

CHRISTIAN IMAGE OF MAN AND ILLNESS  
FROM ANCIENT MINAHASAN PERSPECTIVE  
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## **Introduction**

Like many ancient ethnic cultures, the ancient Minahasan culture does not separate the divine and the profane, despite of their differences. It is the reason why there are many theological schools in Indonesia consider “ancient ethnic cultures” as “ancient ethnic religions”, and accommodate it in their theological curriculum. For instance, Harun Hadiwijono, a theologian from Reformed Central Java Church, the first President of Dutawatjana Theological School in Jogjakarta, labels the ancient ethnic cultures as “common ancient religions” (Indonesian: *agama suku murba*).<sup>1</sup> And, vice-verca, every ancient ethnic religion is tied with its ancient ethnic culture and, therefore, naturally tied with its locality,<sup>2</sup> yet its “religious values” are essentially universal.

This paper is a socio-cultural analysis by using particular anthropological and sociological theories.

### **I. *Si Tou Tinow Tumow Tou*: The Image of Man**

Man in ancient Minahasan perspective should be understood within the cultural framework of the dialectical relations between the human and the divine, which is revealed in the wholistic relations between the human and the universe. In other words, put it in Mircea Aliade term, within the framework of the relations between “microcosmic” and “macrocosmic”.<sup>3</sup> In this relation, for the ancient Minahasans, man is not only an individual human being, but also the one who has a calling to care of and for the “neighbours”: both the human (microcosmic) and the universe (macrocosmic).

This cultural value, which is also the ancient philosophical perception, of the Minahasans is expressed in a word: “*si tou tinou tumou tou*”, which means “the man is born (given birth) in order to make the other human alive”.

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<sup>1</sup> Harun Hadiwijono, *Agama Suku Murba di Indonesia*. Jakarta, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Th. Van den End, *Ragi Carita I*. Jakarta, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Eliade Mircea, *The Myth of the Eternal Return Or, Cosmos and History*. Trans. by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

In the Minahasa land we may find many places, especially in certain old villages, some particular stones that is called *watu tumou touwa*, which means “stone to make the human alive”, or “stone of the source of human life”. It means, the ancient Minahasans believe that this stone is a living one and, at the same time, it is the source of religious values and spiritual guidance. It is therefore the reason why people commonly **bringing offerings** and **doing rituals** at those places. It means that the *watu tumou touwa* is an important symbol of the way for the Minahasans relate to the universe and *vice-versa*.

### ***Nuwu' i Tua*: Moral and Ethical Concept of Ancient Minahasan**

Ancient Minahasan culture, like many ancient ethnic ones in Indonesia, expresses the moral and ethical concept of the so-called pre-literary society. It is expressed by the unwritten traditions and regulations inherited through generations. The Minahasans usually call it *nuwu' i tua*, literary means “message of the ancestors”, that is, moral and ethical values that must be revealed by social behavior of the individuals in community. In this relation, at least, there are five moral and ethical attitudes that can be explained in this paper.

**First, the attitude toward fellow human.** Social behavior is related to, or a reflection of, the value orientation related to day-to-day life in the community. It is generally expressed by local terms, such as *masigi-sigian* (respect to one another), *maupu-upusan* (love to one another), and *maleo-leosan* (honest to one another). These expressions cannot be literally understood, for they essentially have their particular meaning to explain the cultural-religious value-orientation of the Minahasans in terms of human relations. This cultural orientation also aims to explain the essence of their ethical-moral value or principle, particularly in relation to respecting of one another. Moreover, by this ethical-moral principle the Minahasans realizing their adoration of the divine that they usually call, such as, *Opo Kasuruan Wangko*, *Opo Wananatas*, *Opo Wailan* (God, the Great One; God, the Highest One; or God, the True One).

