

The Development of the Tiwah Tradition of the Ngaju Dayak Tribe in Kota Baru Village, Kapuas Tengah District, Kapuas Regency

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Abstrak

Tiwah adalah proses mengantarkan arwah sebagai sistem religiusitas dalam kepercayaan Dayak Ngaju. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji perkembangan tradisi Tiwah di Desa Kota Baru, Kecamatan Kapuas Tengah, Kabupaten Kapuas, Kalimantan Tengah, baik prosesi, fungsi, hingga nilai tradisinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah, yang terdiri dari heuristik, kritik, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa masyarakat Desa Kota Baru yang melaksanakan Tiwah tidak memandang agama tertentu, atau latarbelakang seseorang. Pelaksanaan Tiwah dilakukan bersama-sama ketika ada anggota keluarga yang telah meninggal dan masih menganut Kaharingan. Dalam keseharian, mereka dituntut menjaga hubungan baik antara manusia, Tuhan, arwah leluhur, dan lingkungan. Kesimpulannya adalah Tiwah merupakan ritual keagamaan berkaitan dengan penganut Kaharingan di Desa Kota Baru. Mereka percaya setelah melakukan ritual ini, mereka tidak akan mendapatkan keburukan.

Kata kunci: tradisi, tiwah, dayak ngaju.

Abstract

Tiwah is the process of sending off the soul as a religious system in the beliefs of the Dayak Ngaju. This research aims to examine the development of the Tiwah tradition in Kota Baru Village, Kapuas Tengah District, Kapuas Regency, Central Kalimantan, including its processes, functions, and traditional values. This research uses a historical method, which consists of heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Research found that the people of Kota Baru Village who carry out Tiwah don't consider a specific religion or a person's background. Tiwah is done together when a family member has passed away and still follows Kaharingan. In daily life, they are expected to maintain good relationships between humans, God, ancestor spirits, and the environment. In conclusion, Tiwah is a religious ritual related to followers of Kaharingan in Kota Baru Village. They believe that after performing this ritual, they will not encounter any misfortune.

Keywords: tradition, tiwah, ngaju.

INTRODUCTION

Dayak customs and culture, including those found in Central Kalimantan, have long attracted the attention of travelers and foreign cultural experts. However, it is important to note that their desire and efforts to understand Dayak culture are generally solely driven by their own personal interests or those of their own group. Therefore, these writings are often

presented from the perspective of those who sometimes do not understand the true meaning of Dayak customs and culture. They are often interpreted negatively, and this is then disseminated to other tribes in our country and the outside world. It is therefore not surprising that many responses demean Dayak customs and culture.

In the Dayak Ngaju culture of Central Kalimantan, there are two commonly accepted types of death ceremonies: a simple funeral and a more elaborate ceremony known as Tiwah. Tiwah aims to send the spirit (*liau*) to the afterlife and symbolizes freedom or liberation from worldly responsibilities. In this tradition, the bones of the deceased are buried a second time in a final resting place known as *sandung*. (Situmorang, 2019).

On the other hand, according to the Dayak people who adhere to the Kaharingan Hindu religion, Tiwah is the process of delivering spirits which the community uses as a system of their religiosity in worshiping the creator (*hatala ranying langi*) based on the original beliefs of the Dayak tribe (Riwut, 2007). This tradition is only performed by the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan who adhere to the Kharingan Hindu faith, but it does not preclude people who have converted to another religion or belief from performing this ritual. The Tiwah ritual is a ceremony usually held for someone who has died (Bonxy et al., 2018).

Tiwah aims to purify, liberate and perfect the spirits of people who have died on their journey to *lewu tatau* (heaven), so that thanks to this Tiwah tradition, the spirit entity will take a straight journey without obstacles, so that he can live a serene and peaceful life in

the realm of the Almighty. The main aim is for the spirit to unite with *Ranying Hatala*, and the Tiwah tradition also aims to relieve bad luck for the family left behind. Tiwah also means releasing the bonds of widow or widower status for married couples, so that after the tiwah ceremony they are allowed to choose their next life partner or still choose not to remarry (Nugraha & Theresia Dessy Wardani, 2021).

