

THE EXISTENCE OF THE *KEJEI* DANCE OF THE REJANG TRIBE AS AN EDUCATIONAL DANCE THROUGH THE SELUPU REJANG ART COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes community participation in preserving the existence of the *Kejei* dance culture of the Rejang tribe through the arts community in the Selupu Rejang sub-district, Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province. This research is qualitative. Methods of collecting data using research observations, interview methods, and documentation. The interview technique was carried out in an unstructured manner using interview guidelines. Research data analysis is descriptive. The results of data processing in this study show that efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe through the art community in the Selupu Rejang sub-district use three methods, namely protection efforts are an effort to maintain the existence of the *Kejei* dance so that it does not become extinct by conducting dance training *Kejei* every week regularly. Development efforts are carried out through the quantity aspect of the dance, namely the development of the number of actors (dancers), the number of users, and the number of regions that receive the *Kejei* dance. Third, efforts to utilize the *Kejei* dance as an effort to introduce the *Kejei* dance to the wider community that the *Kejei* dance must be maintained.

Keywords: Preservation, Existence, Kejei Dance of the Rejang Tribe, Art Community.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is home to many different tribes and cultures. Apart from the Malay tribe, the Rejang tribe is the oldest in Sumatra. One of the provinces in Sumatra, Bengkulu Province, is the place of origin of the Rejang tribe. The Rejang tribe controls most of Bengkulu Province which is divided into North Bengkulu Regency, Central Bengkulu Regency, and Rejang Lebong Regency, which have since been divided into Lebong Regency, Kepahiang Regency, and Rejang Lebong Regency respectively.

The Rejang people have been known for centuries in Rejang Lebong Regency. On May 29, 1880, Rejang Lebong Regency, which had Curup as its capital, was established. With an area of 151,576 ha (1,516 km²), Rejang Lebong Regency is a geographically cool area. consists of 15 districts and is located at 102°57' East Latitude and 2°22' 7' South Latitude.

There are four *Mergo* in the Rejang tribe: *Mergo Bermari* or *Bermano*, *Mergo Beginggo*, *Mergo Sepanjang Jiwo*, and *Mergo Bembo*. This *Mergo* is also known as *Rejang Pat Petulai* or *Rejang Empat Tulai*. The Rejang tribe, like other tribes in Indonesia, has almost all elements of its culture, including history, scripted language, knowledge systems, systems of social organization, systems of living tools, religious systems, and art. These elements are wrapped up in the traditional process of celebrating their custom. Researchers are very interested in the *Kejei* dance, one of the many cultural elements of the Rejang tribe. *Kejei* dance is one of the most well-known traditions of the Rejang tribe. On October

4, 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia designated the *Kejei* Dance as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Indonesia.

Masdene and *Mateman's* fairy tale is a short story from the history of *Bun GeligeKace* where the *Kejei* dance originates from traditional elders' tales passed down from generation to generation. When *Seri dato* married *Cerlik Cerlang Mato*, they performed this dance for the first time in Kersip Hamlet. According to historical records, the *Kejei* dance existed before the marriage of Monk Bermano and Putri Senggang in the 9th century. On March 12, 1957, Indonesia's first president, Mr. Soekarno, performed the *Kejei* dance at the Merdeka Palace.

The *Kejei* dance has its characteristics with its straightforward dance steps, but each has its meaning. The first dance movement, the prayer movement (*Sembeak Semanie*), is a way to show respect to traditional leaders, ancestral spirits, dignified guests, relatives of opposing dancers, and spectators at the *Kejei* event. The second movement, *Bederap Salah Pinggang* is a sign of wisdom in decision-making. The third movement known as *Petik Jari* is a way to accept new friends or family. The fourth movement, the *Mate'ak Dayung* implies total surrender to the Highest. In the fifth movement, worship the turtledove to express gratitude for the convenience that the *Kejei* dance brings. *Mendayung* motion is the final dance movement. It is a way of saying goodbye to ancestors, honored guests, the audience, and to fellow dancers (Talking with Mr. Ahmad Faizir, October 2022).

Rejang *kelintang* is a traditional *bamboo* musical instrument with a front or dim part, small gongs, large gongs, and the accompaniment of *krilu* (*suling rejang*), which is played during the *Kejei* dance. Named the fifth, seventh, and twelfth stars. At first, female dancers wear loose clothes in brackets, scarves that cover their chest and back to toe, *songket* cloth, and head coverings made of tapung or banyan attached to banana stems and head circumference when performing the *Kejei* dance. The male dancers wear a *bupakn* or *songket*, a *ke'is*, and *Cuk Uleu*, a cross-shaped *songket* scarf.