**Secondly, moral obligation to help the other human.** In addition to respecting to one another, there is an awareness of the obligation to help the others. This is expressed through what is called, for instance, by the Tountemboan (southern Minahasans), *masaali*, that is, an obligation of the children to serve their parents who are getting old. And, an obligation to serve the elders in the community. From the socio-cultural perspective, *masaali* may also be seen as an expression of the religious and ethical awareness of adoring the divine. In another word, the adoration of God is expressed by practical-moral life, that is, through serving or helping the neighbours. Thus, the practice of *masaali*, in broadly sense, is to put into practice the ethical-moral values through the social life. In other words, it is to realize one's awareness of moral obligation to help the neighbours.

**Thirdly, solidarity and equality.** The value system of ancient Minahasan culture also very much recognizes solidarity in social life. There are some local words to express it; for instance: *ma linga-lingaan* (to recognize one another), and *ma tombu-tombolan* (to encourage one another). This can actually be seen through the life around communities day after day; for instance, *kedukaan* (grief-stricken), wedding feast, etc. The practice of *marukup*, which is a spontaneous helping coming from the neighbors to the mourning family, keeps going on to the present day, as the expression of solidarity. All social activities around the communities' life not merely as

daily routine, but more than that it is the expression of religious-ethics in living together. The participation of community around these social events is all at once their cultural as well as religious expression of solidarity and equality.

**Fourthly, institutionalization of work ethic.** Ancient Minahasans use to have an institutionalized work ethics which is called *mapalus*. There are some people that simply associate it with the practice of *gotong-royong*, which is a mutual aid in the village community in Java, or in other village communities around the country. Despite of some similarities on the aspect of mutual aid, *mapalus* is, however, different from *gotong-royong* practice, both on its substance and practice, since it is rooted in agrarian culture of ancient Minahasans. On the one side, it can be said that *gotong-royong*<sup>4</sup> is a spontaneously mutual aid among village inhabitants in building up such a community building, for instance, mosque. Whereas, *mapalus* is an institutionally organized mutual aid into a work system among agricultural village communities in ancient Minahasa. Thus, from the socio-cultural perspective, it can also be said that *mapalus* is a form of institutionalization of the Minahasan work ethic in mutual aid on farming. In other words, *mapalus* is rooted in a communal work ethic on farming. Today, it is being reduced to what is called “*arisan*” (lottery by neighborhood wives), that is, a raffle of money, or any materials needed by members of the *arisan* gathering or club.<sup>5</sup>

**Fifthly, unanimous concensus.** Those have been described above are value orientations and practical ethics related to building the communal life in the villages. This last one is related to the way of Minahasans dealing with, or overcome, the social conflict and social plurality. This value orientation is found in the story about the meeting of leaders from different sub-ethnics of Minahasans, that is, the tale story of *Batu Pinawetengan* (Stony place of Concensus Meeting). Like many ethnic cultures in Indonesia, the ancient Minahasan culture has its specific way to deal with social plurality which is called *musyawarah mufakat*. In modern West, according to Eka Darmaputera,<sup>6</sup> the way to deal with social plurality or social conflict is to use the “either-or” approach. Differently, the way of *musyawarah-mufakat* is a “both-and” and “neither-nor” approach. The main substance of it, as said by Taulu<sup>7</sup>, is expressed by the words: *Esa, esa kita peleng, esa wia se Opo-opo Lumimuut wo si Toar...* (We are one, we are all brothers and sisters, united by our ancestors Toar and Lumimuut). In other words, the main norm in ancient Minahasan culture to overcome social conflict is keeping and maintaining the social integrity in communal life. The word “*torang samua basudara*” (we all are brothers and sisters), etc., is nothing else than a philosophical articulation of the value orientations have been described above.

