

# **Preserving Traditional Rituals as Local Cultural Heritage in Jayapura, Papua: A Study on the Role of Indigenous Communities in Sustaining Ancestral Traditions**

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## **Abstract**

The preservation of traditional rituals is a vital aspect of safeguarding local cultural heritage amidst the growing influence of globalization that threatens regional cultural identities. This study aims to examine the role of indigenous communities in sustaining traditional rituals in the Jayapura region of Papua. Using a qualitative research method with an ethnographic approach, the study involved participant observation and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, community figures, and youth representatives. The findings reveal that indigenous communities actively preserve rituals through the inter generational transmission of cultural values, youth involvement in customary activities, and the integration of ritual practices into social and religious events. Despite external pressures such as modernization and lifestyle changes, indigenous communities remain strongly committed to sustaining their ancestral traditions. This research highlights the importance of involving local communities in the formulation of cultural preservation policies to ensure the continuity of cultural heritage in Papua.

**Keywords:** traditional rituals, indigenous communities, cultural heritage, preservation, Jayapura

## **INTRODUCTION**

Papua, as the easternmost region of Indonesia, and well known the diversity of culture and tradition passed down through the generations by indigenous communities. Jayapura is the capital city of Papua Province. A city is not only the centre of governance and modernization but also become a living space for various indigenous tribes who still maintain and preserve their ancestral cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is important because it strongly influences the sense, loyalties, and behaviour ( Buckland, 2013). The cultural heritage can be identified in various aspects of life,

from language, dance, tradition music, religious rituals, and the local knowledge systems that are rich in values of togetherness, spirituality, and ecological wisdom.

For the indigenous people of Jayapura, culture is not only understood as the expression and tradition form, but also it can be an identity and guide of life. Many various rituals in Jayapura such as welcoming ceremonies, healing rituals and traditional celebrations are manifestation from the relation of human with the nature, ancestors and communities. However, in the development of globalization, modernization, and technological developments, the existence of this cultural heritage faces quite serious challenges.

One of the problems is the decreasing interest of the younger generation in studying and preserving ancestral culture. Many of them are more interested in popular culture that comes from abroad, so that local traditions tend to be marginalized. In addition, the changes in people's lifestyles, urbanization, and the influx of global culture have resulted in most traditional ceremonies and oral traditions no longer being carried out routinely.

Another problem is the limited documentation and systematic preservation efforts. Much indigenous knowledge, such as folktales, myths, traditional religious rituals, and handicraft techniques, is passed down orally only. This case concerns about the loss of this knowledge when older generations are no longer able to convey it.

In addition, the exploitation of natural resources, shifting values due to development, and minimal attention from outside parties have also accelerated the loss of some elements of local culture. In fact, the cultural heritage of the Jayapura indigenous people not only functions as a community identity and character, but also plays an important role in tourism development, character education, and strengthening national cultural resilience.

Thus, real efforts are needed to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of the Jayapura indigenous people so that it does not become extinct. This preservation can be done through education, documentation, revitalization of traditional ceremonies, and empowerment of local communities as the main subjects in preserving their culture.

## **LITERARY REVIEWS**

The concept of cultural heritage as the legacy of tangible and intangible attributes inherited from the past generations, maintained in the present, and transmitted to future generations (UNESCO, 2003). Research divides cultural heritage into tangible (monuments, artifacts, landscapes, buildings) and intangible (rituals, traditions, oral histories, languages, and performing arts). But, this research included on the intangible heritage that has been owned by Jayapura. Smith (2006) defines that intangible cultural heritage serves as the foundation for community identity also linking people to their ancestral traditions. Indigenous communities (Bendix, 2009) argue that the intangible heritage plays a crucial in sustaining cultural resilience amidst globalization and modernization.

Some of researches note the challenges to heritage preservation such as the urbanization, modernization, climate change, commodification, and loss of intergenerational transmission. Logan (2012) argues that the global tourism can both the sustain and endanger of heritage, leading to commercialization and distortion of cultural the meanings of cultural heritage. In addition that the globalization that has contributed to the erosion of indigenous languages and rituals (Harrison, 2013).