One of the Dayak ethnic groups that practices the Tiwah tradition is the Ngaju Dayak. Demographically, the Ngaju Dayak community is spread across various regions in Central Kalimantan, including Kota Baru Village in the Central Kapuas District. The Tiwah tradition has existed among the Ngaju Dayak community long before the existence of the current religions recognized by the Indonesian state, namely Hindu Kaharingan, as a form of the Dayak people's belief system.

Kaharingan rituals and ceremonies often focus on gaining blessings and protection, as well as maintaining harmonious relationships with ancestral spirits. One of Kaharingan's defining characteristics is its teachings, which are largely passed down orally through songs, folktales, and other oral traditions. This reflects the close relationship between religion and culture in Dayak society (Ajun, 2025).

Before adopting a religion, this tradition was a form of belief in something

they believed to have power over the earth (gods and goddesses). Although most of the population has adopted a state-recognized religion, the Ngaju Dayak, especially those who have converted to Kaharingan Hinduism, maintain this tradition, and the values passed down through generations are still preserved. Religious tolerance is also reflected when those who do not adhere to the Kaharingan Hindu faith perform the Tiwah ceremony for parents who were previously buried according to Kaharingan Hindu rites. This act demonstrates respect and fulfills the obligation of filial piety towards deceased parents. Furthermore, the cleansing of bones by the extended family and the spirit of mutual cooperation during the exhumation of the bodies, regardless of religious differences, are symbols of love and family ties (Rukmana Nilam Sari et al., 2024).

According to researchers, the kinship that exists within the community has never been abandoned, which is why the Dayak Ngaju culture and traditions have survived to this day. To begin to understand a culture, researchers attempted to examine the existing culture, namely the Tiwah tradition of the Dayak Ngaju tribe in Kota Baru Village, Kapuas Tengah District, Kapuas Regency. What is interesting about this tradition is the value of kinship that is continuously maintained and its existence that continues to be maintained even though

the majority of the community has embraced religions outside of Kaharingan.

METHODS

In historical research methods, this is often referred to as historiography, which refers to the results of historical writing. It can also be defined as a medium for discussing known, verified, and interpreted research results (Sukmana, 2021). The method used by the researcher in this report is a historical method, which consists of heuristic elements, namely data collection or retrieval, including interviews, observations, and source studies. This is followed by a critical process of the sources obtained, both external and internal, resulting in interpretations by the researcher, which are presented in historiography, either descriptive, narrative, or analytical. The following explains several stages in the historical method.

Heuristics is the stage of searching for and collecting or compiling the data needed to reconstruct the historical events being studied. The data collected in this research was obtained from several historical sources which contain the Tiwah traditions of the Dayak Ngaju tribe in Kota Baru Village. In this stage, researchers used data sources which included oral sources obtained by interviewing informants, namely Alim (54 years old) as Basir or Telon (Tiwah presenter) while written sources were obtained from

various scientific works relevant to the Tiwah tradition of the Dayak Ngaju tribe.

The next stage is criticism, which is the process carried out in collecting critical sources so that selected facts are captured and this source criticism is divided into internal and external. Internal criticism is carried out by researchers on the originality of the contents of sources obtained in the field, both through oral sources, written sources, and material sources. For example, in internal criticism, the results of the interviews obtained are in accordance with one another and the written data whether the contents support what will be written, such as the procedures for carrying out Tiwah, namely before the bones or *runi* are delivered and placed in the *sandung* (bone storage place) in that case, it is carried out first which includes dancing, gong sounds, slaughtering sacrificial animals and *bukung* (exorcism of evil spirits) until finally the bones are placed or inserted into the *sandung*.

Furthermore, external criticism is the researcher's critique of the validity of the data obtained by the author, which is conducted based on the techniques and timing of data collection in the field (Kota Baru Village). This is done by checking the data with the same sources using different techniques and timings. After conducting the criticism, the researcher then interprets the data obtained to draw

conclusions that have been verified for accuracy. Based on all the information obtained in the field, the researcher then compiles it into several historical facts.