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<sup>4</sup> Koentjaraningrat, *Some Social-Anthropological Observations on Gotong Royong Practice in Two Villages of Central Java*. Itacha: Monograph Series, Modern Indonesian Project Cornell University, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> Today there are so many *arisan* gathering in Minahasa, such as village community, church community (from youth fellowship to men fellowship and women fellowship), public mini-bus driver community, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Eka Darmaputera, “Pancasila and the Search for Identity and Modernity in Indonesian Society: A Cultural and Ethical Analysis”. Ph.D. dissertation. Newton Centre: Boston College, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> H.M. Taulu, *Bunga Rampai: Sejarah dan Anthropologi Budaya Minahasa* (Anthropology and Histoty of the Minahasan Culture). Manado: Toko Buku Tunas Harapan, 1981, p. 3.

Thus, the expression *si tou tinou tumou tou* (man is born - being called - to help, or to make, the others live) can be seen said as ethical-moral concept in ancient Minahasan culture in terms of keeping the human solidarity. Being human has the call to helping each other for the living, not “beating or defeating one another” (Minahasan humor: *tumongkok tou*, means swallowing one another).

### ***Tumou Tou* in Presentday Cultural Hermeneutics:**

Presently there is a growing awareness among people of Indonesia, particularly those who are seriously concerned with ancient cultures, including the academicians, on the importance of re-searching the ancient cultural traditions. Their assumption is that the ancient cultures present cultural and religious values in which the ancient people found the “wisdom”. Therefore, there is a new study program officially promoting by the government via the Ministry of Education what is called “*Pendidikan Karakter*” or character building education, which is based on, and referring to, the so-called “**local wisdom**”. The follow-up of it is that there are now six universities in Indonesia have started the study program of the so-called “*kajian budaya*” or study on ancient cultures to re-search on the local wisdom.

Within the frame of what just mentioned above, we may perceive the ancient Minahasan perspective on man and illness as follow:

- First, the expression *tumou tou* essentially contains three meanings: *tou ente'*, *tou nga'asan*, and *tou sama*. The meaning of *tou ente'* is that the Minahasans are mentally and physically strong and powerful; *Tou nga'asan* means the Minahasans are intellectually clever and smart; and *tou sama* means that the Minahasans are open to the universally religious values, particularly to the Christian values, and to the modern values. In this sense, Minahasan people are able and open to the cultural transformation in terms to accommodate the three value systems, that is: local wisdom, modern intellectuality, and conventionally religious wisdom, into their social and cultural life.
- Secondly, *tumou tou* religiously means a divine order (sacred mission) for the human to taking care for the others; in other word, it is a humanistic orientation of life. This is the basic root of the common expression: *torang samua basudara* (we are all brothers and sisters). On the one hand, the Minahasan society is tightly communalistic, yet on the other hand, they are broadly open to others (tolerant).

### **The Meaning for the Minahasans Today:**

- First, the Minahasans, in modern and post-modern world, are challenged to have an ability to integrate the three value-systems in our cultural life orientation; that is, **local wisdom** (traditional/ancient), **modern (rational) wisdom**, and **conventional (religious) wisdom**, that could make them able to avoid, such a “split personality” or “split mentality”.
- Secondly, as part of, or integrated into, modern-global community, the Minahasans are also challenged to have an humanitarian orientation and awareness, that they may have

the ability and capability to participate in responding to the present human problems, such as poverty (economically and spiritually), the abuse of human rights, violence, etc., in the local settings and surroundings.

- Thirdly, *tomou tou* (making the other ones to live) has a multi purpose, as mentioned above, including every effort of helping poor people to survive, and helping those who are economically and politically weak and exploited.

Despite of belonging to the past, this ancient Minahasan cultural value-orientation still however has its religious calling for the “better off” Minahasans (common Minahasan expression: *so jadi orang, deng so tabae*, means the Minahasans that have already been successful); whether they are living in the Minahasa land or abroad. Moreover, this should be the “sacred mission” of the Minahasan Christians today, despite of many “domestic problems” overwhelming the church in Minahasa (particularly the GMIM Church) today. Above all, I surely believe, this is also part of the essence of Christian faith; therefore, it should be the present missionary calling to all Christian men and women today.

