

# **Kinship and Identity of the Toba Batak in the Multi-ethnic City of Jakarta**

2nd year student  
Indonesia Field School  
Research Area: Indonesia  
HIRATA Ikuko

Keywords: urban migration, identity, minority, affinal alliance, religion

## **Background and objectives of my research**

Urban cities in Indonesia have multi-ethnic peoples and the population is getting higher annually. Jakarta. The capital of Indonesia particularly is a mega city which holds the population of 10 million with various ethnics groups.

The Batak is one of such ethnic groups and their homeland is a high rolling plateau in interior north-central Sumatra. The Batak is divided into six sub-ethnic groups: Karo, Pakpak, Simalungun, Toba, Angkola, and Mandailing. Their total population is about 6 millions that accounts for 2.5% of the population of Indonesia.

This study focuses on the kinship and affinal alliance of the Toba Batak who have immigrated from their homeland in North Sumatra to Jakarta, to elucidate the identity construction of the Toba Batak living in the multi-ethnic city of Jakarta.

The Batak living in Jakarta number approximately four hundred and forty thousand, and the largest sub-ethnic group is the Toba Batak among them. Their society has been ordered by patrilineal descent and asymmetric alliance. Exogamy still operates at the clan level, with some exceptions. Each marriage establishes a long-term affinal alliance with complicated ritual exchanges between two descent groups.

In the post colonial era, the Batak elite started to immigrate to big cities for education, and in 1960's under the Suharto administration, the number of immigrants who sought for jobs has explosively increased.

During my stay in Jakarta, I have visited some weddings and then focused on the movement of the bridewealth or gifts exchanged among relatives, to clarify the density or the relationship of them. In ordinary lives in Jakarta, a wide circle of individual relatives are not on visiting terms with each other, but instead of that, ethnic churches play a key role to connect each sub-group of Batak, by giving the opportunity to find spouses or communicate with neighbors and relatives.



picture 1: at wedding, wife givers(*hula-hula*) bring rice to their wife takers(*boru*)



picture 2: bride's parents giving a Batak traditional cloth(*ulos*) to the brides



picture 3: youths practicing a hymn after the service of their church