These historical facts were then selected, arranged, added to, or reduced in emphasis by the researcher and placed in a causal sequence. After all stages were completed, the final stage was to present the research results in a systematic and coherent written form. This process is expected to result in a scientific paper entitled "The Development of the Tiwah Tradition of the Ngaju Dayak Tribe in Kota Baru Village, Kapuas Tengah District, Kapuas Regency."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Tiwah Tradition Procession

The Tiwah tradition is a secondary burial procession or the removal of the bones of a deceased person and placing them in a new burial container called *sandong*. The Ngaju Dayak people of the Kaharingan religion believe that if they have not performed the Tiwah procession for their family, the soul of the deceased will remain in the world and cannot go to *lewu tatau*, so that is why for the Ngaju Dayak people, holding the Tiwah tradition is obligatory, especially if the deceased still adheres to the Kaharingan religion. The Ngaju Dayak people believe that the soul of the deceased who has gone through the Tiwah feast ritual will go to a

dimension of eternity in the seventh heaven. (Iban & Tuti Elfrida, 2017).

As for the Tiwah procession, it is carried out in the following way:

1. *Ngantung usik* (waiting for the dead) which is held for a week, where in this event all family members are required to take part in a series of events because if it is not carried out properly then the *liau* (the person being celebrated) will not find his way to heaven;
2. Then the procession will continue with the bones being taken out of the hall (place where bones are stored) which will last for a week where at this event the bones of the deceased will be cleaned;
3. The next process is the *tampung tawar* (cleaning) event by family members which takes place for a week, where the bones are placed on the ground and after the time is up, they are put back into the hall;
4. *Sangkaraya muhun kapetak* (*sangkaraya* descends to the ground) for one week, usually called *pandung* or a place where people will *badeder* (do a dance that is usually done during the Tiwah event). The *sangkaraya* will be placed in animals that will be used during the Tiwah event, such as pigs, chickens and also

buffaloes, and the *sangkaraya* will be placed in *pantar* (a place for decorations and flags during the Tiwah event);

5. The procession continues with *tabuh* (killing the sacrificial animal). During the first *tabuh*, the bones emerge from the hall and are placed in the *sandung*, or final resting place. During the second *tabuh*, the *nyangkean* (inserting the bones into the *sandung*) ceremony takes place. At the time of the third *tabuh*, the *tabuh ngarahang* (or killing of the last animal, namely the buffalo) will be performed which is carried out on the last day of Tiwah. At the time of the *tabuh* on the last day, the *telun hanteran* (*liau ngalingu*) is carried out, the spirit of the deceased will enter the *telon* body, so the possessed *telon* will be possessed, then look for their children and family, then advise them not to forget those who have died;
6. *Balian hapandui* will be carried out on the last day of Tiwah (one family will board a boat, then the boat will be sunk and covered with a *nyaki balai* (bone place for the last place)).

Tiwah is usually held for someone who has died and the body is placed in a *runi* (coffin) which aims as a ritual to

straighten the journey of the *salumpuk liau* towards *lewu tatau* so that it can be united with its ancestors and *sangiang*. This Tiwah also has a meaning for the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan as a procession to release bad luck for the family left behind from the bad influences that befell them. The Tiwah ritual is a traditional ceremony that connects with the deceased, namely delivering the *runi* or skeletal bones of the deceased to a medium or small sized house that is specifically made to store the *runi* or bones of the deceased, this house is called *sandong*.

The Tiwah ceremony for the Dayak tribe is very sacred, because in this Tiwah event, before the *runi* or bones are delivered and placed into the *sandong*, there are many ritual events, dances, gong sounds, *bukung* and others, until finally the *runi* are placed or inserted into the *sandong*. The Ngaju Dayak people believe that if they have not married off their dead family, the *salumpuk liau* will remain on earth and cannot go to heaven. That is why for the Ngaju people, holding a Tiwah ceremony is obligatory if the person who died still adheres to the Kaharingan Hindu religion. For all families who are left behind or who are still alive, carrying out this Tiwah ceremony is their last respect (Malania, 2019).

