

## Indonesian Spa and Traditional Wellness: Gender, Health and Life Styles

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**ABSTRACT:** Rapid increase of Spa and Wellness services in Indonesia, particularly in big cities, is shown as a new trend on health and wellness perception among Indonesian. Such perception rooted from the diversity of traditional cultural heritage. Spa and Traditional Wellness services in Indonesia, undoubtedly, can be developed in the areas of public health, education, cultural and tourism. Spa and Traditional Wellness System (STWS) is, definitely, cultural heritage which needs comprehensive approaches involving various knowledge and science to develop. The efforts to develop STWS inherited from natural resources with cultural and philosophy diversities as background is the effort to establishing the power of local cultures in facing global competition. This paper described STWS which are having wide-range of philosophy and values, practices and the use of ingredients. At the same time, the function and advantage of widely spread STWS in big cities in Indonesian were also discussed. STWS was approached by medical anthropology perspective developed by Foster and Barbara Anderson and Michael Winkelman. Such perspective explained that concept and theory of medical anthropology and nutrition which can be used to analyse the wide-range STWS practices based on ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and naturalistic medical system. As a new trend in health and life style, STWS could be either an alternative choice on preventive medical system, while positioning STWS in the world map of national cultural asset or a temporary trend and commercialised life style in the big cities.

**Keywords:** spa; naturalistic medical system; cultural ethnocentrism, relativism

## Introduction

The growth of health and wellness awareness in big cities around the world reminds us to the wealth of cultures in the Spa and Traditional Wellness System (“STWS”). In Indonesia, based on every and each ethnic, STWS has been practised throughout the country.

For the interest of this paper, the practise of the members of each ethnic in Indonesia on Spa and Traditional Wellness is called Indonesian Spa and Traditional Wellness (“ISTW”). This paper discussed the three subjects in ISTW: (i) the various philosophy and values, practises and the use of ingredients which includes the role and its advantages as part of health system and life style practised in country side and big cities; (ii) developing ISTW as part of naturalistic medical system and become choices of public medical services; and (iii) exploring ISTW as trend in health awareness and life style in relation of gender issues.

Indonesia Tourism Law states that spa is one of the Indonesian tourism sectors. So in relation to such Law, the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economics has determined that in order to develop ISTW, attention shall be on cultural resources of practises among nine Indonesian ethnics, which include Bali (Balinese), Banjar (Banjarese), Batak, Betawi (Jakartan), Bugis, Madura, Minahasa (Menadonese), Minang (West Sumatran) and Javanese (furtherly stated as “Nine Regionals”). And of course, different ethnic has different name. At least six different names identified for such STWS: in Banjar of South Kalimantan, for example, the name is *Batimung*; in Madura of East Java is *So` Oso*; in Minahasa of north Sulawesi the name is *Bakera*; in in Minang of West Sumatra is *Tangeh*; in Batak of North Sumatera is *Tange* and *Martub*; while in Betawi of Jakarta is *Tangas*, the rest three ethnics has no specific name.

## Indonesian Spa and Traditional Wellness

ISTW is national cultural heritage. To understand it, holistic and comprehensive approach involving interdisciplinary sciences is necessarily. In line with that, developing ISTW derived from national natural resources with different philosophy and cultural values is an effort to

establish local cultures to become national strength in facing global competitiveness. ISTW is phenomenon which has potential opportunity to face global challenges.

ISTW was approached by medical anthropology perspective developed by Foster and Barbara Anderson and Michael Winkelman. Such perspective explains that concept and theory of medical anthropology and nutrition which can be used to analyse the wide-ranging ISTW practices based on ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and naturalistic medical system.

### **ISTW: an Indonesian Cultural Treasure**

Medical Anthropology provides two major approaches for the science of health, one is holistic approach and the other one is cultural relativism approach. Most physicians viewed Medical Anthropology as a bio-cultural discipline that concentrated on the interaction between biological aspect and human behaviour aspect which affected the health and ill in human history. Holistic approach helps us to understand holistic framework of social-cultural aspect, economics, environmental aspect, organisation and other related aspect to develop ISTW.

Cultural relativism provides understanding that certain values and practices of spa and traditional wellness in certain community may not be accepted in other community. Things commonly practise here will get different opinion from other people who live in the other side of the mountain, for example. Things can be more complicated when it is all about health and values. It is understood that the most difficult behaviour easily differ when it is related to survival strategy, such as eating behaviour. For members of certain ethnic groups in Papua, who traditionally consume stone-burned cassava, it is difficult for them to accept bread with strawberry jam as eating replacement. Undoubtly, eating behaviour derives from availability of local natural resources combines with their philosophy and values forming into common practices.

