

The Sustainability of the Performance Art of Bathing Babies in the River among the Iban Community

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Abstract. This paper aims to discuss the sustainability of the performance art of Bathing Babies in the river among the Iban community (the largest indigenous group in Sarawak). The sustainability of the Performance Art of Bathing Babies in the river among the Iban community is the key to life. Hence, there are many ritual festivals and rites activities throughout the year in unique yet distinctive manners. Another significant traditional practice among the Iban was rice farming. The Iban community interacted with nature by depending on natural resources which indirectly maintained a harmonious relationship with nature. Appreciation and respect for nature as essential in the Iban community. In general, wild plants and animals can be preserved. Iban communities were extraordinarily rich in traditions and culture. These values include their cumulative deposits of knowledge, beliefs, religion, universal concept, and material object required and passed on from the ancestors to the younger generations.

Keywords: culture, longhouse, indigenous group, traditional, appreciation, performance

1 Introduction

“Sea Dayak” or better known as Dayak people is a title given by the British to the Iban people in the past. This is so because it is very appropriate to the situation of the Dayak people who at that time lived on the edge of the river. The practice of animism was practiced by the Iban community in the past because the Iban community strongly believed in taboos. Animism means belief in the spirit of nature and the worship of spirits. The nature that is worshiped involves all the living things that exist in the living environment of the Iban community in the past. Among the living

things that are worshiped are animals and plants. Sky, earth, river and sea are also worshipped. This is so because the Iban community believes that each of these elements has its own spirit which is believed to be able to protect the Iban community from disasters and bad things that are not wanted to happen. In addition, the Iban community also attaches great importance to customs, where the Iban community considers customs and taboos to be part of their lives. This practice of animism has been inherited since the time of our ancestors. Because the Iban community practices animism, there are various beliefs about nature. The river is between the source and the source that serves as the basis of the life of the Iban community. The Iban community is very dependent on the river because the river is a connecting road from one place to another. Therefore, the Iban community strongly believes that in the river there are various types of spirits that are spirits that are the guardians or guardians of the river. Even in this very modern age, the Iban community is still holding firm in defending customs and still practicing animism.

1.1 Research Objective

The objective of this study was to investigate the significant correlation of ritual and bathing baby in the river among the Iban society. It also aimed to explore the role of expertise in performing the ritual of bathing baby according to the traditional methods and cultures.

1.2 Research Question

1. What are the roles of ritual towards bathing baby in the river?

2 Methodology

This research is based on exploratory research. A qualitative approach was used as the research design as field notes and criterion sampling strategy were implemented. The criterion sampling was interviewed to acquire the information as the result of the research.

Field notes were prepared to obtain information about the roles of ritual after considering the related literature. Field notes were filled during the interview session among the focused groups. The field notes utilized interviews and focus groups can be generated multiple times [1]. Following transcription of the interview or focus group and/or the field notes, some researchers use the field notes to “add back” critical nonverbal content into the interview or focus groups transcript [2]. The final section was concluded for triangulation proposes. This process included identifying the Iban communities’ concern and solution to their concerns.


Table 1. The Instruments Used to Gather Research Data

Research Instrument	Explanation
Field Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify Iban community daily activities - Participate in the ritual of Bathing Baby - Take notes and visual proof during the ritual of Bathing Baby
Interview	Interview ritual expert (<i>Lembang or Manang</i>) who performed the ritual

3. Findings

The ritual of Bathing Baby performed during the ceremony was carried out by the expert.

Table 2. Ritual of Bathing Baby

Type of Activity	Explanation	Image
First activity: Ceremony of “ <i>Miring</i> ”	This ceremony is symbolic opening for the food preparation offering to God.	
Second activity: Marched to the river	The sound of gongs echoed throughout the processions down to the river to avoid unwanted birdsong.	

Third activity:
Bathing the babies

The event of bathing a baby in the river is done by a baby carrier.



Four activity:
Baby wrapped

Babies will be wrapped by using *pua kumbu*.



3. Analysis and Discussion

The tradition of bathing babies in the river is a necessity and culture in the Iban community, especially for those who still practice cultural beliefs and heritage among the Iban community. The Iban community believes that by practicing this tradition they can prevent their babies or children from being in danger while in the river. The Iban community strongly believes that the tradition of bathing babies in the river is symbolic of life. The Iban community believes that the god of all rivers and water called "*Sera Gindi*" protects and takes care of their children. For example if there

is a shipwreck or drowning in the river, the water creature can help them to avoid misfortune or accident while in the river.

In the Iban culture and society, the tradition of bathing a baby in the river is a highlight in the Iban society where this event is done very carefully and is more complex after the baby is given a name by the parents. The tradition of bathing babies is usually done every year on Dayak Gawai Day. Since the event of bathing babies in the river is held on Gawai Dayak Day. The Iban community takes this opportunity to participate in the event of bathing babies in the river. It allows the Iban community who are outside the longhouse area, especially those who are in the city, to be able to participate in bathing babies in the river. Through the tradition of bathing babies in the river, the Iban community realizes that they have a unique identity.

