

The Philosophical Meaning of the Traditional Fire Racing Dance as a Cultural Heritage of Halong Village

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap makna filosofis dan nilai-nilai budaya yang terkandung dalam Tari Balalap Api, sebuah warisan budaya unik masyarakat Dayak Deah di Desa Halong, Kabupaten Balangan, Kalimantan Selatan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode etnografi, penelitian ini menggabungkan studi pustaka, observasi partisipatif, dan wawancara mendalam dengan para pelaku tari, tokoh adat, dan anggota masyarakat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Tari Balalap Api memiliki makna filosofis yang kompleks, meliputi hubungan manusia dengan alam dan dunia spiritual, konsep keseimbangan kosmik, serta representasi ketangguhan dan resiliensi manusia. Tarian ini juga berfungsi sebagai medium komunikasi dengan leluhur dan simbol identitas kultural Dayak Deah. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan modernisasi, Tari Balalap Api tetap dilestarikan sebagai warisan budaya yang berharga, mencerminkan kearifan lokal dan spiritualitas masyarakat Dayak Deah.

Kata kunci: tradisi, budaya, dayak deah.

Abstract

This study aims to uncover the philosophical meaning and cultural values contained in the Balalap Api Dance, a unique cultural heritage of the Dayak Deah community in Halong Village, Balangan Regency, South Kalimantan. Using a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods, this study combines literature studies, participatory observations, and in-depth interviews with dancers, traditional figures and community members. The result shows that the Balalap Api Dance has a complex philosophical meaning, including the relationship between humans and nature and the spiritual world, the concept of cosmic balance, and the representation of human toughness and resilience. This dance also functions as a medium of communication with ancestors and a symbol of the cultural identity of the Dayak Deah. Despite facing the challenges of modernization, the Balalap Api Dance is still preserved as a valuable cultural heritage, reflecting the local wisdom and spirituality of the Dayak Deah community.

Keywords: traditional, culture, dayak deah.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional dance is a form of cultural expression that contains symbolic, philosophical, and historical values that are passed down from generation to generation. Using an ethnographic approach to analyze the relationship between dance movements and symbolism in society, which shows that this dance functions as a vehicle for building the social and spiritual identity of the

community. Every movement, from the hands, feet, to facial expressions, contains symbolism that reflects the community's outlook on nature, God, and others (Panaringan, AR, & Sudrajat, 2023).

Each traditional dance has a deep meaning that is often associated with history, spirituality, and the social life of the local community. Previous studies have shown that the symbolic meaning in traditional dance not only represents the

beauty of the movements, but also reflects the cultural values and identity of a community. Traditional dance in Kalimantan is part of a cultural heritage that is rich in philosophical, symbolic, and spiritual values. Each dance has a meaning that is closely related to the social life, religion, and customs of the local community. For example, research on the Kinyah Mandau Hatue Dance in Central Kalimantan revealed that this dance symbolizes the strength and maturity of Dayak men. Research on the Jubata Dance of the Kanayatn Dayak Tribe highlights the transcendental value in this dance as a form of worship of nature and ancestral spirits. Based on these studies, understanding the philosophical meaning of traditional Kalimantan dance is important to maintain the sustainability of regional culture. Therefore, research on the Balalap Api Dance as a cultural heritage of Halong Village needs to be conducted to reveal the cultural values contained in it and support efforts to preserve it for future generations.

Fire racing is a unique and captivating cultural heritage in Halong Village, Indonesia. This tradition, which has been going on for generations, is not just a show, but a reflection of the cultural identity and spiritual values of the local community. However, amidst the rapid flow of globalization and modernization, cultural heritage such as fire racing is facing the threat of

extinction. Changes in lifestyle, population migration, and the influx of foreign cultural influences have eroded the interest of the younger generation in their ancestral traditions, including the fire racing attraction in Halong Village. Although this attraction is still carried out routinely, there are serious concerns about its sustainability in the future. Some of the main challenges faced include the lack of interest of the younger generation to learn and preserve this tradition, limited documentation and in-depth research on the history and meaning of the fire racing attraction, and the risk of losing knowledge and skills related to its implementation due to the lack of knowledge transfer between generations. In addition, changes in the socio-economic landscape also affect the priorities of the community in maintaining their cultural traditions.

