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Uang Japuik as a Financial Instrument: Rethinking Indigenous Accounting in Minangkabau Adat

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes the accounting dimensions embedded within two primary customary gift instruments in Minangkabau marriage traditions in Nagari Ketapiang, Padang Pariaman Regency: uang hilang and uang japuik. The study aims to demonstrate how these indigenous instruments implicitly practice accounting principles including transaction recognition, value measurement, resource allocation, and community-based financial accountability.

Design/methodology/approach: This study employs an interpretive paradigm using an accounting ethnography method. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants comprising customary figures in Nagari Ketapiang. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) model and interpreted through a critical accounting framework.

Findings: Uang hilang represents permanent expense recognition with social investment value, measured through a communal fair value mechanism based on deliberation rather than market price. Uang japuik functions as a customary debt-credit instrument structurally analogous to a financial instrument under PSAK 71, featuring a structured repayment mechanism and a binding penalty clause equivalent to liquidated damages. A post-wedding communal accountability mechanism was also identified, reflecting transparency and public accountability principles embedded in indigenous governance.

Practical implications: The findings suggest that customary financial practices in Indonesian indigenous communities contain sophisticated accounting logic that existing formal accounting standards do not adequately capture. Policymakers and standard-setters should consider recognizing the diversity of community-based financial governance in national accounting frameworks.

Originality/value: This study is among the first to analyze uang hilang and uang japuik through an accounting lens, contributing to the literature on indigenous accounting and critical accounting in the Indonesian context. The study proposes a four-pillar indigenous accounting framework derived from Minangkabau adat practices.

Paper type: Empirical/Qualitative

Keywords: uang hilang, uang japuik, indigenous accounting, customary accountability, Minangkabau marriage, critical accounting

1. Introduction

Accounting as a discipline cannot be separated from the social and cultural context in which it is practiced. Hofstede (1984) asserts that the cultural values of a society significantly influence the accounting systems and practices that prevail within it. Consequently, contemporary accounting scholarship has extended well beyond conventional business-entity accounting into the realms of social accounting, environmental accounting, and indigenous accounting—practices grounded in local wisdom (Kamla, Gallhofer, & Haslam, 2006).

In the Indonesian context, indigenous communities have long practiced distinctive forms of accountability and resource management, yet these rarely receive serious scholarly attention from an accounting perspective. One compelling phenomenon is the Minangkabau customary marriage tradition in West Sumatra, which involves two primary financial gift instruments: uang hilang and uang japuik. These instruments are not merely cultural artifacts; they embody complex and coherent economic and accounting logic (Triyuwono, 2006).

Nagari Ketapiang in Padang Pariaman Regency is a nagari that consistently preserves this tradition. Within its customary marriage ceremonies, flows of financial resources occur between the bride and groom's families through mechanisms of recognition, measurement, and accountability that are both unique and sophisticated. Uang hilang is acknowledged as a permanent, non-refundable gift; uang japuik operates as a form of customary receivable returned in a larger amount, subject to binding customary penalty provisions in the event of cancellation.

Despite the relevance of these phenomena to accounting research, no prior study has specifically examined these instruments through an accounting lens within the local context of Nagari Ketapiang. This gap motivates the present study. The research questions are: (1) How can uang hilang be analyzed from the perspective of accounting recognition and measurement? (2) How does uang japuik reflect the characteristics of a customary financial instrument containing accounting logic? (3) How do the value-setting and accountability mechanisms of both instruments reflect the principles of community-based accountability?

This study contributes to the literature on indigenous accounting and critical accounting by constructing a theoretical framework grounded in Minangkabau adat practice, and offers implications for accounting standard-setters regarding the recognition of community-based financial governance in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Indigenous Accounting and Social Accounting

Indigenous accounting refers to the practices of recording, reporting, and financial accountability that develop organically within an indigenous community based on its local values and norms (Yamamura, Suzuki, & Imanishi, 2013). Unlike Western accounting, which is oriented toward business entities and profit, indigenous accounting emphasizes communal accountability, resource redistribution, and the maintenance of social relationships.

