

The Practices of Berdikir and Berbadak as Cultural Heritage among Kedayan Ethnic Marriages in Lawas, Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the *berdikir* and *berbadak* ceremony as a cultural heritage in the Kedayan ethnic wedding customs in Lawas, Sarawak. This study was conducted by focusing on the implementation of *berdikir* and *berbadak* ceremonies in the Kedayan ethnic wedding customs in Lawas, Sarawak as well as analyzing the symbolic functions and meanings contained in both practices. The ceremony is part of the intangible cultural heritage that is still practiced in the Kedayan ethnic group in Lawas Sarawak and has a close relationship with religious elements, customs and the identity of the local community (Awang Azman Awang Pawi, 2013). In the context of cultural studies, wedding ceremonies are seen as an important field that reflects the values, beliefs and social structure of society. Previous studies have shown that cultural practices act as a system of symbols that form the meaning and identity of the community (Geertz, 1973), while oral traditions such as *berdikir* function as a medium for conveying values and social norms (Finnegan, 2012). However, studies that integrate the practice of *berdikir* and *berbadak* specifically in the Kedayan ethnic context in Lawas Sarawak are still limited. This study uses a qualitative approach through observation, interview and document analysis to understand the implementation and cultural meaning of the practice. The findings of the study show that *berdikir* functions as an expression of oral culture that contains elements of advice, prayer and praise, while *berbadak* symbolizes self-purification, blessing and blessings in the transition of the bride's life. These two practices complement each other in forming a ritual system that reflects the continuity of cultural heritage, the strengthening of social relations and the preservation of Kedayan ethnic identity in Lawas Sarawak. This study contributes to the enrichment of cultural studies by emphasizing the importance of ritual as a medium of meaning and transfer of cultural values in traditional and contemporary societies.

keywords: Marriage, Berdikir, Berbadak, Cultural Heritage, Ritual

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country rich in cultural diversity, customs and traditions inherited by various ethnic communities. This diversity forms the national identity and becomes an important heritage treasure in the life of the community. Based on (UNESCO, 2003) cultural heritage includes tangible heritage and intangible heritage that includes social practices, rituals, customs, traditional knowledge and cultural expressions that are passed down from one generation to the next. According to Ismail (2018), intangible cultural heritage plays an important role in preserving community identity, strengthening social relationships and ensuring cultural continuity in the face of the challenges of globalization and increasingly rapid social change.

In the context of society in Malaysia, marriage customs are one of the manifestations of cultural heritage that are still practiced today. Marriage is not just an institution that unites two individuals through a legal bond, but also functions as a medium of conveying cultural values, beliefs and social norms of a society (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Each ethnic group has its own customs and wedding rituals that reflect the world view, value system and cultural identity of the community concerned. The ceremonies performed in a wedding

ceremony usually contain elements of symbolism that reflect the hope for well-being, blessings, fertility and harmony in family life (Turner, 1969).

In Sarawak, one of the ethnic groups that also has a unique cultural heritage of marriage is the Kedayan ethnic group. The Kedayan ethnic group is a group of indigenous people who inhabit the northern areas of Sarawak, especially in Lawas and Limbang, as well as in Sabah and Brunei Darussalam. The Kedayan community is known for its strong adherence to Islamic teachings while still maintaining various traditional customs inherited from previous generations (Awang Pawi, 2013). In the context of marriage, the Kedayan community has several ceremonies that reflect the close relationship between culture, religion and the social life of the community. The ceremonies not only function as a complement to the wedding ceremony, but also become a medium for conveying cultural values and social education to the younger generation.

However, studies that focus on Kedayan ethnic marriage customs are still very limited. Most previous studies focus more on aspects of language, ethnic identity, traditional beliefs and engagement customs such as *Njaum-Njaum* (Awang Pawi, 2013; Barwi, 2023). The lack of systematic documentation has the potential to cause the meanings, values and philosophies contained in the ritual to be increasingly forgotten by the younger generation. Therefore, a study was conducted to identify the implementation of the practice of dhikr and berbadak in the Kedayan ethnic wedding customs in Lawas, Sarawak as well as to analyze the function and symbolic meaning contained in both practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies related to Kedayan ethnic marriage customs

Among the studies that discuss Kedayan ethnic marriages is a study conducted by Normiwati Barwi (2023), *Njaum-Njaum as a Marriage Proposal of Kedayan's Ethnic Perspective Sarawak Islamic Family Law Ordinance 2001*. This study discusses in detail the practice of *Njaum-Njaum*, which is a Kedayan ethnic engagement custom that involves giving a ring and opening money to the woman as a sign of consent to the engagement. The findings show that this custom is still practiced by the Kedayan ethnic group in Kampung Bungai, Bekenu, Sarawak despite social changes and modernization. This study also explains that the Kedayan ethnic group sees this custom as a symbol of respect for the woman's family as well as a symbol of the men's seriousness in the marriage process.