On the other hand, the fire racing attraction has great potential as a cultural asset that can support tourism and empower the local community's economy. However, the development of this potential must be carried out carefully so as not to sacrifice the authentic values and spiritual meaning of the tradition. Therefore, in-depth research on the fire racing attraction as a cultural heritage of Halong Village is very important. This study will cover various aspects, ranging from history, philosophical meaning, implementation techniques, to challenges

and strategies for its preservation in the modern era. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the fire racing attraction and its contribution to the cultural identity of Halong Village. By analyzing various aspects of this tradition, it is hoped that an effective strategy can be formulated to preserve and develop the fire racing attraction as a valuable cultural heritage. The results of this study will not only benefit the people of Halong Village, but can also be a model for efforts to preserve similar cultural heritage in other areas. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution in efforts to maintain the continuity and relevance of cultural traditions amidst the challenges of modernity. This study aims to analyze the philosophical meaning and cultural values contained in the fire racing attraction. And analyzing the perception of the younger generation towards fire racing attractions so that this research is interesting to be raised.

METHODS

This study will use a qualitative method that will begin with a literature study based on video recordings to gather initial information about the Balalap Api dance and its cultural context in Halong Village. Furthermore, the researcher will conduct participatory observation by observing and even participating in the dance performance to gain a deep understanding

of the movements, costumes, music, and other elements. In-depth interviews will be conducted with dancers, traditional figures, and community members who have knowledge of this dance to uncover the philosophical meaning and cultural values contained therein. Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. In participatory observation, researchers were directly involved in cultural activities related to the Balalap Api dance in order to observe the performance process, the symbols that emerged, and the accompanying social interactions. In-depth interviews were conducted with traditional figures, dancers, village elders, and local cultural figures to explore information about the philosophical values contained in the dance. Interviews were semi-structured to remain flexible but still focused. In addition, documentation studies were conducted to complement primary data, through searching archives, photos, videos of performances, and literature related to local culture and traditional performing arts (Sugiyono, 2019).

The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques based on the Miles and Huberman model. The analysis process includes data reduction, data presentation in the form of thematic narratives, and drawing conclusions based on the patterns

and themes found, such as movement symbolism, fire elements, spiritual values, and social values contained in the dance. Fire Race in the context of Halong Village cultural heritage (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Geographical Location of Halong Village

Halong Village is located in Halong District, Balangan Regency, South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. Geographically, this village is located in the Meratus Mountains region that stretches from north to south of Kalimantan Island. Halong Village is located in the northeastern part of Balangan Regency, directly bordering Tabalong Regency to the north. The village area is dominated by fertile hills and valleys, with an altitude ranging from 100 to 500 meters above sea level. Small rivers that are tributaries of the Balangan River flow through this village, providing water sources for residents and agricultural land. Tropical forests that are still quite dense surround the village, creating an ecosystem rich in biodiversity. The climate in Halong Village is classified as humid tropical with quite high rainfall throughout the year.

The location of the village in the interior of Kalimantan makes it relatively isolated, but it can still be accessed by land connecting it to the center of Balangan Regency. The Dayak Deah are

believed to have inhabited the Meratus Mountains region for hundreds of years. They are part of the Dayak Meratus group spread across several districts in South Kalimantan. Oral tradition states that their ancestors came from higher areas in the Meratus Mountains and then spread to various regions, including Halong Village. The Dayak Deah community in Halong Village still maintains a traditional social structure. They are led by a traditional leader called Damang, who plays a role in deciding customary matters and leading traditional ceremonies. Their kinship system is bilateral, where lineage is recognized from both the father's and mother's sides.

The Dayak Deah have various forms of traditional art, including dances such as the Balalap Api Dance which is a cultural heritage typical of Halong Village. They also have a musical tradition with traditional musical instruments such as the kelentangan (a type of gamelan) and the sape (a plucked instrument). Like many other indigenous communities, the Dayak Deah in Halong Village also face the challenges of modernization. They try to balance maintaining tradition and adopting technological advances and modern education. Efforts to preserve the Dayak Deah culture continue to be carried out, both by the community itself and with government support. This includes preserving language, traditional arts, and

customary rituals that are still relevant to modern life.