Gray, Owen, and Adams (1996) define social accounting as an extension of conventional accounting that considers the social, cultural, and environmental impacts of an entity's economic activities. In this framework, the reporting entity is not limited to corporations but extends to communities and customary institutions that collectively manage shared resources.

2.2 Recognition and Measurement Theory

Within the IASB (2018) Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting, recognition is the process of capturing an element in the accounting system when it meets the applicable definition and recognition criteria. Measurement involves determining the monetary value of recognized items. Although no formal financial statements exist in the adat context, recognition and measurement occur informally through deliberation and socially binding agreements.

The concept of sunk cost in management accounting refers to costs that have already been incurred and cannot be recovered, and should therefore not influence future decisions (Horngren, Datar, & Rajan, 2015). This concept is directly relevant to understanding the permanent, non-refundable character of uang hilang.

2.3 Community-Based Accountability Theory

Roberts and Scapens (1985) define accountability as a social relationship in which an individual or party provides an account of their actions to another party with a legitimate interest. In indigenous communities, accountability encompasses not only financial but also moral and social dimensions.

Sinclair (1995) developed a multidimensional accountability framework encompassing political, public, managerial, professional, personal, and spiritual dimensions. In the Minangkabau adat context, accountability aligns most closely with the social and moral dimensions, wherein accountability to fellow community members and to adat itself constitutes the primary basis for resource stewardship.

2.4 Social Exchange Theory

Blau's (1964) social exchange theory explains that social interactions frequently involve the exchange of resources—both material and non-material—governed by norms of reciprocity. This norm functions not merely as an economic mechanism but also as an instrument for maintaining social relationships and communal solidarity.

The mechanism of uang japuik being returned in a larger amount exemplifies this principle of reciprocity, which strengthens the familial bond between two newly united families rather than constituting a purely economic transaction.

2.5 Financial Instruments in Accounting

PSAK 71 (IAI, 2017) defines a financial instrument as any contract that gives rise to a financial asset for one entity and a financial liability or equity instrument for another. Although uang japuik does not take the form of a written contract, the customary provisions that are socially binding may be understood as a form of social contract possessing binding force within the community.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Paradigm and Approach

This study adopts an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative approach. The interpretive paradigm was selected because the study seeks to understand the meanings constructed by indigenous communities regarding their financial management practices in customary marriage, rather than measuring or quantifying nominal values alone (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

The method employed is accounting ethnography—an approach that integrates deep contextual observation of cultural settings with analysis of the accounting practices embedded within them (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006). This method allows the researcher not only to document what occurs but also to understand why and how customary financial practices are meaningful to those who enact them.

3.2 Research Site and Informants

The study was conducted in Nagari Ketapiang, Batang Anai District, Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra Province. Key informants comprised two individuals: (1) Mamak Uniang, a customary figure with deep knowledge of the gift-giving system in local customary marriage; and (2) Bapak Ajo Marah, a community member with direct experience in customary marriage ceremonies. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria of knowledge and direct experience with the research object.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, field observation, and documentary study. The interview guide was designed to specifically explore: (a) the value-setting mechanism for uang hilang and uang japuik; (b) the flow of funds between families; (c) repayment provisions and customary sanctions; (d) accountability mechanisms for fund use; and (e) community perspectives on the value and meaning of both instruments.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) model, encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview data were analyzed using a critical accounting framework to identify the accounting elements embedded in customary practice, including: transaction recognition, value measurement, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and method triangulation (Sugiyono, 2019).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Uang Hilang as Permanent Expense Recognition

In-depth interviews with Mamak Uniang revealed that uang hilang is a gift from the bride's family to the groom's family that, by adat, is never returned. The gift is understood as a form of appreciation to the groom's family for raising and educating the prospective husband.

From an accounting perspective, uang hilang can be identified as permanent expense recognition. In management accounting terminology, it possesses the characteristics of a sunk cost—an expenditure that has occurred and cannot be recovered, generating no asset whose return value can be measured (Horngren, Datar, & Rajan, 2015). It satisfies the IASB (2018) expense recognition criteria: there is a decrease in the economic benefit of the bride's family without an expectation of quantifiable future economic benefit. The benefit obtained by the bride's family is non-financial in nature—social legitimacy, community honor, and recognition from the groom's family.

