

Bride Wealth in Marriage: A Review of Cross-Cultural Findings

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Bride wealth is the amount of substantial resources such as money, property and other forms of wealth that is given to the bride's family by the groom. Recently, bride wealth has become a significant issue particularly for the marriage age in many rural countries. In this paper, the researchers analyze 20 articles to look for cross-cultural interpretations and practices about bride wealth in two ways 1) describing the importance of bride wealth and 2) defining factors that stipulate the amount of bride wealth among various cultures. The researchers conducted a summative content analysis to see variations of bride wealth practices across countries. The analysis suggests that culturally, the groom is bound to provide the bride wealth to his future wife. Although it is not grounded in religion, bride wealth is compulsory to legalize marriage, enhance social stratification, and maintain family stability as well as cultural identity. Various factors are regarded as significant in which the amount of bride wealth is stipulated for instance educational level, economic standing, family stratification and physical appearance. Indeed, bride wealth is crucial in one's marriage and it has an important role in many societies. It will maintain as an important tool that perpetuates culture and tradition. However, very limited studies have addressed the impacts of bride wealth on women's health and wellbeing. Finally, the paper suggests for more interdisciplinary studies into the modern practice of bride wealth in order to find new ways of fulfilling one's cultural obligation due to the fact that there are changes in the society today which challenged the relevance of bride wealth practice.

Keywords: Bride wealth, Culture, Identity, Marriage

1. Introduction

The custom of bride wealth is widespread in many parts of rural area (Schler 2003) such as Africa, Indonesia, China, Pakistan and India. However there are similarities between different regions in term of bride wealth practice, each society has its own idiosyncratic nature. Bride wealth becomes very significant for people from these areas since it is a compulsory requirement for any marriage (Rudwick and Posel 2014). Apostolou (2008) reported that this practice is generally famous in most developing countries which embraced the patrilineal system such as in Sulawesi islands of Indonesia. This island is divided into four – north Sulawesi, middle Sulawesi, south-east Sulawesi and south Sulawesi, all of which maintains the practice of giving bride wealth. Interestingly, the practice of bride wealth or known as *uang panai* is considerably famous in South Sulawesi particularly among Makassar and Bugis ethnic groups. Even they live in different parts of Sulawesi, *uang panai* is still practiced accordingly.



Figure 1: Sulawesi map

Source: Geography: Planet Indonesia (www.planet.sulawesi.com)

According to *Badan Pusat Statistik* South Sulawesi in 2015, the number of population in South Sulawesi was 8,432 million. 1,429.2 million of the population comes from Makassar, the capital city. The religion of Sulawesi Island is Islam with a total number of 983,006 Muslims, followed by Catholic 66,581, Protestant 114,631, Buddhist 16,886, Hindus 9,129 and Konghuchu 3,264 (<https://sulsel.bps.go.id>). Most of the inhabitants are farmers. They engaged in rice production, planted cocoa, corn, cassava and vegetables (Mulyoutami, Martini and Khususiyah 2013). The capital city of South Sulawesi is Makassar which is commanded by a governor as the highest position in the structure of South Sulawesi official. The governor is helped by a regent and many village chiefs to do their duty in South Sulawesi area. There are four ethnic in South Sulawesi which are Makassar, Bugis, Toraja and Mandar. The majority of people in South Sulawesi are from Makassar and Bugis ethnic group. They use their own traditional language to communicate with their own ethnic. The traditional language of Makassarian is called Makassar/*Mangkasara* and that of Bugis is Bugis/*Ugi*. The aim of this paper is to examine the socio-cultural determinants of bride wealth practiced in South Sulawesi. This paper is pertinent in the study of culture particularly to the discipline of sociology and anthropology because how *uang panai* is seen and managed, rests upon social and cultural factors.

2. Bride wealth variations across culture

In most human life, the culture of society is highly influenced by the environment and circumstances which they lived in. In the case of bride wealth, the literature has suggested that there are variations in the practice particularly in traditional societies like Africa, China, India, Bangladesh and others. In Africa for example, the bride wealth is called *ilobolo* and the practice was originally giving a cattle to the bride. However, in the past century cash payment is the practice as it is more convenient. Rudwick (2014) reported that this change was linked to the colonial modification in pre-capitalist era where the colonialist demanded the sons to be linked with the labor system that lead to the development of money economy

and accumulation of the sons' wealth.

In a similar vein, a historical account on bride wealth evolution was studied by Yan (2005). According to Yan, China has also transformed their bride wealth known as *caili* in 1950 from giving food and wine to cash transaction. However, this practice is challenged by a political campaign that attempts to abolish the traditional marriage transaction. In 1960s, *caili* were revisited to *maidonxiqian* (money to buy things such as clothes, shoes and other items for the bride) which is understood as trousseau money. In this practice, the amount of money will not be given directly to the bride's parents but the family of the groom will purchase the trousseau to the bride. In 1970 and early 1980s, the bride will transfer *zhuangyanqia* (cigarette money) to prepare tobacco for the groom's family during the wedding party. This practice no longer practice since the middle of 1980s. Trousseau is changed to *ganzhy* which means material gifts are changed into monetary terms. By the early 1990s, the given material gifts are requested to be converted into cash. This is called *daganzle* (grand converting) which include all category of bride wealth. By the end of 1990s, the bride wealth is converted again into a new house and production machine such as tractor and cow. Therefore, it is estimated that expense of marriage increased significantly ranging from 200 Yuan in 1950 to 50,000 Yuan in 1999.