As we already aware that human basic needs, which include food and drink, medication and health are set up by socio-cultural system, to accept and or to deny of things is under control of culture. The construction of culture and values will modify, restrain and change people behaviour through various ways. The ways on how people using plants for food or for

medication and healing procedures are cultural inheritance which related to people perception on nature and quality of living. The difference arises from the assumption on the values that they believe is true and is the most excellent. The same plant can be used as foodstuff in a culture while on the other culture will be used for ingredients of medication.

Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism explain why there is a difference on common practice among people in different cultures which include STWS. *Kerokan*\* is a common practice for Javanese people which is found in Vietnam and Chinese tradition. Kerokan related to the healing treatment when someone feels *masuk-angin*. Prof. Dr Didik Gunawan Tamtomo of Medical Faculty of Sebelas Maret University in Solo conducted a research on the benefit of *kerokan* for physically and psychological healing.

Michael Winkleman wrote in “*Culture and Health: Applying Medical Anthropology*” (2009: 8-9) that cultural competence for professional medical practitioners is imperative in medical services. Such competence includes awareness and knowledge, personal perceptiveness, and also the cultural factors that affected health.

Furthermore Winkleman wrote that such competence is not only important on individual basis but also significant for public institutions and regulations. Cultural competence comprises of knowledge on the dynamics of culture and cross-cultural relations, skill on adaptation in cultural interrelations, and knowledge on a specific culture and their beliefs. From this standpoint, the importance of culture competence for professional STWS becomes undeniable to understand medical and nonmedical factors.

### **Entities of Culture in ISTW**

At least, three entities of cultural structure play important role in the growth of ISTW values, process and action, and attainment and natural materials.

### ***Entity of Values***

Philosophy and cultural values of every ethnic in Indonesia on health and wellness are the basic of the development of ISTW. In Nine Regionals, the diversity of idea, value and philosophy are strongly inherent within the development of ISTW.

\* *Kerokan* is a Javanese word for an activity to heal someone when he/she feels *masuk-angin* by firstly pouring oil on the skin of someone's back then repeatedly stroking a coin, or any other rounded objects, along such oily skin. *Masuk-angin* is a body condition when a man/woman feels unfit, weak, stomach unfit, or in general, in poor condition. So when someone feels *masuk-angin*, he/she can use *kerokan* as his/her healing process.

### ***Entity of Process and action***

The growth of ISTW, especially in big cities, shows the complexity of process and simultaneously actions. Numerous networks and teamworks involved ISTW related activities, from spices farmers, local traders, traditional producers, spa services of domestic and international level, therapist, education and training on herbal and its use; up to regulation authorities and lincense offices.

Unquestionably, women play substantial role within those network and teamwork. The fundamental role of women is as the guardian of local wisdom, which ranging from sources of methods in planting, production and the use of each or mixed plants in the service to customers of ISTW.

### ***Entity of Attainment and Natural Material***

Indonesia is very rich natural resources for materials to be utilised in ISTW. Plants or spices, such as lemongrass, ginger or turmeric, which are mostly used in traditional wellness as basic materials, are easily found in Indonesia. Of course not only those three kinds of plants, but noni fruit, lime or many roots of herbal are also among popular domestic resources. These natural materials can also be processed in the forms of oil, powder and ointment for traditional herbal medication or wellness. Several works being guarded traditionally and some stages of production have applied the modern technology. The nine regionals showed that diversity of

materials and products from local resources were being applied in ISTW. Local wisdom in every ethnics of Nine Regionals protects the perception, values and custom on health, wellness and the beauty in using natural resources which nowadays known as ecosystem harmony.

Many studies in exploring philosophical side of ISTW are endless. Martha Tilaar *et al.* in “The Green Science of Jamu: Pendekatan Pragmatik untuk Kecantikan dan Kesehatan” (2010, *The Green Science of Herbal Medication: A pragmatism Approach for Beauty and Health*) wrote about (i) the wealth and the diversity of biological resources in Indonesia are source of medication and cosmetics; (ii) the variety of culture that applying Green Science for medication and cosmetics; (iii) the use of *jamu* (traditional herbal drinking medication) is a form of ethnomedicine from the past till today, (iv) philosophy of beauty of Javanese princess inspired in the development of products of beauty and wellness in Indonesia. Those three entities are within the equilibrium of the community and the use of plants for practising ISTW based on the strength of their own culture.