Philosophical Meaning of the Traditional Balalap Api Dance

Based on the results of an interview with one of the elders in the studio that still preserves the Balalap Api Dance, it contains a deep philosophical meaning, reflecting the outlook on life and local wisdom of the Dayak Deah community in Halong Village. Essentially, this dance symbolizes the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural powers. Fire, as the main element in the dance, is seen as a symbol of transformative power that can purify and give life, as well as destroy. The dancer's ability to control and play with fire symbolizes self-mastery and spiritual balance that has been achieved through discipline and intensive training. Furthermore, the Balalap Api Dance represents the human struggle in facing life's challenges. The fierce and dangerous fire is analogous to various trials and obstacles in life, while the dancer's ability to overcome fire illustrates human toughness and resilience in facing adversity. This dance also teaches the importance of courage and self-confidence, where dancers must overcome their fear in order to interact with fire safely. In the context of Dayak Deah spirituality, Balalap Api is considered a medium of communication with the spirit

world and ancestors. Dynamic dance movements and interactions with fire are believed to open the gate between the physical and spiritual worlds, allowing for the exchange of energy and messages. This confirms the Dayak Deah people's belief in the close relationship between the human world and the supernatural world. The philosophy of natural balance is also reflected in the Balalap Api Dance. Fire, which can be a friend or enemy of humans, reminds us of the importance of maintaining balance in the use of natural resources. This dance teaches that humans must live in harmony with nature, using it wisely without destroying it. Furthermore, the ability to 'conquer' fire without destroying it shows the ideal of living side by side with the greater power of nature. The Balalap Api Dance also contains a philosophy about the cycle of life. Fire that burns but also gives new life symbolizes the constant process of regeneration and renewal in life. It teaches that change and transformation are integral parts of existence, and that from every ending there is always a new beginning. Finally, this dance also symbolizes the achievement of a higher level of consciousness. The ability to overcome the pain and fear of fire illustrates the transcendence of human physical and mental limitations, towards a deeper understanding of reality and the place of humans in it. Thus, the Balalap Api Dance is not just a performance, but

an embodiment of the complex and profound philosophy of life of the Dayak Deah people.



Figure 1. Documentation with elders from the fire dance

According to the latest research by (Asdiansyah, R., & Zulyani, 2023) the fire racing attraction in Halong Village is usually held at night during important celebrations or certain traditional ceremonies. The participants, who are usually adult males, wear traditional clothing and smear their bodies with a special potion that is believed to protect them from the heat of the fire. The torches used are made from a bundle of dry coconut leaves tied to a bamboo stick, then dipped in kerosene and lit.

(Kurniawan, H., & Suhartini, 2022) in their study revealed that the fire racing attraction is not just a show, but has a deep spiritual meaning for the people of Halong Village. This ritual is believed to be a form of respect for ancestors, spiritual cleansing, and a symbol of village protection from danger. In addition, fire racing is also considered a test of courage

and physical endurance for its participants. Although the fire racing attraction is still routinely held, (Nugraha, AR, & Saputra, 2023) identified several challenges in its preservation. They noted a decline in interest among the younger generation to actively participate in this tradition, as well as concerns about safety aspects given the risks associated with the use of fire. However, their research also showed that most people in Halong Village still view the fire racing attraction as an important part of their cultural heritage that needs to be preserved.

The Balalap Api attraction is one of the most unique and amazing cultural heritages of the Dayak Deah community in Halong Village, Balangan Regency. This ritual combines elements of traditional dance with a demonstration of the body's extraordinary resistance to fire. In this attraction, the dancers, who are generally male, dance with dynamic movements while playing with the blazing fire around their bodies. They use torches made of coconut fiber or other flammable materials, which are tied to the end of a stick or held directly by hand.



Figure 2. The Fire Dancers of Halong Village

The Balalap Api dancers demonstrate their courage and spiritual strength by licking fire, walking on hot coals, or even attaching fire to parts of their bodies without suffering serious burns. This attraction is usually performed at night, creating a dramatic and stunning sight for the audience. Balalap Api is not just an entertainment show, but also has a deep ritual meaning for the Dayak Deah community. It is believed that the ability to perform Balalap Api is obtained through special rituals and intensive spiritual preparation. The Balalap Api performers must undergo fasting and self-cleansing rituals before the performance. They also use mantras and protective amulets that are believed to protect them from the dangers of fire. This attraction is often performed in a series of traditional ceremonies, harvest celebrations, or other important events in the Dayak Deah community.



Figure 3. The Fire Dancers of Halong Village

Although it looks dangerous, Balalap Api has been performed for generations and is considered a form of spiritual expression and proof of the inner strength of its practitioners. However,

along with the changing times, the frequency of Balalap Api performances has decreased. Currently, efforts to preserve and promote this attraction as a cultural asset and tourism potential are being carried out by the local community and local government, with the hope of maintaining the continuity of this unique tradition while improving the welfare of the Dayak Deah community in Halong Village.