The practice of bride wealth in Zimbabwe is called *roora*. There are two kinds of customary marriage which are the regular proposal marriage and the elopement marriage. These types of marriages require the man to pay the bride wealth in installment rather than cash on the day of the marriage. Another reason for this is that the full payment is regarded as a sign of disrespect. In fact, installment payment prevents husband from ignoring his responsibilities towards his wife (Dekker and Hoogeveen 2002).

Like Indonesia, Malaysia and its neighboring country Thailand practice bride wealth. In Malaysia for instance, among the Malays, bride wealth is called *wang hantaran* (Ismail and Daud 2013). In Thailand, it is known as *sinsod*. In the past, Thai parents will request the groom to work for the family to prove his ability to work. Today, it is no longer the practice. Instead, man is obliged to give bride price to the bride. The amount of *sinsod* is based on the economy of the woman, her level of education and social status. Bride price can be in form of materials like car, bank account, land or a house. In many traditional societies, bride wealth is demanded by the family to compensate the loss of their daughters' labor (Laiphrakpam and Aroonsrimorakot 2016).

Whilst bride wealth is given to the bride, the situation is the opposite in India. In India, the structure of marriage is different as the bride will give money to the groom. This practice is called *dowry*. The amount of bride wealth in India has increased over time. This is the result of the high number of women compared to men. Here, marriage is endogamous. People are only permitted to marry within their sub-caste. If the prohibition is violated, social sanction will be imposed (Bloch and Rao 2016). The amount of dowry in India has led to the impoverishment of the bride's family (Anderson 2016). Even though in the marriage process the wife gives money to the groom, the wealthy wife has a tendency to appear aggressive towards her husband. This happens because the husband requested for an extra transfer of money from his bride's parents.

In short, the practice of bride wealth is not new in the patrilineal system and developing countries since many evidences showed that it has been widespread in Africa, China, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Malaysia and Indonesia. The characteristic of bride wealth is highly dependent on the culture of the society. Thus, the practice of bride wealth differs from one culture to another.

3. The practice of *uang panai* in Makassar

The term bride wealth in Makassar is *uang panai*. Basically the practice of *uang panai* has no significant difference to other regions since *uang panai* also is regarded as the amount of money brought by the

groom to the family of the bride. However, the differentiation in ritual of giving *uang panai* is obvious. In most regions in which the bride wealth exist, a ritual for giving the bride wealth is not highly important but in Makassar, the ritual of *uang panai* becomes a very significant element. Before reaching the determination of *uang panai*, there are some rituals that should be done. The whole rituals are as follow:

1. *Mappese'-pese* means the family of the groom will oversee the prospective bride in term of her attitude and relation to her parents etc. if the attitude is good enough then the proposal will be continued. In contrast, if she is not good in attitude and relation with parents, then the proposal will be cancelled (Elvira 2014).
2. *Massuro* is the ritual of visiting the bride's house by the groom families to convey the interesting to propose her daughter by the groom. If it is approved then another ritual will be held (Yudi and Rahayu 2015). The representativeness of the groom family called *madduta* then that of the bride called *ridutai*.
3. *Mappettu ada'* is a ritual to stipulate the amount of *uang panai* and the date of the wedding. This step is highly sensitive because the proposal sometimes does not meet an agreement if the proposed money by the bride family is really high and cannot be approved by the groom. The high of *uang panai* also is regarded as a way to reject the proposal if the bride's family is not interesting to the groom. There are two ways to lobby the amount of *uang panai* which are traditional lobby (family approach) and society lobby (Andriani, Sirajuddin and Iba 2016).
4. *Mappaenre' doi'* is a ritual to give the amount of *uang panai* which has been agreed in previous step (Ikbal 2016). *Uang panai* is put down in the small thing then it is given to the family of the bride. The ritual is respectful a lot since majority of the bride's family will attend this ritual.

The fifth and sixth rituals which are *Mappaenre botting* and *Mapparolla* are related to the wedding party. *Uang panai* is highly essential to the practice of marriage in South Sulawesi, because *uang panai* becomes the basic factor to legalize the relation of prospective spouses. It also enhances the woman and her family status within the society if the amount of money is huge. Finally, *uang panai* is also regarded as a significant factor to maintain the economic stability of the family.