This finding aligns with Tinker's (1985) critical accounting observation that conventional accounting frequently fails to capture non-financial values that are highly significant in social contexts. The true value of uang hilang lies not in its nominal amount but in its social and moral dimensions.

Regarding measurement, the value of uang hilang is not set according to a fixed normative standard but through a bilateral negotiation mechanism between both families in a deliberative forum. This mechanism reflects a consensual fair value concept—what this study terms communal fair value—in which the value is determined by parties with adequate information and a free will to transact (IASB, 2018). The family deliberation forum functions as a customary 'market' where a fair value is collectively determined.

4.2 Uang Japuik as a Customary Debt-Credit Instrument

Uang japuik possesses the most complex accounting characteristics of the two instruments. According to Mamak Uniang, uang japuik is fundamentally symbolic as a gesture of respect to the groom's family and is generally returned to the bride's family—even in an amount larger than the original sum.

From an accounting perspective, uang japuik can be analyzed as a customary receivable-payable instrument. At the time of transfer, the bride's family implicitly recognizes a customary receivable over the amount given to the groom's family, while the groom's family recognizes a customary payable to be fulfilled after the wedding. This mechanism is structurally analogous to a financial instrument under PSAK 71 (IAI, 2017), although the entire process operates within a framework of social norms rather than written contracts.

The provision for return in a larger amount introduces an element of return on 'investment.' In financial accounting terms, this is analogous to an investment instrument yielding a value greater than the original principal—an instrument implicitly containing the time value of money, though not formulated as an interest rate as in formal financial instruments.

The most significant dimension of uang japuik from an accounting perspective is the penalty clause embedded in its mechanism. Customary provisions in Nagari Ketapiang stipulate that if cancellation originates from the groom's side, uang japuik must be returned twofold to the bride's family. Conversely, if cancellation originates from the bride's side, uang japuik becomes the full right of the groom's family. This mechanism reflects awareness of risk management in customary transactions—a concept at the core of modern accounting and finance.

This penalty clause is functionally equivalent to liquidated damages in conventional financial contracts—compensation predetermined as compensation for breach of contract. These findings suggest that the indigenous community of Nagari Ketapiang has long practiced principles of rights protection and contractual risk management well before these concepts were codified in accounting standards and civil law.

From the perspective of Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, the reciprocity mechanism in uang japuik is not merely an economic transaction but a tool for maintaining and strengthening social relationships between two newly united families. Return in a larger amount constitutes a social signal communicating good faith, financial capability, and commitment—a form of social reporting using financial resources as a medium for communicating non-financial values.

4.3 Communal Fair Value in Value Deliberation

Neither uang hilang nor uang japuik carries a fixed nominal standard imposed unilaterally by adat. Value determination always proceeds through deliberation between both families, considering each party's economic capacity and relational harmony.

From an accounting perspective, this constitutes a unique form of value measurement that this study terms communal fair value—value determined not by formal market mechanisms but by a communal deliberative process that simultaneously weighs social, economic, and relational factors. This concept is more inclusive than the IASB's fair value construct (IASB, 2018), which is solely market-oriented, as it integrates considerations of capacity, equity, and relational sustainability.

When the bride's family is economically disadvantaged, gift values may be adjusted through deliberation without sacrificing the essence of adat. This flexibility reflects a principle of communal going concern—wherein the continuity of the relationship and social harmony are prioritized over the fulfillment of rigid nominal values. This concept resonates with Hines's (1988) critique that conventional accounting often fails to capture social reality because of its excessive focus on numerical representation.

4.4 Post-Wedding Accountability as Communal Accountability

The most significant finding from a public accounting perspective is the existence of a customarily institutionalized mechanism for accountability over the use of uang hilang and uang japuik. After the wedding celebration, the groom's family is obligated to convene all mamak and family members from both sides to deliver an oral account of fund use, encompassing: (a) total funds received from both instruments; (b) a breakdown of expenditures during the ceremony; and (c) any remaining balance and its planned allocation for household life.

This mechanism substantially satisfies Sinclair's (1995) accountability criteria: an obligation on the part of the resource-holder to account to all stakeholders with a legitimate interest. In this context, all extended family members and customary figures act as stakeholders entitled to information about the use of resources derived from shared tradition.