The clothing used in the Balalap Api Dance is an important element that not only functions as a performance costume, but also contains symbolic meaning and cultural values of the Dayak Deah. Balalap Api dancers generally wear traditional clothing made from natural materials from their surroundings. The upper body of the dancer is often left naked or only covered with a short vest made of processed bark, called "zawah" or "cawat". This bark usually comes from the kapuak tree or nyamu tree which is believed to have fire-resistant properties. The lower body of the dancer is covered with a loincloth or shorts which are also made from bark or traditional woven cloth. This loincloth is often decorated with typical Dayak motifs that have symbolic meanings, such as dragon motifs, hornbills, or geometric patterns that symbolize the balance of nature. A belt made of woven rattan or animal skin is used to tighten the loincloth and also

functions as a place to store protective amulets.



Figure 4. Documentation with the Fire Dancers of Halong Village

On the head, the dancers wear a headband or "laung" made of woven cloth with typical Dayak motifs. This laung not only functions as decoration, but is also believed to have magical powers to protect the wearer. Some dancers also wear crowns or headdresses made of bird feathers, especially hornbill feathers which are considered sacred in Dayak beliefs. Additional accessories such as necklaces, bracelets, and anklets made of beads, animal teeth or fangs, and other natural materials are often worn to complete the costume. These accessories not only function as decoration, but are also believed to have spiritual powers to protect the dancer from the dangers of fire. The dominant colors in the Balalap Api Dance attire are usually red, black, and white. Red symbolizes courage and passion, black represents strength and resilience, while white symbolizes purity and connection with the spiritual world. This combination of colors also reflects the cosmic balance in the Dayak Deah

people's outlook on life. It is important to note that although there is a general pattern in the Balalap Api Dance attire, the details can vary depending on the specific traditions of a particular family or community in Halong Village. Every element of the clothing, from the materials used to the motifs applied, has its own meaning and is the result of a cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations. This clothing not only serves as physical protection for the dancers when interacting with fire, but also as a visual representation of the rich culture and spirituality of the Dayak Deah people.

CONCLUSION

The Balalap Api Dance is a unique and meaningful cultural heritage of the Dayak Deah community in Halong Village, Balangan Regency, South Kalimantan. Located in the Meratus Mountains, Halong Village is home to the Dayak Deah community who still preserve their ancestral traditions. This dance is not just a performance, but a reflection of the philosophy of life, spirituality, and local wisdom of the local community. Through dynamic movements and bold interactions with fire, the dancers demonstrate the balance between humans, nature, and supernatural powers. The philosophical meaning of the Balalap Api Dance is very deep, symbolizing the struggle for life, resilience in the face of adversity, and the

achievement of higher spiritual awareness. This dance is also a medium of communication with the spirit world and ancestors, emphasizing the Dayak Deah's belief in the close connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. The traditional clothing used, made from natural materials such as tree bark and woven cloth, not only functions as a costume but also contains symbols of protection and magical powers. Despite facing the challenges of modernization, the Balalap Api Dance is still preserved as a valuable cultural identity. Preservation efforts involve documentation, promotion as a cultural attraction, and integration with local education programs. The research on Balalap Api Dance uses a qualitative ethnographic approach, combining participatory observation and in-depth interviews, to reveal the complexity of the meanings and values contained therein. Balalap Api Dance is not only a traditional performance, but is a visual manifestation of the philosophy of life, spirituality, and local wisdom of the Dayak Deah community. This dance is evidence of the richness of Indonesian culture, especially in South Kalimantan, which needs to be continuously maintained and preserved. Through a deep understanding of the meanings and values contained in the Balalap Api Dance, we can better appreciate cultural diversity and strengthen Indonesia's multicultural national identity.

Efforts to preserve and develop fire racing attractions require a balanced and integrated approach. Strategies involving education, innovation in traditional presentation, safety standardization, and active involvement of various stakeholders are needed to ensure the sustainability of this tradition. It is important to maintain the essence and authentic values of fire racing while adapting them to the modern context. The Halong Village fire racing attraction represents an interesting dynamic between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to the demands of the times. Success in preserving and developing this tradition will not only benefit the people of Halong Village, but can also be a model for efforts to preserve other intangible cultural heritage in Indonesia. Further research and cross-sector collaboration are needed to ensure that the fire racing tradition remains alive, relevant, and appreciated by future generations, while maintaining its cultural integrity. Thus, fire racing can continue to be a source of pride, cultural identity, and economic potential for the people of Halong Village and Balangan Regency as a whole.

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