While many studies examine cultural heritage globally, there is a growing call for localized studies, particularly focusing on indigenous communities in regions such as Papua. Much of the literature emphasizes monumental and urban heritage, whereas rural and ritual-based practices remain underexplored. Furthermore, the role of youth and intergenerational knowledge transfer requires deeper scholarly attention.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This is a library research study with the descriptive qualitative method. It is research that is done through the collection of the data, scientific writing that focuses on the investigating also gathering from bibliography the data. One aspect of library research is that the researcher is face to face with the text (Zed, 2004). This study will consult from

many reference books, and periodicals as well as the results of related earlier research, books, journals, and websites that have been connected to the researcher's topic. The data collecting technique is documentation, which looks for information about things or factors in books, journals, paper and document analysis of existing literature, local reports, and cultural archives. Besides that, the source data also use interviews with the community elders, cultural practitioners and youth. The subject of the research is the indigenous people of Jayapura or participants observation during the traditional ceremonies. The data analysis used data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Analysis of Types of Cultural Rituals in Jayapura, Papua**

The cultural traditions and rituals still practiced in Jayapura has important role in social aspect, spiritual and economic (UNESCO, 2003).

#### **a. Life-Cycle Rituals**

Birth, initiation, marriage, and death ceremonies are rituals that mark the stages of human life. For example, a birth ceremony is held to welcome a baby and seek protection from ancestral spirits. The Bakar Batu (Burning Stone) initiation ceremony not only symbolizes the transition to adulthood but also strengthens community unity through sharing a meal. Meanwhile, Sentani traditional marriages emphasize the value of social and economic exchange through dowries, while death ceremonies serve to maintain spiritual connections with ancestors. Function: strengthen family identity, maintain social continuity, and connect generations with ancestors.

#### **b. Religious and Spiritual Rituals**

Some rituals are closely linked to beliefs in ancestral spirits. Rituals to summon ancestral spirits are performed to seek guidance in dealing with problems, while the Suanggi ritual functions as a traditional healing ritual by expelling evil spirits that cause illness. Furthermore, village cleansing ceremonies demonstrate the

relationship between humans and nature, where communities pray for protection from disasters and calamities. Function: maintaining spiritual balance, preserving traditional beliefs, and strengthening communal solidarity through traditional religious practices.

c. Agricultural and Nature Rituals

Rituals related to nature, such as harvest rituals and ceremonies for clearing new land, reflect the harmonious relationship between indigenous communities and the environment. Agricultural and marine products are not only viewed as economic resources but also hold spiritual value for which gratitude must be expressed. The Bakar Batu tradition, also used in harvest or celebration contexts, symbolizes the values of togetherness, sharing, and brotherhood among members of the community.

d. Social and Communal Rituals

Social rituals emphasize togetherness and community integration. The Yospan dance serves as a friendship dance often performed at welcoming guests and cultural events. The War Dance holds historical value as a symbol of courage, while the Suanggi Dance is associated with spirituality and wards off evil spirits. Furthermore, customary conflict resolution ceremonies play a crucial role in fostering social reconciliation through symbols of peace, typically the sharing of traditional food. Function: maintaining social solidarity, resolving conflict, and serving as a medium for artistic expression and collective identity.

e. Cultural Festivals

Traditional rituals have also evolved into cultural festivals, such as the Sentani Lake Festival. This event combines traditional dances, Tifa music, and decorated boats, thus serving not only as a means of cultural preservation but also supporting local tourism and providing economic benefits to indigenous communities. Function: Preserving culture in a modern context, promoting local identity, and developing a tourism-based creative economy.

Thus, cultural rituals in Jayapura serve not only as religious or customary symbols, but also as a means of social unification, a guardian of spirituality, a preserver

of nature, and a driver of the creative economy. This confirms the strategic role of indigenous traditions in sustainable development based on local wisdom in Papua.

### **Challenges in Preserving the Cultural Heritage**

Preserving cultural heritage in Jayapura, Papua, faces various challenges from both internal and external factors. In terms of modernization and globalization, the influx of foreign culture through media, education, and social interaction often leads the younger generation to be more attracted to modern popular culture than to ancestral customs and traditions. This has led to a shift in values and a decline in interest in preserving traditional rituals, languages, and arts.