## II. *Pina ke'kepan*: The Image of Illness

As already mentioned above, human life (microcosmic) is related to the universe (macrocosmic), either the good one or the bad one. In this sense, **illness** is perceived to be the **bad condition** caused or “hugely held” or “embraced” by the **spirit forces**. Ancient Minahasans, like many ancient societies, believe in spirit forces, therefore discussing about illness we need to see firstly what is the spirit forces in the mind and culture of traditional Minahasans.

### *Se dei'ca pa-ileken*: A Wholistic Life Phenomenon

Spirit forces generally be grouped into two categories: *se dei'ca pa-ileken* and *opo-opo*. The first one literally means the “**unable seen ones**”, that is, spirits that cannot be seen ordinarily by everyone. They could only be seen in a particular moment by those who are called having *telew weren* (sharp eyes). Indonesians usually call *hantu* or *roh-roh halus* (literally: refined spirits), that is, the various kinds of spirit wandering around. The second one is the phenomenon of **spirit possession**. It is commonly believed that there are many *se deica pa-ileken* wandering around our atmosphere. Among them are, for instance, *panunggu* (the guard spirit or ghost), *kuntilanak* (the ghost of the dead pregnant woman), and *lo' lok* (the personified spirit or ghost).

As a guard, *panunggu* is believed to be the protector of a “sacred places”, such as big stones, big trees, rivers, springs, or any hunted places. It must be aware that *panunggu* might not hesitate to attack anyone, especially a careless one, that coming up or passing by unbehaviorly. In Durkheim's term, “they (the ghost *panunggu*) punish him or her if he or she does not treat them in a fitting manner”<sup>8</sup>. And, as the *panunggu* attacking or punishing a person, he or she might get sick or ill. For instance, in a village there was once a young boy got sick, having a fever for several days. As the *walian* or *tukang baruba* (the healer) came asking the boy and his parents to recall what he had done in the past few days before getting sick, they said that he went

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<sup>8</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of The Religious Life*. Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1947.

down alone to the spring to get water at 12.00 AM. The healer said that the boy was *pina upusan e deica paileken* (the boy “got loved” by *panunggu* ghost). In other word, the boy was loved by the invisible spirit, in this sense by the ghost. After three days of healing by the healer, he got normal again.

Different from *panunggu*, *kuntulanak* is perceived as the spirit or ghost of a dead pregnant woman wandering around her village, with a long hair and bearing her baby. She is so scary to villagers, because it is beleived she might become a “vehicle” or “agent” for devil. To avoid this scareness, it is commonly advise to the pregnant women to carry herbal fruit such as *lemong suangi* (fragnant lemon), *goraka merah* (red ginger) *cingke* or *cengkih* (clove), or pala (nutmeg) that, in ancient Minahasan believe, may protect them (both the woman and the beared baby) from the devil. In this sense, the life of a pregnant one who is giving birth a baby is related to the healthiness, to the fertility, or to the harmony. In other words, a pregnant women is not merely the matter of an individual person bearing a baby, but is a phenomenon of human life that is holistically related with the universe (macrocosmic); that is to say, that human life is perceived to be divinely meaningful and legitimated.

### ***Opo* and “*Opo-opo*”: The Divine and the Possession of Spirit**

*Opo* is an ancient Minahasan term for the divine, the God, and *Apo* (coming particularly southern Minahasans) is a term for the great parents or ancestors. But, *opo-opo* is a term for spirit possession. Scholars usually label various terms for spirit possession such as spiritualism, spiritism, and spirit medium. **Spiritualism**, the most common term, has been used in two senses: first, to describe a metaphysical theory that asserts the non-material reality, that is, spiritual world-view common to many religions; secondly, to identify a system of beliefs and practice having the objective of communicating with the supposed spirit of those who have died. Almost similar is the view of **spiritism**, that is, belief in the possibility of communicating with the spirits of the departed or the dead one and the practices of attempting such communication, usually with the help of a **medium**, which is believed to act as an intermediary with the spiritual force. In all, *opo-opo* can be seen as the possession of spirit forces, more specifically, it is the possession of spirits of the departed or the dead ones, particularly the ancestors. It is the reason why Minahasans call the spirit possession *opo-opo*, which derives from either *Opo* or *Apo*.