The Rejang people consider the *Kejei* dance as a sacred dance that has its meaning for the Rejang people and is their pride and hallmark. For the Rejang youth, the *Kejei* dance is also a way to find a mate. Important events in people's lives always include the *Kejei* dance in the procession of indecisive traditional events, such as welcoming monks, wedding ceremonies, and clan customs. This is in line with the name *Kejei* which comes from the Rejang language and means big celebration. *Kejei* dance has become a tradition in people's lives.

The *Kejei* dance is presented at major events that occur among the Rejang tribe and is danced by dozens of Rejang tribal youths who are called *anak sangei* in an odd number, for example, three pairs, five pairs, seven pairs, or nine pairs. The Rejang people believe that those who will fulfill this dance are the ancestors of the Rejang people. The positions of dancers form a circle facing each other clockwise in a closed *Balie Panyang* and only has one entrance in the middle of which there is a *Penei* or a disc placed on top of the *Sukung* line. *Penei* is a symbol of kutei, one of the binding conditions that must be met in staging the *Kejei* dance which symbolizes the prosperity and welfare of the Rejang people as a sign of gratitude to God Almighty. *Sukung* is a dividing sign between dancers. When male and female dancers cross the *Sukung* line, they must perform the *Mate'ak Dayung*. *Sukung* is made of 2 *bamboo* sticks (*boloak mbuk guata*) which are hung above the *Penei*. *Penei* includes various kinds of objects such as agricultural products, plantation products, materials for traditional needs, traditional objects, and ingredients for the kitchen needs of the Rejang tribe community.

Apart from the *Penei* table and breadfruit, several other requirements must be fulfilled by the host of the event which is quite binding and requires a lot of money, usually for

noble families by slaughtering up to 7 buffaloes. For an ordinary family, it is enough to slaughter a goat. the number of animals slaughtered is adjusted to the length of time the *Kejei* dance is performed, the purpose of slaughtering buffalo is as a dish to entertain guests who come and the duration of the *Kejei* dance depends on the ability of the host. In addition, the host must also bear the living costs and provide accommodation for the dancers.

The conditions that must be met by the dancers of the *Kejei* dance are that the dancers must be in a state of purity and still pure. The sacred meaning means that female dancers are not menstruating, while the sacred meaning is that male dancers must still be virgins and female dancers must still be virgins. In addition, the dancers must come from different clans between male and female dancers. This aims to avoid marriages of one descendant because the Rejang people consider that one clan is one descendant. These conditions must be met to avoid obstacles in the implementation of the *Kejei* dance.

The *Kejei* dance that is performed at the peak of community marriages is usually nurturing, the current implementation of the *Kejei* dance which is by binding conditions is usually performed at the peak of traditional marriages or marriages performed by officials such as regents or community leaders. This makes implementation easier and shorter, though the requirements still need to be met. This is because the binding conditions have changed some of the requirements for the *Kejei* dance, and the high cost of staging the *Kejei* dance affects its existence. To maintain the continuity of the *Kejei* dance in the lives of the participants, shifts are needed from time to time, so it is impossible to determine when the shift began. For example, the long stalks of ivory sugarcane needed for the *Kejei* dance and currently displayed on *Penei* tables are extremely hard to come by as a result, they have been replaced with the available red cane.

As part of conservation efforts, the *Kejei* dance is currently being performed so that it can be performed adequately on a certain day or time, especially at the start of the climax of the wedding ceremony, and the host does not have to be a member. the indigenous Rejang people. The dancers don't have to be from different tribes; as long as these youths can dance the *Kejei* dance, they can take part in the performance of the dance even if they are not from the indigenous Rejang community. This is because the clan of the Rejang tribe is no longer clear, making it difficult to find dancers with a different clan. However, there is still a myth that develops and develops that dances performed by young people are only for female dancers who are still virgins and for males who must also be virgins. *Kejei* dance performance venues, dancers' attitude modifications, and musical accompaniment are also included. The clothes worn by female dancers at present are the *baju kurung* (*Kurung Nyawe*), *songket* cloth, *songket* shawl, *tapungor beringin* (*Tapung* and Head Circumference), *Bandoak Andoak*, *Ringgit*, *Gelamor* necklaces, *Dering* Bracelets (traditional bracelets of the Rejang people), *Cempako*, *Burung-burung*, *Kote-kote*, *Pending* (Belt), and *Ke'is*. The male dancers wear *Beskap* Shirts, *Bupak* fabrics, *Songket* scarves, *Cu'Uleu*, *Jas* Chains, and *Ke'is*. The musical instruments accompanying the *Kejei* dance are now made of brass and the *Kejei* dance can already be performed on a stage with various sizes and decorations.

