

An Epistemological Study of Rejang Tribe's *Kejei* Dance in Bengkulu Province

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Abstract—*Kejei* is a Rejang tribal sacred dance that is performed during the community's great festivity. This dance is estimated to appear in the year 1947, under the era of the leadership of the tribe of Rejang Ajai. Because of its traditional nature, *Kejei* dance not only prioritizes the beauty of motion, but also provides strength, regulates something to achieve, and influences the community's environment. Amid the emergence of the dance now, there has not been much change, only in the form of its presentation has it experienced a slight shift along with the times. The sacred dance shows are now only a form of entertainment dance that all people can enjoy at any time.

Keywords—*Kejei, tradition, epistemology*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity is an attraction and characteristic of Indonesia. Likewise, Indonesian people consist of different ethnic groups, nationalities and races. Likewise, unique cultures reflect the diversity and wealth of tribes in Indonesia. Looking back at the history of Indonesia in the past, Indonesia was a former colony of foreign nations that eventually left a wide variety of major impacts on cultures, for example, Austronesian and Melanesian national cultures.

As Koentjaraningrat in [1] and Edward Burnet Taylor in [2] put, culture is a belief or a belief system. Javanese people, for example, have a belief in an event that must be commemorated or carried out in a ceremony.¹ The Rejang tribe is one of the oldest tribes in Sumatra, precisely in Rejang Lebong District, Curup, Bengkulu Province [3]. Rejang Lebong has an area of about 1.515.76 kilol square meters and has a population of around 246.378 inhabitants [4]. The Rejang tribe has a clear lineage, ranging from customs to the procedures of a high system of life among hundreds of tribes in the archipelago.² The Rejang tribe has enough elements to express a culture including history, language, numbers, knowledge systems, social organizations, equipment systems, livelihoods and technology, and religious and artistic systems. One of the arts in the Rejang community what has been preserved until now is the *Kejei* ceremony. It is a celebration of the grand festivity or a big event held by the Rejang people such as marriage (kemtuk), circumcision (temtok puguk), piercing (menindik), and releasing intentions or vows (mpas sot sangei). At the *Kejei* ceremony, a dance that accompanies

the ceremony is commonly called the *Kejei* dance. It is believed to be a sacred dance of the Rejang tribe that can only be performed at certain times, because of its sacred nature. In addition, this dance has several things to obey when performing it. Regarding the form of presentation, *Kejei* Dance may not be performed on any place or opportunity. As we know, in prehistoric times, this dance was an expression of a sense of community excitement, and then it was manifested in a religious ceremony or ritual. In the ritual of a community group, most dances pay less attention to the beauty or aesthetics aspects in performing them, but rather they aim to represent the ceremony. It happened to the *Kejei* dance at the *Kejei* ceremony. This dance does not emphasize aesthetics too much in dancing, but other objectives are conveyed to influence the environment and lifestyle of the community. This can evidently be viewed through a very simple motion that does not change too much. Even, this dance has a mystical element because several requirements and completeness must be obeyed by dancers and the community who perform it in the *Kejei* ceremony.

For that reason, it is necessary to explore each of the developments and stages of change from time to time so that all the traditional dances exist in Indonesia.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow: Section II presents the discussion. Section III describes about epistemology dance. Finally, Section IV concludes this work.

II. DISCUSSION

A. Rejang Tribe

Rejang is among the oldest tribes on the island of Sumatra [4]. We can explore its authenticity and privilege based on the cultural elements that have long been integrated into it. Historically, the development of the Rejang tribe is divided into two parts, namely the history of ancient Rejang and the history of modern regimes. An ancient Rejang document states that all the Rejang's scattered people came from the areca nut coating, or the scalp that is currently called *Lebong*. At this time, several figures have led the tribe including:

1) *Rhe Jang Hyang*

The first person from Mongolia came to Bengkulu around 4100 years ago. People at this time were referred to as ancient

tribes of Rejang because at the beginning of their arrival, they were led by Rhe Jang Hyang from the north through the west route and ended at the coastal strait. They used to move, or live in caves commonly called *serunding*, and they depended wholly on leaf roofs, and simple living equipment. After years of living in the jungle, they finally settled around 2090 BC by establishing a village called Kutai Nuak, in the area of Napal Putih, North Bengkulu. Rheang Hyang died at the age of 120 years and his successor was I Daey Lian's grandson from Rhe Jang Hyang who led a new place called Kutai Pinang Belapis.