The Ngaju community prepares for the Tiwah ceremony for months, and the ceremony can last three days, seven days,

or a month. The Tiwah ceremony varies from region to region, depending on local and family decisions. The Tiwah ceremony is a major ceremony whose implementation requires very large costs used to fulfill the requirements of the Tiwah ritual ceremony, which include providing food, sacrificial animals and offerings which aim to entertain the guests who come and make offerings for the spirits of ancestors and spirits.

B. Function of the Tiwah Tradition

The Tiwah tradition is a series of traditional funeral ceremonies for the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan. The Tiwah ceremony is part of the beliefs of the Ngaju Dayak people, particularly those who still adhere to the Kaharingan Hindu religion (Al-Kumayi, 2011). The Tiwah traditional ceremony aims as a ritual to straighten the journey of spirits or souls towards *lewu tatau* or heaven. Apart from that, the Tiwah ceremony is intended to release the bad luck for the deceased's family who are left behind from the bad influences that have befallen them. Since it became known to the public, the Tiwah ceremony has remained alive because it has a function in society (Putri et al., 2022).

According to the Ngaju people, spirits are invisible entities but they do exist, and it is often heard that they sometimes bring good things or bad things. According to the Dayak Ngaju people, there are evil and good spirits, there are

spirits of ancestors or deceased relatives. An evil spirit is a spirit that is believed to be able to disturb the peace and comfort of society in everyday life.

The Tiwah tradition is a unique tradition that has developed into a religious cultural heritage of the Dayak Ngaju people and has undergone several transformation processes in line with changes in the socio-cultural life of the Dayak Ngaju people. The Tiwah ceremony and the Dayak Ngaju culture are increasingly being eroded by the progress of modernization and globalization, so that the many cultural acculturations that have entered have resulted in the Dayak Ngaju tribe becoming increasingly heterogeneous. Of the many ceremonies carried out in connection with the human life cycle, the death ceremony is one of the ceremonies that is considered quite important in society, there is even an opinion that the most important series of ceremonies in many religions in the world is the death ceremony.

The main theme in a death ceremony generally symbolizes a process of separation between the living and the deceased, where the death ceremony is the culmination of all the ceremonies carried out in the context of a person's life journey, so it can be said to be the end of all existing rites. For the Ngaju Dayak people and the Dayak people in general, the event where a person reaches death does not mean that life will stop there,

but rather the soul returns to the original world where the eternal state is eternal and humans reach a point of conclusion. Death does not mean the end of life, but death is a process of transition into a new world, namely the spirit world, and life will continue as life has been lived in the real world.

According to Alim's presentation (13/06/2021), in the Ngaju community there is a kind of moral and social obligation to carry out the Tiwah ceremony. Moral obligation means that the family of the deceased feels obliged to accompany the spirit to the spirit world, a world which according to their minds is perfect. Humans actually experienced this perfect state before they violated the command of the Almighty and as a means to reach the afterlife they had to go through ceremonies, the manifestation of which is seen in the Tiwah ceremony.

According to the beliefs of the Ngaju people, people who die and have not undergone the intended ceremony cannot enter the eternal world of spirits. The spirits will remain in the environment of living people and will even disturb the living relatives. These disturbances can take the form of crop failure, disease, and other dangers that continue to threaten. On the other hand, the social obligation in question is that if other families are able to carry out the Tiwah ceremony when one of their members dies, why can't we, so that later we will be considered less

capable and ungrateful, especially if the deceased is a parent such as a father, mother, grandfather or grandmother.

The Tiwah ceremony signifies a final tribute to the deceased. In the Ngaju Dayak community, the Tiwah ceremony is a major event that also requires significant costs. The Tiwah ceremony itself also takes a long time, sometimes even months, depending on the source. The lengthy Tiwah ceremony naturally requires significant costs (Agusvina et al., 2025). The longer and more festive a Tiwah ceremony is, the greater the influence it has on the organizers, meaning it increases their self-esteem.

