative descriptive research was used in
this study to obtain a more detailed explanation of the Tambakboyo community efforts in preserving the
annual Tambakbayan tradition and the implementation of concrete philanthropic and ecological values
in the society, especially in this pandemic era.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Brief description of Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition
The Javanese people, especially those who live in Sukoharjo Regency, are familiar with various
traditional ceremonies, rituals, and beliefs. These ceremonies include slametan (meaning safe; a
tradition to ask for safety from any disturbances and obstacles) and Merti Desa (a joint activity to clean
the village both physically and spiritually). The Javanese people also perform various individual and
collective rituals or ceremonies to seek safety and avoid any forms of harms. Ritual events involving
neighbors and other relatives create a sense of togetherness and foster a sense of solidarity among the
community members.

The word Tambakbayan is taken from the name of Tambakboyo Village, the place where this ritual
was born. Tambakboyo is one of the villages in Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java. It lies beside the
Bengawan Solo River. The name Tambak Boyo is taken from the words 'tambak' which means 'pond'
and 'boyo' which means 'crocodile.' The village was named so because crocodiles were often seen on the
banks of the Bengawan Solo River in the old times. Tambakboyo Village is one of the villages in
Sukoharjo Regency which is active in carrying out traditional activities that promote the local wisdom
values of the community. This Tambakbayan tradition is held annually in the Sura Month of the
Javanese calendar. The tradition began when a large stone named "Kyai Guna Wijaya" was found and
lifted from the bank of the Bengawan Solo river. The process of moving the stone from the river into
Tambakboyo village was accompanied with traditional gamelan music and tayub dance. The
Tambakbayan traditional ceremony has been carried out since, for centuries from generation to generation. The tradition is maintained because the community believes that there is a wisdom behind the existence of the large stone pepunden (Javanese for sacred landmark or object). The community also considers that God sends blessings to their villages through the large stone pepunden in order to protect and preserve the natural surroundings, and to provide the villagers with safety, prosperity and peace [7].

Merti Desa Tambakbayan is a local tradition in the form of conceptualized ritual series that involve the Tambakboyo community as a whole. It is a part of the collective intelligence that exists in the Tambakboyo community. In this tradition, the community manifest their ideas in the form of tradition to ask for blessing and safety. This tradition is also carried out to protect and care for the living environment of the community, and to share sustenance and happiness with fellow villagers. The Tambakbayan culture is carried out in the form of a conceptualized annual traditional ceremony. The tradition provides direct examples for the community about the meaning of life regarding obedience to God, concern for others, and a willingness to care for and develop the environment.

In addition to reinforcing safety and warding off possible harm, the Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition is an expression of gratitude to God who has given an abundance of sustenance and prosperity to the surrounding community in the ongoing year and the years to come. In this tradition, there is a ritual to pray for and honor the ancestors so that all their sins will be forgiven. This tradition also fosters a sense of solidarity among the community members. Such practice promotes harmony and encourage a sense of concern for the nature and surrounding environment. The Tambakbayan tradition is also carried out to preserve ancestral heritage in the form of traditional ceremonies. Such ceremonies do not conflict with the nation's culture. This tradition is also a form of hope to God, a prayer to ask for abundant sustenance from the agriculture, as well as for the safety and peace of the society.

3.2. Implementation of the ecological and philanthropic values of tambakbayan tradition in the pandemic era

Traditions that run in a society must be viewed with a positive and comprehensive mindset. The author would like to emphasize that people, as observers or viewers, should view traditions as a collective intelligence to express ideas. This expression serves various purposes such as to be grateful and obedient to God, to share with others, and to be passionate in caring for the environment. With such a mindset, it is expected that the existing traditions in the community are not seen as activities that are associated with the worship to evil spirit or other superstitions. Furthermore, the local wisdom tradition of a community should be respected and its educational value should be comprehensively explored. Only then, its positive purposes can be applied in the community.

The first value in the Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition is the ecological value. This value can be seen from the series of events arranged by the traditional leaders and the committees. The events begin with a community service activity to clean up the environment in Tambakboyo Village. The cleaning activity is usually carried out on Sunday morning to afternoon. The villagers will come together to clean out tree branches and garbage that obstruct the village roads and burn them. This indicates a form of solidarity in protecting the environment where the villagers live. Cleaning up all forms of garbage can also mean that the whole community has a solid determination to keep their homes clean and to get rid of all forms of evil that exist in Tambakboyo Village.

Another activity in the Merti Desa Tambakbayan tradition is cleaning the cemetery in Tambakboyo Village. This is done to keep the cemetery area clean, tidy, and far from a scary image. It can also make cemetery visitors feel comfortable and solemn when praying for their deceased relatives. This activity also means that the people of Tambakboyo Village have a unified thought and idea to protect and respect their ancestors. Even though their ancestors had passed and moved to another realm, the villagers still respect and pray for them. The ancestors are like their parents who deserve respect for their past good services to the society. Thus, this activity is always a part of the Tambakbayan tradition.