The Iban community believes in the existence of the power of the universe where it needs to be adored, cared for and respected so that unwanted things do not happen. Each behavior needs to start with "*Miring*" ceremony so that the event of bathing the baby in the river runs smoothly. "*Miring*" ceremony is important because it is the preparation of a plate or "food preparation" to be given to Gods that are worshiped so that the Gods can provide protection to the Iban community, especially children or babies who have been bathed in the river.

The tradition of bathing babies is usually done early in the morning after the preparation of plates in the *ruai* by the Iban community in the long house. Plates will also be brought when taking the baby down to the river to bathe the baby. After finishing the "*Miring*" ceremony, the ceremony continued by taking the baby to the river accompanied by a group of witnesses and led by the head of the longhouse. The flag will be carried by the head of the longhouse and an assistant will carry a chicken to offer to the gods. The spear or harpoon will be carried by an assistant if the baby being bathed is a boy, while the sling will be carried by a woman if the baby is a girl. *Leletan* is a special wooden tool used to weave cloth.

In the procession carrying the baby down to the river, two adult women are responsible for carrying the plate while another woman will carry the baby behind using a cloth called *pua beletan* [3]. *Pua beletan* is a special fabric that is embroidered with floral patterns and is white in color. Next, the procession was accompanied by a man carrying a shotgun, followed by members of the baby's family and then the longhouse community. In addition, the procession is accompanied by a group of musicians whose position is at the very back. These musicians will play musical instruments such as gongs, *tawak* and instruments throughout the baby bathing event. This is so because it is believed that, by playing the musical instrument, those who carry out the ceremony of bathing the baby do not hear unwanted sounds such as the sound of birds because the sound of these birds indicates a bad omen.

The ceremony continued as they reached the river. The male assistant who had brought a chicken crossed the river and recited the mantra to be called to the god. In his prayer, he called upon the god of water and river, which is "*Sera Gindi*", who is the creator of river and water, including all aquatic animals such as fish, to protect their children while they are in the river and avoid threats or danger while in the river. Next, the community leader who brought the flag went down to the river to cut or cut the water using a sword. This shows the symbolism of killing any evil element in the river. Using the same sword, a chicken was slaughtered by the river so that the blood of the chicken flowed throughout the river and at that time, the gun carrier fired into the air to shock the babies. Chicken wings will be cut and placed on a plate. The plate will be hung on a spear for a baby boy while for a baby girl the plate will be placed on a string or woven stick. Both of these

objects symbolize the main activity for men which are fighting or war while the stretchy object symbolizes the activity of weaving.

After the event of bathing the baby in the river is over, everyone present started marching back to the long house. The procession was led by the village chief who held the flag and everyone involved started marching to the long house. During the March home, the drum was also hammered as it was done at the beginning of the ceremony. They were greeted by longhouse residents who did not participate in the ceremony with a welcome event. In the ceremony, the babies were then handed over to their respective mothers. Mothers of the babies sat on a gong that is closed using *pua kumbu* while holding their babies.

They are surrounded by longhouse residents and the leader of the ceremony called *lemambang* will start the *bebiau* ceremony by waving a chicken over the mothers and babies. The purpose of baby *dibiau* (waving the chicken) is to be cleansed of all unwanted things so that they grow up healthy and perfect. The people who performed the "*Biau*" ceremony are chosen based on those who are intelligent, hardworking, and highly educated. This is so that the baby can be blessed and inherit their abilities. *Lemambang* began to pray and ask for blessings from the gods and spirits. *Lemambang* who recites the prayer will dip his finger into a basin filled with water. The water contains gold, silver, protective stones, and charm stones [3]. The ingredients in the basin will be sprinkled on the heads of mothers and babies. After the ceremony is over, all residents of the longhouse and guests will be served delicacies and food. Thus, the babies who had been given a bath earlier were officially accepted and recognized by the residents of the long house.

4. Conclusion

There are several roles that should be performed by experts in the traditional affairs of bathing babies in the river. Among them is to encourage young parents to participate in practicing the tradition of bathing babies in the river. With the lack of experts like *Lemambang*, this heritage and tradition will not be able to continue if they do not pass on the knowledge they have to the younger generation. Young parents should be concerned about the importance of preserving the heritage and culture of bathing babies in this river. This is because this custom is a generational tradition in the Iban community. Young people should also be trained and educated about the importance of the heritage and culture of bathing babies in the river. Younger generation must learn and practice heritage and culture of the Iban community. The Iban community and heritage should not be neglected the heritage has been passed down from generation to generation in the Iban community. Although the arrival of religion into the Iban community has caused the Iban community to rarely practice this tradition, there are still a few Iban communities who were concerned and practiced the heritage and culture of bathing babies in the river.

References

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