Studies related to Kedayan ethnic

One of the studies related to Kedayan ethnicity is the study conducted by Dilah Tuah et al. (2021). This study investigates and reports on the language choices among the Kedayan community in Bekenu in order to determine the resilience of this language due to the wide usage of the Malay language, Sarawak Malay dialect and Iban language in Sarawak. This study applies the domain analysis and language choice framework by Fishman (1972) which is the domain of family, friendship, religion, education and work. A total of ninety informants from three different ages group were selected based on quota sampling method. This study found that the Kedayan language is resilient although it receives pressure from Sarawak Malay dialect and Iban language. In conclusion, this study found that the Kedayan language is well preserved at this time compared to other minority languages in Sarawak.

A study by Salbrina Sharbawi & Afi Hasnan (2018) shows the previous research on Brunei English (BrunE) has reported that its speakers tend to pronounce postvocalic /r/, resulting in the widely accepted view that BrunE is a rhotic variety, particularly when contrasted with the largely non-rhotic English of neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia. This characteristic has commonly been attributed to first-language (L1) transfer from Brunei Malay, which itself is rhotic. To re-examine this explanation, the present study focuses on the Kedayan community, whose members traditionally speak a non-rhotic Malay dialect. Speech samples obtained from reading tasks involving 10 Kedayan speakers from two age groups were analysed and compared with their responses to a questionnaire exploring linguistic identity. The analysis indicates that the participants' English is generally non-rhotic and suggests an age-related pattern in the production of /r/. Older speakers displayed almost no rhotic pronunciations, whereas younger speakers, who reported weaker identification with the Kedayan dialect, exhibited greater variation in their realisation of /r/. These findings challenge the argument

that rhoticity in Brunei English is primarily the result of spelling pronunciation. Instead, they support the view that rhoticity is better understood as a consequence of L1 influence and that its occurrence is associated with generational differences, becoming more evident among younger speakers. This study also shows that the issue of rhoticity among the Kedayan people is closely related to the age factor.

Among the scholarly works on the Kadayan ethnic community is a study on the Ritual Makan Tahun (Annual Feast Festival) ritual, conducted by Mohamad Maulana Magiman & Othman Yatim (2011). Annual Feast Festival a traditional celebration observed by the Kadayan community in Kampung Selanyau, Bekenu, Sarawak. Despite the rapid socioeconomic development experienced in Sarawak, the Kadayan community continues to uphold this ritual as a means of reinforcing their ethnic identity and safeguarding their cultural heritage from disappearing. The celebration embodies both religious and cultural dimensions, serving as an expression of gratitude to Allah S.W.T. for a successful and abundant padi harvest. This thanksgiving is marked through a series of Islamic religious practices, including *Tahlilan*, *Bacaan Yasin*, *Ratib Saman*, *Solat Dhuha*, *Solat Hajat*, and *Doa Selamat*. Beyond its religious significance, the ritual is intended to instil positive values in future generations of the Kadayan community. The organisation and execution of the festival require the collective involvement of villagers and neighbouring communities, reflecting a strong spirit of cooperation and social solidarity. Furthermore, the celebration strengthens relationships among family members and the wider Kadayan community while reinforcing values of gratitude, unity, purity, and cleanliness that are central to Kadayan cultural identity. Ultimately, the continued observance of the Makan Tahun ritual demonstrates the community's commitment to preserving what is regarded as the "*ibu segala ritual*" (the mother of all rituals), ensuring its continuity as an important cultural legacy for future generations.

According to the study by Mohamad Maulana Magiman et. al. (2019), ritual communication is a common practice in many societies, particularly in the performance of ceremonial rituals that serve as a medium for expressing intentions and aspirations through various forms of presentation. These presentations function as channels of communication in both verbal and non-verbal forms by incorporating a range of symbols that carry specific meanings. Such symbols are manifested through ritual communication and can only be fully understood by members of the community who practice the rituals. This study examines the role of religious symbols in the ritual communication of the Kadayan community in Sarawak. The research data were collected using an ethnographic approach through fieldwork conducted in the Sibuti, Sarawak, and analysed based on Turner's Ritual Theory to explain how ritual symbols contribute to fostering togetherness and community cohesion. The findings indicate that ritual communication within the Kadayan community encompasses three principal dimensions: thought, self, and society. These dimensions play a significant role in maintaining social harmony, as a lack of understanding of the symbolic meanings embedded in the rituals may give rise to social disruption and challenges within the community.