C. Values in the Tiwah Tradition

According to the Panaturan book, Tiwah is one of the final steps of the death ritual carried out by surviving family members, according to Robert Upeng, a Kaharingan Hindu religious figure. According to Thian Agan, another Kaharingan Hindu leader, Tiwah is one of the final stages of the death ritual, with the hope that the family members who are prayed for will be reborn and transported to *Lewu Tatau* (eternal heaven). Simpei emphasized that the Tiwah ceremony is intended for living family members and the spirits of the deceased (Helim & Unggun Tiara Syahriana, 2019).

As the Dayak Ngaju people carry out the Tiwah ritual, which originates from the Kaharingan Hindu religion. Each stage of the procession leading up to the

final ceremony, which includes transporting the bones of ancestors or family members to the funeral home known as *sandung*, is very important for the Dayak people. This is the last respect from the bereaved family, especially for those who died while still adhering to the Kaharingan Hindu religion (Anggreni & Jatie K. Pudjibudojo, 2021).

In the entire series of traditional ceremonies in human civilization, funeral ceremonies play a major role. Funeral ceremonies have two values for the Dayak people in Central Kalimantan, namely social and religious. The religious value is as a final respect, purification of the soul, which then accompanies it to *Lewu tatau habaran bulau* or the land of the spirits, *habusung bulau*, *hakarangan lamiang*, which means a land rich, beautiful, containing many diamonds, gold, and merjan stones, or is equated with the term "heaven", while the social value is as a forum for relationships between brothers, relatives, and the surrounding community. (Yulianti, 2018).

Beyond the spiritual aspects, the social activities that support the Tiwah ritual demonstrate strong collective and inter-community values. The role of the Great as ritual leader, along with positions such as *Menenun*, *Nalampas*, and *Nganihi* strengthen social bonds and collective responsibility for the balance of life and death. Furthermore, the involvement of people from various religious backgrounds

in ritual processes such as mutual cooperation, food provision, and sacrifice demonstrates social solidarity that transcends religious boundaries. Interfaith engagement in the Tiwah ceremony demonstrates a model of tolerance that goes beyond official tolerance and is based on social solidarity and respect for local values. This kind of tolerance is in line with the ideals of Pancasila and the spirit of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, where religious differences are not a barrier to working together for the common good (Josela, 2025).

Traditional ceremonies are a series of various forms and elements of communicating or relating to gods, ancestral spirits and natural spirits. Koentjaningrat identified eleven elements of ceremonies (rites), namely offerings, sacrificing, praying, eating together, dancing, singing, performing arts, performing drama, fasting, intoxication, asceticism and meditation. In anthropology, sociology, and religion, death rituals are conventional texts that help people resolve shared obligations to cope with grief and promote healing (Eka et al., 2023).

The Tiwah ceremony is one of the biggest ceremonies specifically carried out by the Kaharingan Hindu community, but as the potential of the region and religious diversity developed, it began to spread rapidly, both through thought and marriage (Sanawiah & Muhammad Raymon

Abdalla, 2018). Death ceremony rituals, especially the Tiwah ritual of the Kaharingan Hindu community, must be carried out and are very meaningful. The purpose of the Tiwah ritual is to ensure that the community or family left behind can be at peace and free from illness and all the bad luck that befell them because of the loss of one of their family members who has died.

The Ngaju Dayak community in Kota Baru Village, Kapuas Tengah District and the Dayak people in general, believe that an event where a person reaches death does not mean that life will stop there, but rather the soul returns to the original world, where the state is eternal and humans reach a point of perfection. For everyone, death is an inevitable event. As a result, some ethnic groups celebrate death with special rituals (Ririn et al., 2021). In various myths and folk tales known among the Dayak people in general, it is said that in the beginning of life in the world, humans did not know about death, this life was an eternal life and would continue continuously, humans lived in a world full of pleasure and luxury. But at some point humans make mistakes against the Creator and the punishment is that there is no more eternal life for humans, everyone will definitely experience the end of life, namely death.

