



The Role of *Handep* in Communication between Church and Culture in Central Kalimantan

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Abstract. Handep is a culture that has positive value for the churches in their existence in the midst of Dayak Ngaju people in the Province of Central Kalimantan Through Handep's role, the church builds good communication with culture. The purpose of this research is to find out the role of Handep in communication between the church and culture, and to see the challenges of the church in practicing Handep culture. The descriptive qualitative method is used in this study and it is found that Handep's role in communication is as a form of group communication that carries out its functions as social communication, expressive communication, and ritual communication. The implementation of Handep certainly cannot be separated from various challenges. These challenges are related to several aspects, namely education, economy, and culture. Through this research, we hope it can help the church and the community to preserve the Handep culture and have a positive impact on the church, community and cultural life in Central Kalimantan.

Keywords: Handep, Communication, Church, Culture

1 Introduction

Humans as social creatures are equipped with intellect and the ability to interact. Interaction with others is an unavoidable activity, and communication is an important point in human life. In general, communication itself is a process of conveying messages, ideas, ideas from one party to another. Many experts consider that communication is a basic need for a person in social life and society. Schramm [1] says that communication and society are two twin words or have similar meanings that are interrelated. Because it is impossible for society to be formed without communication, otherwise communication cannot be developed without society.

Basically, the culture contained in society plays a role in communication behavior, because communication is a system in socializing cultural norms from one society to another, as well as from one generation to the next. So that in return communication plays a role in determining and inheriting culture. As stated by Hall [2] that "culture is communication", and "communication is culture." Culture is then manifested in the form of language and behavior which certainly affects human communication as social beings [3]. So, the correlation between communication and culture is important to understand because with the existence of culture, it is important to understand the relationship between communication and culture.

Communication is the lifeblood of human interaction, serving crucial functions in our social lives. According to Gorden's theory, communication encompasses four key

functions: social communication, expressive communication, ritual communication, and instrumental communication. These functions are intricately intertwined, each playing a unique role. Social communication helps shape our self-concept, aids in survival, relieves tension through enjoyable exchanges, and fosters meaningful relationships. Expressive communication, closely linked to social communication, involves the expression of emotions and feelings through non-verbal cues, whether individually or in group settings. Ritual communication, often a collective endeavor, involves the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages during ceremonial occasions, reaffirming our commitment to culture, family, tribe, nation, and religion.

Culture plays a vital role in shaping the community's identity and social interactions in every society. The rich cultural diversity of Indonesia is a true national treasure that deserves to be celebrated and safeguarded. Each ethnic group boasts its unique cultural practices and social customs. One captivating aspect of Indonesian culture is the *Handep* culture, a local wisdom of the *Dayak Ngaju* tribe in the Central Kalimantan Province. This vibrant culture is not just a philosophy of life for the *Dayak Ngaju* tribe, but a testament to moral values such as equality, tolerance, and solidarity passed down through generations. It's a living heritage that we must cherish and honor [4].

The term *Handep* originates from the *Dayak Ngaju* language, symbolizing the spirit of cooperation. In ancient times, *Handep* culture was a beautiful way of expressing gratitude and reciprocating help from others, embodying noble values such as patience, wisdom, and mutual assistance. Today, *Handep* has evolved to encompass not only gratitude and reciprocity but also cooperation, playing a vital role in shaping community identity and maintaining cultural traditions. However, the rapid modernization and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have posed a threat to the continuity of *Handep* culture. Despite these challenges, the community continues to uphold *Handep* culture through various rituals and traditional practices, including *Tolak Bala*, *Punduk Sahur*, and *Pakanan Sahur*, as well as in significant life events such as *Tiwah*, weddings, land clearing, farming, and house-building. It's imperative to recognize the significance of *Handep* culture and work towards its preservation for the enrichment of our communities and the preservation of our heritage.

The *Handep* culture in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village is a vibrant part of the predominantly Christian community, bringing immense value to social, church, and cultural life. It's fascinating to note how the noble values within *Handep* Culture echo the teachings of love and mutual support found in Christianity, as mentioned in the Bible, "Help each other to bear your burdens! Thus you fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:7). This synergy has allowed Christian churches in the village, such as Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis (GKE), Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI), and Gereja Pantekosta Tabernakel (GPT), to integrate *Handep* culture into their social functions, enriching the village's social fabric. Amid the dynamic interplay between Christian faith and culture, *Handep* culture has emerged as a positive force within the *Dayak Ngaju* community, particularly in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village. Through the practice of *Handep*, the church has fostered effective communication with the community's culture. It's intriguing to see how communication and culture intertwine, with culture influencing communication behavior and communication aiding in the preservation of culture. This piques my interest in investigating the pivotal role of *Handep* in facilitating communication between the Church and Culture in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village, *Gunung Mas* Regency. This research endeavor holds the promise of contributing to the development of theories

on Communication and *Dayak Ngaju* culture, offering valuable empirical insights for future research

2 Research Method

The research method chosen for this study is qualitative, allowing us to gather insights from interviews and written sources to delve into the intricate nuances of attitudes, behaviors, and social processes [5]. This research was conducted in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village because this village always carries out tribal activities such as the ritual of rejecting bad luck, the ritual of *Punduk Sahur*, the ritual of food for *Sahur*, and the *Tiwah* ritual by always upholding *Handep* culture.