4. The importance of *uang panai*

Uang panai is significant in the marriage of Makassar people. Without sufficient *uang panai*, there will be no marriage (Ikbal 2016). In other words, *uang panai* is an element which legalizes marriage (Adiningsih 2016). This is also supported by Anderson (2016) who made similar observation in Africa. In South Sulawesi, the range of *uang panai* is between 20 million Rupiah (USD1,475) and above. Therefore, men who plan to get marriage have to prepare a lot of money. One of the implications of not preparing enough *uang panai* is *silariang* (elopement). In the study of Adiningsih (2016), she discovered that there are also cases where women engaged in pre-marital sex and become pregnant in order to get married easily. Also, many men are willing to sell their land or property to be united with the women they loved.

Beside the legalization of marriage, *uang panai* also affects the status of women and her family. The higher the *uang panai*, the higher the status of a woman and her family would be. Therefore, the family of the prospective bride would ask for a large *uang panai* because they argue that the luxurious wedding party can enhance their stratification in the society. Generally, the proposed money in the *mappettu ada* ritual will be used to pay the wedding expenses. In the case where wedding party expenses exceeded the amount of *uang panai*, the bride's family will use their own money instead asking for more from the groom (Adiningsih 2016). However, Syarifuddin and Damayanti (2005) have observed that *uang panai* to some extent is abused by the bride's family to organize an excessive and extravagant party which burdens the groom and puts him into a difficult situation (Syarifuddin and Damayanti 2015).

Another important aspect of *uang panai* is maintaining family stability. It is assumed that the large amount

of *uang panai* is an indication of the man's ability to provide a prosperous life to the woman. In the era of Bone and Gowa Tallo king, the king's family requires any man who are interested to marry their daughters to bring money as a sign of his ability to provide for the family (Aini 2017). Indeed, *uang panai* is essential in the marriage of people in South Sulawesi. *Uang panai* is the determinant factor in which a marriage legalize. It also enhances the woman and her family status within the society apart from ensuring economic stability of the family.

5. The determinants of the amount of *uang panai*

The amount of *uang panai* is determined by the family of the bride. The potential bride is not allowed to take a part in making decision. There are several factors that result in the high amount of *uang panai* which are educational level, economic standing, family stratification and physical appearance of the potential bride. An educated bride normally has a big opportunity to receive a huge *uang panai*. If the woman completed only her elementary school, the amount of *uang panai* is small. On the contrary, if a woman graduated from a university and had a job, definitely, her *uang panai* would be higher (Syarifuddin and Damayanti 2015). Furthermore, it is believed that educated women are an investment of the parents to get high bride wealth since a huge sum of money had been spent on the daughter's education previously (Ashraf and Et.al 2015; and Mwamwenda and Monyooe 1997) Mwamwenda and Monyooe 1997).

Another factor is the economic standing of the woman's family. Wealthy family is honored in Makassar and Bugis tribes. The richer the woman, the higher will be her *uang panai*. One possible reason for this is that they want to maintain the honor of the family because it is uncommon for the folk in these tribes to receive low *uang panai*. In other words, wealthy family deserves a handsome amount of *uang panai*. Lesser *uang panai* is recognized only in the low income family (Yudi and Rahayu 2015).

Equally important in determining the amount of *uang panai* is the family stratification. The stratification in Makassar consisted of *bangsawan* (nobles) *tinggi*, *bangsawan menengah*, *arungpalili*, *to deceng*, *to maradeka* and *ata* (slave). If the woman is from *bangsawan tinggi*, *menengah*, *arung palili* group, the *uang panai* is high as they are from the noble or aristocratic family compared with the woman who belongs to *to deceng*, *to maradeka* and *ata* (Yudi and Rahayu 2015). In addition, physical appearance of the potential bride is another consideration that determines the amount of *uang panai*. Ikbali (2016) claimed that as long as women have fair skin and tall, they are likely to receive high *uang panai* even she is not from the *bangsawan* family or an educated one. Apart from the aforementioned factors, the high amount of *uang panai* was sometimes proposed purposely to reject the man's marriage proposal. This happened when prospective groom does not meet the criteria of the woman's family such as good financial provider and so on.

6. Conclusion

Uang panai is the amount of money from the groom to the bride family. It is well-known that the money is significant in order to legalize marriage, enhance family stratification and maintain family stability. The amount of *uang panai* is influenced by several factors such as economic standing, educational level and physical appearance of the bride. Thus, the higher the woman's position, the higher the *uang panai*. Bride wealth is a topic that attracts social scientists particularly sociologists and anthropologists. The researchers found that several aspects of *uang panai* were not studied. For instance, we have yet to know the relationship between *uang panai* and the well-being of educated women, the abuse of *uang panai* by the bride's family as well as women's perception about insufficient *uang panai* which leads to the cancellation of marriage. Therefore, it is hope that future researchers will address these issues. Finally, the researchers suggest the government particularly the religious affairs office to come up with a policy to limit the amount of *uang panai* in order to prevent negative impacts such as the cancellation of

marriage, elopement and pre-marital pregnancy.

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