Although conducted orally and informally, the essence of this mechanism is equivalent to public financial reporting: the disclosure of relevant, timely, and verifiable information to interested parties. This aligns with what Kamla et al. (2006) term counter accounting—accounting practices that arise from communities to serve community interests rather than capital interests.

Furthermore, this mechanism reflects principles of good governance grounded in local wisdom, encompassing transparency, participation, and accountability (Mardiasmo, 2018). This demonstrates that the indigenous community of Nagari Ketapiang has long possessed a functional and effective financial governance system well before the concept of good governance was formalized in modern management frameworks.

4.5 Social Materiality versus Financial Materiality

Bapak Ajo Marah's view that marriage is not a transaction and that value-setting should not burden either party reflects a concept of materiality that differs from conventional accounting. In conventional accounting, materiality refers to the significance of information to the decisions of financial statement users, measured in monetary units.

In the adat context of Nagari Ketapiang, what is 'material' is not the nominal amount of uang hilang or uang japuik but the quality of the relationship and the harmony created through the giving process. This is social materiality—wherein the value of a transaction is measured by its impact on social bonds and community cohesion rather than solely by its monetary magnitude.

This finding is consistent with Hines's (1988) critique that by constructing reality solely in financial dimensions, conventional accounting reduces and distorts the richness of a far more complex social reality. Uang hilang and uang japuik demonstrate that there are dimensions of value that cannot be captured by numbers yet remain real and meaningful in community life.

4.6 A Four-Pillar Indigenous Accounting Framework for Nagari Ketapiang

Based on the comprehensive analysis of uang hilang and uang japuik, this study proposes a four-pillar indigenous accounting framework for Nagari Ketapiang:

First, Adat-Based Transaction Recognition: both instruments are recognized as valid and binding at the point of deliberative agreement, not at the point of physical cash transfer. This constitutes a substance-over-form basis of recognition.

Second, Communal Fair Value Measurement: the value of both instruments is determined through bilateral negotiation that integrates economic capacity and relational harmony—more inclusive and contextual than market-based measurement in conventional accounting.

Third, Equitable Allocation with Reciprocity: uang hilang flows as a provision to the groom's family, while uang japuik ultimately returns to the bride's family. This redistribution mechanism ensures that both parties benefit proportionally from the marriage process.

Fourth, Institutionalized Communal Accountability: accountability for the use of both instruments is discharged transparently to the entire community through a post-wedding deliberative forum, reflecting authentic and effective public accountability.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that uang hilang and uang japuik in the customary marriage tradition of Nagari Ketapiang are not merely cultural instruments but embody complex and coherent accounting logic. Both implicitly practice accounting principles in ways that effectively serve community needs.

Uang hilang represents permanent expense recognition carrying social investment value, measured through a communal fair value mechanism that weighs economic capacity and relational harmony. Uang japuik is a customary debt-credit instrument most closely analogous to a formal financial instrument, equipped with a structured repayment mechanism, a penalty clause equivalent to liquidated damages, and a reciprocity dimension that strengthens inter-family social bonds.

The deliberation mechanism for value determination reflects communal fair value, a concept more inclusive than conventional fair value as it integrates social, economic, and relational considerations. The post-wedding public accountability mechanism demonstrates that the principles of accountability and transparency have long been embedded in the financial governance of Nagari Ketapiang's adat.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its development of indigenous accounting as an important sub-field within accounting scholarship in the Indonesian context, while reinforcing the critical accounting argument that accounting is not a neutral and universal science but a social practice shaped by and meaningful within specific cultural contexts. The proposed four-pillar indigenous accounting framework offers a foundation for future comparative research across other Minangkabau nagari.

For accounting regulators and standard-setters in Indonesia, the findings serve as an important reminder that standards designed for formal business entities may be insufficient to capture the financial reality of indigenous communities. There is a need for space within the accounting standard discourse to accommodate the diversity of communal financial governance practices that exist in Indonesian society. Future research employing mixed methods that combine accounting ethnography with monetary value analysis is recommended to provide a more comprehensive picture of Minangkabau indigenous financial systems.

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