From the entire Tiwah ritual procession, several symbolic values can be

examined which are wrapped up in the procession, including: First, that the ritual is a form of social responsibility in the form of the responsibility of the indigenous community towards their ancestors and upholding the dignity and honor of the Dayak Ngaju tribe as well as the belief to ward off bad luck for the family left behind. Second, that the ritual is carried out on a large scale, meaning that the Dayak people prepare for the Tiwah ceremony for months, and the implementation lasts for seven days and seven nights.

Because this ritual is a major ritual, its implementation requires very large costs, so in order to reduce large expenses, now the Dayak people hold the Tiwah ceremony together, in which in its implementation, people from several neighboring villages will be invited, however, generally the guests who come bring rice or animals as donations. Thus, it can also be said that the Tiwah ritual can be interpreted as a character of mutual cooperation which is a form of character of Asian society that is still very much maintained. Third, there is a symbolic meaning as an expression of gratitude to God (hattalla Langit) and asking God for goodness so that the spirit (of a dead person) gets goodness until they reach heaven (lewu tatau), then changes to expressing gratitude to God and asking goodness and blessings from God Almighty for people who are still alive to avoid

misfortune, poverty and backwardness (Ningrum & Soebijantroro, 2023).

In the beliefs of the Ngaju people of Kota Baru Village, it seems there is a kind of moral and social obligation to carry out the Tiwah ceremony. Moral obligation means that the family of the deceased feels obliged to accompany the spirit to the spirit world, a world which according to their minds is perfect. Humans actually experienced this perfect state before they violated the command of the Almighty and as a means to reach the afterlife they had to go through ceremonies, the manifestation of which is seen in the Tiwah ceremony.

According to the beliefs of the Ngaju people, people who die and have not undergone the intended ceremony cannot enter the eternal world of spirits. The spirits will remain in the environment of living people and will even disturb the living relatives. These disturbances can be in the form of crop failures, diseases, and other dangers that continue to threaten, while the social obligation in question is that if other families are able to carry out the Tiwah ceremony when one of their members dies, they are considered less capable and ungrateful, especially if the person who dies is a parent such as a father, mother, grandfather or grandmother.

The Tiwah ceremony means paying final respects to the deceased, because of the large costs required to hold the death

ceremony, forcing people to work harder to find the energy and funds to be able to carry out its purpose. The longer and more festive a Tiwah ceremony is, the greater the influence it has on the organizers, meaning it increases their self esteem. The meaning of this Tiwah ritual is that it is carried out with the aim of straightening out *Liau's* journey or taking *Liau* to *Lewu Tatau* and so that *Liau* can live a new life in *Lewu Tatau* with *Ranying Hattala* and with his family or ancestors who came before *Liau*, and no longer disturb the family or roam around the neighborhood around the house, throw away all bad luck, be kept away from all illnesses, dangers or anything unwanted. For the couple who are left behind, the aim is to break free from the bonds of widow-widower status and they can start a new life with a new family.

CONCLUSION

The Tiwah ritual is a traditional ceremony performed in Kota Baru Village. Preparations for the Tiwah ceremony can take months, and the actual performance can take three to four days, even a week. The Tiwah ritual is conducted and led by a priest called *Basir* or *Telon*. This Tiwah ritual is intended to guide and straighten the journey of the *liau* towards *lewu tatau* and to live a new life with *ranying hatalla langit*, as well as uniting with the family and ancestors of the past and also aims to ensure that the spirit of the deceased no

longer wanders and disturbs the house or family left behind. Apart from that, this Tiwah also aims to remove all bad luck from the family left behind in the house, to keep them away from all dangers, illnesses, and to keep them away from everything that is undesirable. From this ritual, people can also gather and work together, interact with each other, and strengthen relationships between people from one village and people from other villages.

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