2) *Kutai Pinang Belapis*

Kutai Pinang Belapis is an area located between *Lebong* district and Kerinci Regency. During I Daey Lian's leadership, Kutai Pinang Belapis had developed in terms of the pattern of life, but Daey Lian's first leadership period only lasted 67 years, and then he died and was replaced by Suto Da Eng. During Suto Da Eng's leadership, many disputes happened because the policies were considered too harsh. He changed the total pattern of leadership that had been made by the old leadership. Consequently, the people of Areca nut must live independently, but could not depend on other groups. Finally, Suto Da Eng migrated to Borneo, Kalimantan, and then the leadership was replaced by Jun Jung Bumay.

Furthermore, the areca nut kingdom continued to develop, the descendants of Rhe Jang Hyang's families were called "Jang" or tun that corresponded to Rhe Jang Hyang's daily nickname who settled and had their own territory. These Jang people are then called the Rejang tribes.

B. *Kejei Dance*

Kejei dance is a Rejang folk art performed during the *Kejei* ceremony, or the biggest celebration in the Rejang tribe. It is said that the biggest celebration aims to hold the *Kejei* program that can promote people's capabilities. In the celebration, they killed several buffaloes, goats or cows as a legitimate condition for the *Kejei* ceremony. The dance is performed by young people in the rural center at night amid the lantern lighting. This dance is an introduction to the young and tribal girls 3, and it is only performed at grand ceremonies or parties such as "kemtuk" marriage, "temtok puguk" circumcision, piercing "merging", and releasing the "mpas sot sangei" vow. Therefore, to implement the tradition will take a long time. Even, to do an activity is not as easy as to say it, and the word '*Kejei*' arises. In addition, several other conditions must be met as well as binding rules for performing the *Kejei* dance.

Kejei Dance was originally named after Ta'ei Jang. *Kejei* means "work", and this dance was performed at a time of the great feast called Biku Bermano marriage with Princess Senggang, the leader of monks in the history of the modern era.⁴ There were monks or four brothers from Mojopahit (Java), Biku Sepanjang Jiwo, Biku Bejenggo, Biku Bermano, and Biku Bembo. They were Buddhist monks and they were not siblings; they only had relatives in a religious school in the

Mojopahit Kingdom. Their arrival was intended to spread the teachings of religion, namely Buddhism. During the monk's wedding, there was a *Penei* in the middle of the dancer, as a barrier between female and male dancers. *Penei* is a symbol of the Kutai, a symbol of welfare for the people of the Rejang tribe at that time, as well a symbol of prosperity for the Rejang tribe. *Penei* people in the Rejang tribe consist of two forms, namely *Penei* for the meket poi (binding rice) and *Penei* for ceremonial purposes that hold a gung *kecintang* and perform the *Kejei* dance at the *Kejei* ceremony.

In the Rejang tribal community, the custom of marriage is a manifestation of respect and dignity, the completeness of holding a traditional wedding procession that in its implementation will reflect the social status of the family hosting the celebration.

C. *Performance Form*

The *Kejei* dance is performed in a group consisting of an odd number of female dancers and male dancers. This dance accompaniment consists of traditional musical instruments typical to the tribe of Rejang, such as gung, *kecintang*, dep, sambei and serambek. As usual, sambei is a form of traditional Rejang tribe singing an advice-rich *pantun* [a Malayan form of repetitive poetry]. In performing the *Kejei* dance, the dancers must be from different clans. This is due to the fact that Rejang tribal community's belief in that one clan or tribe means blood relations. Thus, if the two of them later get married, a disaster will occur and give birth to a bad descendant. Besides, the dancers must be in a holy state and still a virgin.

If one of the dancers violates these provisions, there will be a riot. Like the accompaniment of *kulintang* musical instruments, the dance will break and one of the dancers will lose consciousness, so that this will disrupt the event because of its sacred nature. In short, *Kejei* dance has a number of preparations that must be obeyed before performing it:

1) *Mbuak gung kecintang*

An activity of griming gung, *kecintang* and deb with buiak minyak and the potpourri. Other equipment such as seven vines betel, seven pieces of raw betel leaves, seven forms of betel leaves, and turmeric rice placed in a bowl.

2) *Festivity*

Everyone sits in a hall with the candidates of *semanten* and *ngenyang* to start a procession called *mbuak gung kecintang*. The *Piawang* recites a prayer for the festivity.

3) *Sambei pengela*

Before the gung *kecintang* is sounded, the *balai jakso* will break, namely *sambei pengela*, read a prayer while singing. Each prayer contains the *pantun* to give advice to everyone in the hall so as not to make mistakes and violate customs. After completing the inquiry, the *jakso balai* will let *anok sangai* perform the *Kejei* dance starting with the host to request *anok*

sangai to perform the *Kejei* dance. *Kejei* dance has its own characteristics, so this dance is not allowed to be performed arbitrarily. Female dancers should not do graceful movements because this dance will look too simply.