Selupu Rejang sub-district has a name that is synonymous with the Rejang tribe, indicating that the majority of the people living in the sub-district are members of the Rejang tribe. However, over time, Selupu Rejang sub-district has become dominated by Javanese and Minang immigrant communities. Additionally, due to the rapid pace of change and the influx of new cultures, people in Selupu Rejang sub-district, particularly the younger generation, have shown less and less interest in learning and preserving traditional arts in recent years. The "*Sanggar Tiang Bumei Selupu*" was established as a venue for activities aimed at preserving traditional dances, particularly the Rejang

tribe's *Kejei* dance, as a result of some of these factors. To protect the dignity of the nation, which is reflected in the preservation of traditional arts. Educational institutions must understand this and develop the potential of traditional arts as educational media. Currently, there is an opportunity to create character education as a teaching method based on local wisdom so that educational institutions can teach local content about regional cultural diversity, which will make them able to generate love for regional culture.

From the background described above, the researcher is interested in conducting research on community participation in preserving the existence of the *Kejei* Dance of the Rejang Tribe through the arts community in Selupu Rejang Sub-district, Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province, based on the introduction of the problem above.

METHODS

This study uses a type of field research that is descriptive qualitative. the location of the implementation of data collection at the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio in the Selupu Rejang sub-district. The object of this study is the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe, so that community participation and government support in Selupu Rejang sub-district will be seen from the efforts made to preserve the existence of the *Kejei* dance through the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* art gallery. The types and sources of data used in this study are primary data and secondary data. In carrying out this research, researchers used stationery, smartphones, observation guidelines, and interview guidelines as research instruments. Data collection techniques in this study were in the form of research observations, interview methods, and documentation. The data validation techniques used in this study were source triangulation, technical triangulation, and time triangulation. The stages of data analysis used in this study were collecting data, reducing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Kejei Dance is a traditional dance that is the pride and hallmark of the Rejang people. As time went on, Selupu Rejang Sub-district was currently occupied by the Rejang people and dominated by migrant people, namely the Javanese and Minang tribes, therefore the preservation of the *Kejei* dance had to be carried out. Teesen (2016) argues that participation is the participation of a person or group in an activity. The people of Selupu Rejang sub-district agreed to participate in conservation efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance, which received support from the government of Rejang Lebong Regency. According to Priyono (2015), preservation is the effort to safeguard, care for, and preserve something so that it does not become damaged. The following protection, development, and application methods are utilized in efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance:

3.1 Safeguards

Kejei dance is an identity that is very attached to the people who have it, so the people of the Selupu Rejang sub-district are making efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance. The community believes that the *Kejei* dance needs to be protected so that it is far from the risks and dangers that endanger its existence in society. Therefore, efforts to protect the community through the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio are efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance so that people can continue to enjoy its existence. This condition is by the theory According to Kusmawan (2014) protection is an action that guarantees the security of what

is protected from threatening danger or risk. Then Alfarisi (2022) argues that protection is an effort to guard against the threat of cultural extinction which endangers its existence. Endarini and Malarsih (2017) say that protection is an effort made to restore a culture so that it can continue to be enjoyed by community members. Based on the results of research conducted by researchers on October 16, 2022, efforts to protect the existence of the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe in the Selupu Rejang sub-district have been carried out. This is evidenced by the routine weekly holding of the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe and establishing the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe as permanent teaching material at the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio. The *Kejei* dance training for the Rejang tribe was attended by all the people in Selupu Rejang who have the desire to participate in preserving the *Kejei* dance with a training schedule once a week, namely on Saturday from 15.00 to 17.00 WIB.

This training teaches the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe to the people involved, especially the younger generation so that the *Kejei* dance continues and does not disappear due to the times in the community in Selupu Rejang sub-district, this will protect the *Kejei* dance from extinction. Efforts to protect content are by the theory according to Markamah (2022) which argues that traditional arts training is an effort to preserve regional culture.