Basic plants are consisted of primary agent and supporting agent. In the making of wellness formula, one or two plants play as primary agent while the others as supporting one. Supporting agents can be added either for taste, aroma or color. Adding *buah asam* (tamarind) or *jeruk nipis* (lime) intends for minimising bitter taste of primary agents. Or, using *bunga mawar* (rose), or *melati* (jasmine), or *kayu cendana* (sandalwood) for fragrances. Liquid supporting agents can be made from plants, wood or animal. *Minyak kelapa* (virgin coconut oil), *minyak zaitun* (olive oil) or *minyak bulus* (turtle oil, *amyda cartilaginea*) are popular supporting agents for massages.

Foster and Barbara Anderson (1986) analysed that illness can be explained with systemic category. Naturalistic system accepts equilibrium model, *eg.* healthy is when permanent elements in the body (hot, cold, fluit in the body, or *yin-yang*) is in balance condition according to the age, natural and social condition of such person. When the balance is disturbed, it is an illness then. *Ayurweda* of India and Chinese Traditional Medicine of China are the legacy of Great Tradition in Medication in human civilisation.

## **Concept of Universal Similarity**

### ***Medical System is an integral part of Culture***

Universal Similarity in various traditional medical systems occur in ISTW. From raw materials, making process of the products, applying up to methods of service can not be separated from medical system in each ethnic culture. For example, in the Javanese wellness, practising *luluran* (body scrubbing) is also found in other ethnics (eg. in Balinese, Banjarese, Bugis, Madurese, to name some) who has product of *lulur* (the ointment, cream, balm).

### ***Illness determined by Culture***

Keeping in shape condition through STWS is cultural practices based on the believes, values, myth and taboo about ill-healthy condition. For instances, when the kind of illness due to unstable hot and cold elements in the body occurred, it is not an illness when determined as normal. When someone feels *masuk-angin*, which does not need medication, then he/she only needs *kerokan* or to drink a specific drink [for example: *wedang jahe* (hot ginger), or *teh sereh* (lemongrass tea)] to cure his/her *masuk-angin*. This approach is categorised as naturalistic system which the curement is conducted in natural ways to balance the elements in the body.

On the contrary, when a condition of illness found and cannot be explained with their knowledge, then the symptom would be responded seriously or assumed as heavy illness.

### **Every medical system has preventive and treatment elements**

Culture establishes many ways of preventive and treatment methods based on the beliefs, experiences and cultural inheritance process. A habit on consuming *jamu* (herbal drink), or having massage, *kerokan*, *bekam* (hijama; originally an Arabic healing by wet cupping method) proved that medical system on every culture has preventive and treatment elements. Materials, processing processes, or methods can be varied but oftenly there is similarity on the philosophy, beliefs, method or action. Eventhough as preventive measurement, STWS still has curative, and/or rehabilitative functions.

### ***Medical system has numerous functions***

Being part of medical system, Traditional Spa has several functions. Firstly is providing rationale on the method of healing. Massage, *kerokan*, aromatherapy, drinking *jamu*, have their own logic. Why STWS still being practice, even being taught from generation to generation? Why specific plant and roots must be crushed in the *pipisan* (thick stone plate) other than using electric equipment? All the questions related to the “why” shows the dynamics of culture related to STWS. In recent situation, Traditional Spa even has function as national identity in the global perspective.

### **Gender perspective, Health and Lifestyle Change**

As we are now aware that ISTW is product of culture which unseparable in the cycle of life of Indonesian people, Indonesian Women play a substantial role from time to time, from one place to another place. Traditionally, Indonesian Women is the center of marriage life and in the family, from the role of biological reproductive, productive role related to income generating household, up to their role in the community.

In the community, Indonesian women maintain health and wellness through the use of plants that grow in the neighborhood or, even, with utilization of *bumbu dapur* (kitchen herbs). Onion, for example, practically always available in every kitchen, contains anti-cholesterol and antioxidant. In the community, their role include protecting the enviroment and preservation of life in their neighborhood.

From the historical perspective, many Indonesian Women are founder and the leader of companies, inventor of products, farmer of spices materials, maker of *jamu* and its related products, spa therapist, up to the consumer of the of both the products and spa services.