Likewise, male dancers must show such movements strictly in accordance with their manly and authoritative attitude. This reflects the attitude of young people and young women who are simple and not excessive. The following are the forms of *Kejei* dance movements (see Figures 1-6):

a) *Sambah Movement*



Fig. 1. Sembah Movement

b) *Movement against the waist (for male and female dancers)*



Fig. 2. The wrong motion of waist (left) and man (right)

c) *Walk around the Penei*

- Eagles movement towards the wind (female dancers)



Fig. 3. Welcoming the wind

- Ngajak Motion (male dancers)



Figure 4. Ngajak Movement

d) *The broken paddle motions*



Figure 5. The broken paddle motion



Fig. 6. Men's broken laddle motion

In presenting the *Kejei* dance, a makeup and dress form is required to support the event. In addition, this will be intended to attract the attention of the community who participate in enlivening the celebration. In line with the make-up and dress, men wear Belango bay suits, black basic pants, cek'ulew headgear, sling, songket and Keris, whereas female dancers wear red velvet clothes, songket and scarves and the bottom motif is shoot-shaped shoots, sunting goyang and cempaka that must be odd in number, bracelet and beads.

As explained earlier, in the *Kejei* dance, there is a *Penei* among male and female dancers that symbolizes the Rejang community. Basically, the *Penei* form is good for the purposes of picking it and for the same grand festivity, the frame of grand *Penei* in the festivity is only placed on the table while the meket poi is made up of whole bamboos and four blades of bamboos stuck on the ground. *Penei* contains agricultural and plantation products, such as rice, corn, golden banana, pumpkin fruit, as well as kitchen utensils, traditional necessities, and household furniture tied to bamboo slats (see Figure 7).



Fig. 7. *Penei* as a grand festivity

III. EPISTEMOLOGY DANCE

Epistemology is a philosophy of science study that discusses how a science is found [5]. An epistemology dance discusses the processes and stages of the emergence of the dance [6]. The dance history cannot be separated from the development and civilization of human life. In its development, the culture of a society also experiences changes that will occur along with the development of its era. Dance began in pre-historic times to modern times. As we know that prehistory is the beginning of the emergence of a culture, for example, dance.

Dance is a form of art that is expressed through motions [7]. A traditional dance is a form of dance that was created long ago and inherited from generation to generation. In prehistoric times, people were unwittingly able to create an art. This starts from the expressions that strengthen the message in each expression. Pre-history dances have also been created, except that in this era dance is only a simple expression of joy. Like leaps, applause, and cheers from the community, but this was finally manifested in a religious ceremony or ritual.

The Rejang tribe led by four monks, and they often got involved in the civil war because of differences of opinions among their leaders. As the oldest monk, the monk along the island invited the other three monks to make a peace agreement. After making an agreement, the four monks decided to carry out a ceasefire as a first step to peace. As a symbol of peace, the four monks initiated a large ceremony or celebration held for several days. The ceremony presents the dance as entertainment. This dance is performed by several young people who have different clans. Because of the tense atmosphere at the time of truce, the dancers moved stiffly. The movement of the dancers who are stiff or cramped in what eventually the original name of the *Kejei* dance recognized publicly. *Kejei* is taken from the word seizure that can also be interpreted rigidly. The name "*Kejei*" is taken because it matches the movements of the stiff dancers.

Kejei dance was a complement to a traditional tribal Rejang ceremony at that time. This makes the *Kejei* dance sacred because several rules really need to be obeyed by the

surrounding community. When the leadership of the Biku came to the land, they brought the teachings of Buddhism. Thus, every activity is closely related to the ancestors and teachings of the religion.

The *Penei* is the barrier between male and female dancers when performing the *Kejei* dance. The *Penei* contains several agricultural and plantation products, which in the end, each of the produce has a philosophy for the survival of its community. In addition, the number of dancers and rules confirms that if the dancer is a clan, the dancer will get something bad. This is part of an understanding of the Rejang tribe's customs at that time.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the modern era, the development is a traditional dance is no longer consistent because certain people do not enjoy it and the rules to obey are strict. The community has prioritized logic thinking or rationality in that people are intended to leave a culture that is considered mythical or superstitious. This marks the presence of new innovations created by the community amid the world development. The *Kejei* dance had paid more attention to the social and entertainment functions of the association and the ritual function. This can be seen in the form of the dance presentation which is increasingly different. We can only witness this dance at a grand event, and now at ordinary weddings people can watch the *Kejei* dance. Even it has now been shown on certain events as part of the entertainment shows. *Kejei* dance was also contested as an effort to preserve this *Kejei* dance in the community. Not only do the government and the community continue to preserve one of the tribal cultures of the community, but also make the *Kejei* dance a part of the activities, especially the ones held by the Rejang tribes.

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