3.2 Development efforts

Based on the results of research conducted by researchers on October 16, efforts to develop the existence of the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe in the Selupu Rejang sub-district have been carried out. The development in terms of quantity carried out by the studio is to increase the number of performers, the number of users, and the number of regions that receive the presence of the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe.

By inviting members of each community in Selupu Rejang Village to join as studio members, the public in the Selupu Rejang sub-district is attempting to increase the number of dancers in the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio. As a result, they can collaborate to realize their full potential and take part in traditional arts like the Rejang tribe's *Kejei* dance. The *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio also stated that recruiting community members were free, whether directly or indirectly. *Sanggar Tiang Bumei Selupu* tries to keep up with technological advancements that, if applied well, will be beneficial. As a consequence of this, *Sanggar Tiang Bumei Selupu* provides advice via social media accounts like Instagram and Facebook, which are currently popular with members of the younger generation. A social media appeal is an indirect invitation. The *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio has taken the appropriate step by making effective use of technology for cultural preservation. According to Mauludi (2018), millions of pieces of information in information technology need to be used wisely and critically, which is consistent with this finding.

3.3 Utilization Efforts

Based on the results of research conducted by researchers on October 16, 2022, efforts to exploit the existence of the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe in the Selupu Rejang sub-district have been carried out. Performances carried out by the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio are divided into two types, namely performances inside and outside the studio.

Efforts to Utilize the *Kejei* Dance at the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio: The use of the *Kejei* dance performance at the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio as an evaluation of the *Kejei* dance performance is increasing. Members of the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio use the *Kejei* dance performance as an evaluation to see how their skills and understanding of the material provided by the studio trainers have improved after participating in several

Rejang Tribe *Kejei* dance practice meetings. The trainers of the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio were also given a *Kejei* dance performance as an evaluation to identify deficiencies in *Kejei* dance practice at the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio.

Efforts to Utilize the *Kejei* Dance Outside the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio:

Performances that take place outside of the studio to benefit specific events. The *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio performs the *Kejei* dance at the request of the general public in the Selupu Rejang sub-district and outside the district. Uyun (2021) defines interest as the degree to which a stimulus attracts a person. According to this theory, efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance in the Selupu Rejang sub-district will be successful if there is an increase in the public interest. With efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance, it will greatly impact the existence of the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe, so that later the *Kejei* dance can not only become an attractive dance in the eyes of the public but can also become a dance that has a lot of educational value because, based on research results, the *Kejei* dance has many meanings contained therein as well as moral values. The existence of the *Kejei* dance will affect the level of interest of the younger generation in local wisdom culture, so that later in the world of traditional art education, there will be more and more demand from the next generation of the nation.

CONCLUSION

Rejang District, a community participation strategy that combines protection, development, and utilization efforts is used to achieve the goal of preserving the *Kejei* dance. Selupu Rejang Sub-district residents were reluctant to participate in efforts to preserve the *Kejei* dance, which eventually received support from the Rejang Lebong Regency government. By holding regular weekly *Kejei* dance training for the Rejang tribe at the *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio, the protection effort is an effort to preserve the *Kejei* dance so that the community can continue to enjoy it. The development of the number of actors (dancers), users, and regions that receive the *Kejei* dance are the development efforts carried out through the dance quantity aspect. Thirdly, efforts to use the *Kejei* dance as a means of introducing it to the community as a whole require the *Kejei* dance to be preserved. A preservation effort must be influenced, among other things, by supporting or inhibiting factors. The *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio is a community center in the Selupu Rejang Sub-district, which is in the Suban Ayam Village area of the Selupu Rejang Sub-district, Rejang Lebong Regency. It opened in June 2021. The *Tiang Bumei Selupu* Studio is a self-supporting facility. Support from all levels of society in Selupu Rejang Sub-district, social media that serves as a means of promotion, support from the Suban Ayam Village government in the form of licensing, support from the Selupu Rejang Sub-district government in the form of approval for traditional musical instruments, support from the government of Rejang Lebong Regency and the Rejang Lebong Regency Customary Consultative Body (BMA), which has published the book *Strands of Mahligai Arts and Culture* as a means of promotion, The *Tiang Bumei Selupu* studio's limited infrastructure, funding issues, and the busy schedules of its members all make it difficult for the community to participate in keeping the *Kejei* dance alive. This research is able to provide an overview of the potential of local wisdom that can be developed as a medium for learning. This research provides a means of learning about diversity and character through the *Kejei* dance of the Rejang tribe, in the midst of continuous efforts to awaken the spirit of character education.

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