In the patriarchy dominance community, specific herbal recipes are intended to women as wife to the purpose of husband sexual satisfaction for the harmony of marriage life. Some of the beliefs, taboo, myth, and cultural practices valid only for women for keeping shape and healthy which in the end is for the interest of the husband. Women suggested to consume and to avoid certain food and drink not because of healthy reason but for her ”service” to sexually

satisfy her husband. In Betawi Spa of the Jakarta, for example, *Jamu Surga* (literally, heavenly herbs) is suggested to be consumed by wives to increase her "sexual service" to her husband.

According to Mrs Mooryati Soedibjo, a well known pioneer in Javanese-based cosmetic industry, *luluran* treatment in Javanese Spa often known as the "Queen of Treatment" because of the bride-to-be mandatorily has to take 40-days-lulur-treatment prior to the wedding day. Other than that, the bride-to-be has to take *Komaratih* (Javanese legend of a very beautiful woman) treatment while the groom-to-be take *Komajaya* (Javanese legend of good looking man) treatment to have his/her face glowingly and their skin look soft at their wedding day. (Mrs Mooryati Soediby, "Perawatan Spa Jawa" (*Javanese Spa Treatment*), paper presented in Konferensi Nasional Pengembangan Spa Indonesia (*National Conference on the Development of Indonesian Spa*), Bali, 8 May, 2014).

Although it was a habit of women from noble family that imitating custom of the princess in the palace in the past, *luluran* become very popular in many forms of treatment. Today the products of *luluran* are varies, they are in the forms of *bedak* (powder), lotion and *boreh* (ointment). *Luluran* ia also practised among the ethnic of Madurese which is influenced by the custom of noble women in Sumenep Palace in northern part of Madura. In addition to maintain beauty, *luluran* is intended to keep cleanliness and healthiness of the skin. Couple of days prior to the wedding day, the bride-to-be has to be in seclusion and practising many ceremonies which include several times of *luluran*.

Today, *luluran* spreads out in the country with different level of service, while in big cities ISTW becomes a fruitful industry, utilising more diverse materials, like chocolate, coffee, and mud. Practically, in ISTW, the contents guarded by traditional values and beliefs are packaged in modern technology and commercial approach.

Minahasa ethnic in Menado, located in northern part of Sulawesi, has specific traditional treatment for women called *bakera*. *Bakera* is Minahasa Traditional Spa that treats women for 14 days consecutively after giving birth. A *Biang Kampung*, an elderly woman who has knowledge and skill of *bakera*, will treat woman in early morning everyday; from 14 up to 40

days. *Biang Kampung* will give massage to Bakancing (woman reproductive organ) since it believes that during pregnancy and when giving birth, such organ can be loosened and should be returned again so strong as before. (Maria Henny Pratiknjo, in “*Bakera: Spa Tradisional Orang Minahasa*” (Bakera: Minahasa Traditional Spa), paper, presented at *National Conference on the Development of Indonesian Spa*, Bali, 8 May, 2014).

Myth on women reproductive and sexuality affected the reproductive health and sexual health, including their effort responded to such myth (Azwar Anas *et al.*, 2012). This explains why women having spa treatment for the purpose of sexual organ treatment rather than healthy reason. Various studies on women health indicated that women health is vulnerable because of myth and taboos until today in several communities. Such vulnerability emphasised by research data on reproductive health from social-culture and politics perspective edited by Saparinah Sadli, Ninuk Widyantoro dan Rita Serena Kolibonso, in *Ringkasan Studi Pemantauan Status Kesehatan Seksual dan Kesehatan Reproduksi di 6 Daerah di Indonesia* (Summary on Status Monitoring of Sexual Health and Reproductive Health in Six Districts in Indonesia”), *Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan* (Women Health Foundation), 2008.

Myth and taboo on women body, women sexuality and women reproductive health cannot be separated from the role and function, as well as the women existence in family structure and the community. Myth and taboo intertwined with symbolic power which, directly or indirectly, influence policy and regulation that applies in specific community; including practices on preservation on women reproductive health. Construction of culture motivates women to give priority their body care for the interest of beautiness and sexuality treatment.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the above, some ideas can be concluded that:

1. ISTW is Medical Naturalistic System that accepts equilibrium of health and its services in preserving or restoring the balance of elements in human body. In the

future the development of ISTW should include gender perspective as a tool of critical analyses.

2. One of the ISTW function is nationalistic role of traditional health to strengthen Indonesian identity in the global relation.
3. As an integral part of Indonesian Traditional Health System, ISTW has plenty of spaces to develop green science and green product into its services. Concept of “Wellness and Health Care Tourism” should be considered to be implemented in the future.

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