The highlights of Tambakbayan activities are visiting and taking care of a large stone (punden) and a large banyan tree in the middle of Tambakboyo village. This is done as an expression of gratitude to the Creator who has provided a good and comfortable environment for the Tambakboyo Villagers. The
environmental maintenance in the *punden* area is also an offering to the ancestral heritage, a large stone named "Kyai Guna Wijaya". The people of Tambakboyo respect this traditional ceremony and carry it out annually from generation to generation. People who carry out the *Merti Desa Tambakbayan* tradition believe in the wisdom behind the existence of the large stone *pepunden*. The community also believes that God sends blessings to their village through the large stone *pepunden*. With activities that protect and preserve the surrounding nature, this tradition can be considered as a means to maintain the security, prosperity and tranquility of the community. Such tradition is in accordance with the divinity, unity, and togetherness principles.

People who live in certain areas must have a tendency to do good and a will make efforts to take care of their environment [8]. Humans have an important role in maintaining and preserving the natural environment. People also have a great responsibility to manage the harmony of nature, as well as to use it for their survival. Humans are also equipped with reason that can be used to cultivate nature to gain its benefits. Thus, people who love and want to care for their environment will not be trapped in the desire to exploit nature which will cause natural imbalances [9]. These are the reasons why *Merti Desa Tambakbayan* tradition in Sukoharjo or any similar traditions in other regions deserve to be maintained and preserved from generation to generation. These kinds of tradition are effective in maintaining human relations with the natural environment. Moreover, in this era of pandemic, maintaining environmental cleanliness and body hygiene are essential efforts to avoid the covid-19 virus.

The second value of the *Merti Desa Tambakbayan* tradition is the philanthropic value among the community members of Tambakboyo Village. The sense of affection to others can be seen from the series of ritual activities. On the day of the traditional commemoration, there is a ritual where people share regional food specialties and local agricultural products. In addition, there is also a procession of watching a *Tayub* dance performance which is attended by all levels of the community members. From regional officials to the grassroots community, all get together in the village *pendhapa* (hall). Some other agendas in this event are feasting together and social gathering to give charity for the elderly and other community members who deserve the donation. The traditions of utilizing natural resources and the spirit of sharing are good reflections that become the identity of the community.

The activities of sharing and implementing philanthropic values in the society are not only found in the traditional rituals of *Merti Desa Tambakbayan*. This year, the community also carried out social service activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be seen from the village government’s efforts in making strategic policies with philanthropic values to ensure the survival of the community during the pandemic. Collective intelligence that emerges from a tradition will result in a society that cares for each other and has a high spirit of sharing [10]. The various programs that provide assistance in the form of basic needs to the community are the very examples of philanthropic value implementation. In addition, all community components also play an active role in the *Jogo Tonggo* (neighbor care) program, a movement to provide food for neighbors who are self-isolating due to COVID-19.

Traditions that were born in certain region not only have a dimension of having fun and celebration. The local wisdom tradition of *Merti Desa Tambakbayan* has excellent ecological and philanthropic values. These values can also be applied by all people in the current Covid-19 pandemic era. People who get together to care for the environment, maintain cleanliness, and share with each other are the real markers of the society’s noble strength in dealing with the pandemic. Such actions show a humanist sense of the eastern local wisdom amidst of the onslaught of western culture and technology [11].

The preservation of traditional events in Tambakbaya village, especially the *Merti Desa* tradition, has a positive impact on the preservation of the natural environment. The purpose of the traditional celebration is to provide education about ecosystem management and environmental sustainability for the community. This kind of event is essential to maintain, especially in this day and age, where the impact of climate change is rising [12]. Environmental sustainability is essential for the community. Communities should continue to preserve traditions and take concrete actions to prove that they care about their environment. A well-organized community movement in environmental care will also have an impact on the life quality of the future generations [13]. Thus, efforts to preserve traditions that are
based on local wisdom should be maintained. Ecological values in the community and the sense of philanthropy towards nature and fellow community members are precious heritage from the ancestors. Such traditional heritage represents concern for the future generations and the environment.

4. Conclusion

*Merti Desa Tambakbayan* tradition is a form of local community wisdom of the Tambakboyo Village, Tawangsari District, Sukoharjo Regency. This wisdom is manifested in the form of annual ritual ceremony to pray for safety and protection from any future harms. This tradition aims to keep the village safe and peaceful, and avoid any disturbances, either the mystical or non-mystical ones. The *Merti Desa Tambakbayan* tradition has two dimensions of values, namely the ecological and philanthropic values. These values are important for communities, especially in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. These two values are implemented in the concept of maintaining community’s physical and spiritual health. The *Merti Desa Tambakbayan* tradition maintains the cleanliness of the living environment, the ancestral cemetery, and the natural environment of the village pepunden. This tradition also fosters the spirit to share among the community members, either in the form of daily basic needs, agricultural food products, or other material assistance through active and comprehensive community programs. The implementation of ecological and philanthropic values in the community is particularly meaningful in the current Covid-19 pandemic era.

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