A study related to wedding customs in Sarawak

Among other things, a study related to marriage is the ritual practice of sweet flour customs in the Sarawak Malay community in a wedding ceremony conducted by Sarra Jastika Bohari and Mohamad Maulana Magiman (2020). This tradition is believed to be able to bring prosperity and happiness to the individual who is sprinkled. Basically, the custom of sweet flour is seen as a ceremony of sowing yellow rice, corn kernels, potted flowers and sprinkling scented water on the bride and groom. This study found that the ritual is not just a custom, but contains cultural symbolism related to well-being, fertility, happiness, sustenance and sanctity of married life. This study uses an ethnographic approach through interviews with mak andam, priests and traditional practitioners. Data analysis explains that the symbols used in the custom of sweet flour which have been translated through the aspects of the materials used in its implementation which symbolically carry the meaning of wealth (prosperity), purity, beauty, fertility, morals and happiness.

In addition, a study by Azlie et al. (2022) found that each ceremony in the Melanau marriage customs is carried out with full customs and has its own uniqueness and style that distinguishes it from the practices of other races found in Malaysia. The study carried out discusses the customs and uniqueness of Melanau marriages in Sarawak. In addition, this study was conducted to raise the traditions of the Melanau people which are becoming extinct among the community, especially the younger generation. This study also aims to identify taboos in the marriage customs of Melanau, Sarawak. In order to obtain data, the interview method was

conducted with an informant who is skilled and knowledgeable in the field of marriage customs of the Melanau people, Sarawak.

In conclusion, based on previous studies it was found that studies related to marriage customs in Sarawak have indeed been discussed, but specific studies on the marriage customs of the Kedayan ethnic group in Sarawak are still very limited. Most of the previous research focused on aspects of language, ethnic identity, traditional beliefs and engagement customs such as Njaum-Njaum. Studies that comprehensively document the Kedayan marriage process, including rituals before, during and after marriage, taboos still receive little attention. Therefore, a study on the "Practice of *Berdikir* and *Berbadak* as Cultural Heritage in Kedayan Ethnic Marriages in Lawas, Sarawak" has the potential to fill the knowledge gap and contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Kedayan community.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies a qualitative approach and field methods. A qualitative approach was used to help in understanding the *berdikir* and *berbadak* ceremony as a cultural heritage in the Kedayan ethnic wedding customs in Lawas, Sarawak. A total of three (3) selected informants who are residents of Kampung Baru Sundar, Lawas Sarawak. The selection of informants is based on their direct involvement in this practice when there is a wedding ceremony. All data was collected through three main methods. Firstly interviews with informants, observation and literature review. The interview method is a method used to collect data that is difficult to obtain through observation methods such as a person's background, experience, and feelings (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Muthiah, 2008). This study uses semi-structured interviews which ask open-ended questions to informants for the purpose of data collection. In addition, the research methodology used to gather is the observation method is also used. The observation method is a process of observing more deeply, systematically and more to make an assessment based on the objectives of the observer's study (Badzis, 2008). In this study, observation was carried out directly with the involvement of attending a wedding ceremony held in Kampung Kampung Baru Sundar, Lawas Sarawak. In addition, data collection is also carried out through literature review to obtain secondary data to assist in the analysis of research data.

DISCUSSION

Berdikir's Ceremony

The prayer and dhikr ceremony is one of the effective practices in guiding the community to always remember Allah SWT and express love for Rasulullah SAW. The implementation of this kind of ceremony is able to create a positive atmosphere that gives a deep impact to every individual present. Likewise in the Kedayan ethnic custom that applies this ceremony as one of the ceremonies that must be present in a wedding ceremony. The following is a discussion of the implementation of the Kedayan ethnic ceremony:



Fig1 *Berdikir* 's Ceremony

The figure 1, above shows the *berdikir* ceremony performed at the bride's house. Usually, the performance of this *berdikir* ceremony is carried out on the same day as the *berbadak* ceremony. In the Kedayan ethnic group in Lawas Sarawak, the organization of this ceremony has become a common practice in line with the Islamic guidance guiding the community to always remember Allah SWT and express love for the Prophet SAW. This *berdikir* ceremony is usually performed by the bride and will also be joined by the bride's relatives, neighbours and invited guests. This ceremony serves as a medium for conveying moral values, ethics and social education to couples who are about to start a family.