Having possessed *opo-opo*, however, one needs to have what is called *wentel*, that is, “sacred things” such as stones, certain roots or woods, or spices that are medium to possess the spirit. *Opo-opo* is used for various purposes of which can be classified into two aspects: positive and negative. The positive aspect is, that *opo-opo* is used for spiritual healing, or for finding out things being stolen. But, the negative one is, the use of it for black magic.

The positive use of *opo-opo* is called *makatana* which means one who has the knowledge of spiritual healing, of midwife, or of finding out the thief, by the help of spirit forces of the ancestors. Thus, there are *tukang barubah* (the healer), *biyang* (the midwife), and *tukang mawi* (the searcher for thieves). *Makatana* is found to persons called *tounaas* (the leader of the community or society) or *walian* (the priest or priestess). The most important aspect of it is healing. Healing for the Minahasans is related to the concept of restoring the goodness of the human being. The goodness of the human being is certainly related to the concept of the harmonized realtionship in the community or society that has to be reflected by one’s health. In

other words, healthy is an indication of harmony between the human (microcosmic) and the universe (macrocosmic).

The negative use of *opo-opo*, wicked and evil, on the one hand, is seen as the unharmonized relations in the community which is appeared in one's illness. In this sense, **health and illness are inextricably connected with the harmonization of the cosmic order in the human life**, concretely in community or society. Maintaining and sustaining harmony is, for the Minahasans, to have good social behavior and moral conduct. In other words, it is to harmonize or stabilise and encourage society for social conformity. To enjoy maximum health, one should have good thoughts about his or her neighbors, avoiding aggressive acts and quarrels. On the other hand, getting sick or ill is believed to have a failure to perform the right conduct or the religious acts at the right moment. The most important of this concept, that illness or sickness is seen as disequilibrium in the body as well in the community or social life. **Illness is therefore a cosmic cause** to the individual and is derived from a sick or broken society. Thus, on the one side, society or social life is the point of departure for the individual diagnosis, and on the other side, the damage, that is, the unbalance or disharmony in the community or society must be restored before the individual regaining his or her health. Consequently, to restore one's health is to correct one's social behavior and moral conduct. It is here the importance of religion; the legitimation of what is being perceived good behavior that is signified by certain religious rituals. And, it is through the process of healing that the ritual occurs. In this sense, rituals become an integral part of the process of healing.

The misuse of *opo-opo* is labeled *doti-doti* that is, the practice of black magic or witchcraft. Thus, besides *tukang baruba* (the healer), there is also *tukang doti* (in southern Minahasa it is called *mariara*), namely the magician or the wicked. People believe that *doti-doti* is the misuse of *opo-opo* to cause or to make someone get sick, or to bring "misfortune" (the Minahasans call *soe-soe*) to the virtue.

According to Clyde Kluckhohn<sup>9</sup>, belief in witchcraft acts as a sanction against anti social behavior. Witches are wicked people and it is their wicked feelings – their hatred or envy – that cause harm. The belief, thus, supports the moral order of the community over and above particular quarrels. Yet, the Minahasans however believe that some witchcraft has positive effects for certain individuals, helping them to achieve great deeds, especially in facing a confrontation such a war, or business.

To conclude, illness, like healthy, in ancient Minahasan culture or religious belief, is the disharmony of the human life (microcosmic) and the universe (macrocosmic). It is an indication of one's behaviour in the community or social life. It is not merely of physical matters, but non-physical one, religious and spiritual.

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<sup>9</sup> C. Kluckhohn, *Navajo Witchcraft. Papers of the Peabody Museum*. Vo. XXII, No. 2 (Cambridge, 1944), pp. 49, 67.