Furthermore, urbanization and population mobility also impact cultural preservation. Many indigenous peoples have moved to urban areas, leading to a decline in participation in traditional ceremonies. On the other hand, the influx of immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds can lead to cultural assimilation, potentially shifting local traditions.

Another equally important factor is the lack of documentation and institutional support. Many traditions are passed down orally from generation to generation, without adequate recording or archiving. Consequently, as the number of traditional inheritors decreases, cultural knowledge is at risk of being lost. Support from local governments and cultural institutions is often sub optimal, whether in the form of regulations, preservation programs, or funding.

From a social and educational perspective, there are limitations in the integration of cultural heritage into the formal education system. This prevents the younger generation from gaining a deep understanding of the importance of preserving local culture. Culture-based education can be an effective means of maintaining the cultural identity of the Papuan people.

Finally, challenges also from the stigmatization and marginalization of local culture. Some traditional practices are still considered archaic or irrelevant to current

developments. This leaves indigenous communities facing a dilemma between maintaining tradition and adapting to the demands of modernity.

### **Strategies to Enhance Cultural Preservation in Jayapura, Papua**

Cultural preservation in Jayapura, Papua, requires a comprehensive and sustainable strategy to ensure the preservation of indigenous traditions amidst modernization (UNESCO, 2015). Key strategies such as:

- a. Education and the transfer of knowledge between generations. Formal and non-formal education can be effective tools for introducing local cultural values from an early age. Integrating local wisdom into the school curriculum, along with the role of traditional elders as cultural educators, will strengthen the younger generation's understanding of their identity.
- b. Documentation and digitization of cultural heritage is a crucial step in preventing the loss of indigenous knowledge. Research, recording, and publication of traditional rituals, dances, and music need to be systematically conducted. Utilizing digital media, such as online platforms and online cultural archives, can also expand access and make it easier for younger generations to learn about their ancestral traditions.
- c. Festivals and cultural tourism. Activities such as annual festivals showcasing arts, culinary delights, and traditional rituals can serve as a platform for preservation and attract tourists. The development of culture-based tourism must be carried out carefully to avoid diminishing its sacred meaning while still providing economic benefits to local communities.
- d. Legal protection and government policies play a crucial role. Regional governments can create regulations that guarantee the rights of indigenous communities to practice their traditions, while also providing financial support and facilities for cultural activities. The establishment of regional cultural councils can also ensure ongoing oversight of cultural practices
- e. Empowering indigenous communities is key to strengthening their position as cultural owners. Support in the form of training, creative economic development, and the promotion of local, culture-based products will provide real incentives for



communities to continue preserving their ancestral heritage. The participation of the younger generation also needs to be facilitated through engaging and relevant programs.

- f. Finally, collaboration with academics, universities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can strengthen preservation efforts. Collaboration in the form of research, mentoring, and community service programs will help document, preserve, and develop Papuan culture within a broader framework.

By implementing these strategies, cultural preservation in Jayapura not only serves to preserve ancestral heritage, but can also become social capital, collective identity, and a resource for sustainable development in Papua.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research shows that ritual traditions in Jayapura are an important part of the cultural identity of indigenous communities and are an ancestral heritage with social, spiritual, and communal values. Various rituals that are still practiced, such as life cycle ceremonies, spiritual practices, celebrations of natural resources, traditional dances, and conflict resolution, demonstrate that traditions are not merely ceremonial symbols, but also a means of strengthening solidarity, strengthening identity, and transmitting noble values between generations. The role of indigenous communities, particularly elders and leaders, is crucial in maintaining the continuity of rituals through oral knowledge, teaching cultural values within families, and active involvement in every celebration. However, the preservation of ritual traditions faces serious challenges, including modernization, urbanization, changing beliefs, and the declining interest of the younger generation in ancestral traditions.

Therefore, preservation efforts require sustainable and collaborative strategies, such as cultural documentation, integrating local wisdom into education, organizing cultural festivals, protecting them through government policies, and empowering indigenous communities to develop a culture-based creative economy. Thus, preserving ritual traditions in Jayapura not only means preserving the past, but also ensuring that ancestral wisdom remains relevant, alive, and provides direction for future generations.



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