This ceremony also reflects symbolism, among which are:

Symbols of Divine Blessing and Pleasure

The recitation of prayers, praises and prayers chanted in the ceremony symbolize the request blessings from Allah SWT on the bride and groom. This at the same time illustrates the hope that the marriage that is built will receive divine approval, the bride and groom will be blessed with happiness, good sustenance and pious descendants.

Symbols of Strengthening Social Relations

The involvement of family members, relatives and the community in the *berdikir* ceremony also illustrates the strengthening of social relations in which the spirit of togetherness and community unity through involvement in this ceremony. This ceremony is also seen as a symbol of social support for the bride and groom as well as strengthening friendships among members of the community. According to Awang Pawi (2013), ritual practices in ethnic communities in Sarawak often act as a mechanism for transferring cultural values and beliefs from previous generations to new generations. Therefore, the practice of *berdikir* can be seen as a form of cultural heritage that contains elements of strengthening community identity.

Berbadak Ceremony

The practice of *berbadak* is also one of the important ceremonies in the Kedayan ethnic wedding customs. Usually, this ceremony will be performed before the marriage ceremony and at the same time as the marriage ceremony. Before the implementation of this ceremony, the bride needs to prepare powder consisting of seven colors which is also known as seven-color powder. Here is a seven-color powder figure:



Fig 2 Seven-color powder

In the Kedayan ethnic wedding custom, seven-color powder is one of the important elements in the *berbadak* ceremony. The bride's family needs to prepare powder of seven colors consisting of white, pink, blue, green,

orange, purple and red. The use of seven colors is not just for aesthetic purposes, but contains symbolic values that reflect the hopes, blessings, prayers and philosophy of life of the Kedayan ethnic group towards the life of the bride and groom.



Fig 3 Seven-color powder dipping process



Fig 4 The process of brushing seven-colored powder on the bride's palms

Figure 3 and 4 show the execution of different ceremonies. Usually this ceremony will be completed by the bride's family and invited guests. It started by the parents of the groom and the bride by dipping the seven

colors of the powder and applying it to the palms of both brides and grooms. Next will be followed by family members of the groom and the bride.

The performance of this ceremony is seen as a symbol of self-purification, family blessing and prayer for well-being, preparations for the bride and groom to enter the household as well as a symbol of beauty and raising the bride's tie.

The Symbol of Self Purification

The *berbadak* ceremony symbolizes a process of self purification for the bride and groom before stepping into the realm of marriage. This reflects the hope that the bride and groom start a new life in a clean state, both physically and spiritually. The purification also symbolizes self-preparation to assume responsibility as a husband or wife.

Symbol of *Restu* and Prayer of Prosperity

In the performance of the ceremony, the parents of the groom and bride and family members and involved in applying powder to the bride. The act of dipping this seven-color powder and smearing it on the bride and groom's palms symbolizes the blessing, love and prayers from the family so that the bride and groom obtain happiness, well-being and blessings in their married life.

Symbols of Social Status Transition

According to an anthropological perspective, the *berbadak* ceremony can be interpreted as a ritual of transition (rite of passage) that marks the change of a person's status from single to married (Turner, 1969). Through this ceremony, it can symbolize recognition by the family and society as an individual who will assume a new role in the family institution.

Symbols of Beauty and Radiance of the Bride and Groom

In the context of the practice of *berbadak* ceremony, the bride's beauty and charm should not be seen and understood solely as physical beauty or external appearance. On the other hand, this concept includes a broader aspect, which is outer and inner beauty that symbolizes the individual's availability to enter the realm of marriage. The use of powder in the *berbadak* ceremony aims to beautify the bride and groom so that they look neat, clean, radiant and attractive on a day that is considered important in their lives. Symbolically, a radiant face symbolizes joy, confidence and good morals in addition to the radiance of a happy, harmonious and blessed home life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the practice of *berdikir* and *berbadak* in Kedayan ethnic weddings in Lawas, Sarawak is part of the intangible cultural heritage that reflects the identity, values and philosophy of life of the Kedayan community. These rituals not only function as complements in marriage customs, but also contain various symbolic meanings related to blessings, self-purification, well-being and the formation of a harmonious married life. This practice also shows the close relationship between traditional cultural elements and Islamic values that are the backbone of Kedayan community life. This study has the potential to contribute to the formulation and implementation of intangible cultural heritage conservation policies at the state and national levels. Systematic documentation of the practice of *berdikir* and *berbadak* can be used as a reference source for related agencies in identifying, recording and preserving Kedayan ethnic cultural heritage so that it does not disappear under the current of modernization.

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