We chose a descriptive research approach in order to provide a clear and accurate picture of the variables and features that were being examined [6]. Immersion observation, in-depth interviews, careful documentation studies, and triangulation were some of the techniques we used to gather data. We interviewed ten informants over the course of six months, including prominent religious leaders, traditional figures, and involved community members. This approach was specifically chosen to support our investigation of the role of *Handep* in communication between church and culture in a region in Central Kalimantan, as well as our focus on attitudes, behaviors, and social processes.

3 Result/Finding and Discussion

There are 12 sub-districts in *Gunung Mas* Regency, Central Kalimantan Province, which include *Damang Batu* sub-district, *Mihing Raya* sub-district, *Miri Manasa* sub-district, *Kurun* sub-district, *West Rungan* sub-district, *Tewah* sub-district, *Manuhing* sub-district, *Manuhing Raya* sub-district, *Rungan* sub-district, *Rungan Hulu* sub-district, *Sepang* sub-district, and *Kahayan Hulu Utara* sub-district [7].

Tumbang Tambirah Village is home to 256 families, or roughly 1,050 people, and is part of the *Dayak Ngaju* tribe, according to administrative statistics from the Population and Civil Registry Office (Dinas Kependudukan dan Catatan Sipil) in 2019. The population of *Tumbang Tambirah* Village mainly practices Protestantism, but there are also followers of Catholicism, Islam, and Kaharingan.

There are three Christian church denominations in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village: GKE, GBI, and GPT. GKE was established in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village around 1958, approximately 63 years ago. Initially, GKE had a congregation of around 3 to 4 families. Ten years later, GPT and GBI also established congregations with 1 to 2 families. Currently, GKE has around 87 families in its congregation, GPT has around 80 families, and GBI has around 70 families.

The *Tumbang Tambirah* Village is known for its religious diversity, which brings great value to the social and cultural life of the community through the practice of *Handep* culture. *Handep* is a cultural practice of the *Dayak Ngaju* community, which involves voluntary mutual assistance, whether through labor or financial support. This is evident during the *Tiwah* ritual (a *Hindu Kaharingan* ritual) where people from various religious backgrounds come together to participate in the ritual. *Handep* also signifies reciprocity within the *Dayak* tribe, with two primary meanings: mutual cooperation and

voluntary assistance as a form of reciprocity. While "gotong royong" implies voluntary help without expecting anything in return, reciprocity means that the assisted party is obligated to repay the assisting party. The *Handep* tradition holds significance in social life, reflecting the colors of the Indonesian state, and embodies values such as religious values, mutual cooperation, kinship, solidarity, and deliberation [8].

The meaning and practice of *Handep* in ancient times differed from its current form. In ancient times, *Handep* involved providing assistance to others through labor. For example, if family A planted rice, family B would help by contributing their energy, with the understanding that family A would reciprocate when family B planted rice. This was the form of *Handep* practiced between families. In contrast, today's *Handep* is more about providing assistance in the form of objects or money that must be repaid equally or with interest. The term *Handep* is not used for labor-based assistance, which is instead referred to as "gotong royong" or simply "royong" in the village community. Unlike *Handep*, gotong royong activities are voluntary and not coerced.

Based on the data, it's clear that *Handep* can be seen in two distinct ways: first, as a form of mutual assistance based on reciprocity, and second, as voluntary mutual aid. The latter interpretation is supported by both interview results and research observations, particularly during the *Tiwah* ritual activities. During these rituals, the community comes together to contribute goods, money, and voluntary labor, showcasing both voluntary and obligatory forms of *Handep*. Another significant finding is that the practice of *Handep* has evolved over time. In ancient times, *Handep* involved mandatory contributions of energy, whereas today it mainly encompasses mandatory contributions of goods. However, voluntary mutual cooperation is more associated with labor-based *Handep*, which is often referred to as "*royong*" instead of *Handep*.

Handep's implementation unites nearly every villager, irrespective of class, religion, or nationality. Mutual cooperation and selfless assistance without asking anything in return are encouraged by *Handep* culture. The *Dayak Ngaju* Tribe has been greatly impacted by this culture. *Handep* is firmly ingrained in the village of Tumbang Tambirah and has been passed down through the centuries. Although its precise beginnings are unknown, *Handep* has been performed since ancient times and is applicable to all locals, irrespective of their color, ethnicity, religion, or social class. It is a custom that should be preserved and handed down to the next generation. Participating actively in *Handep*-related activities and highlighting the significance of *Handep* values in families, religious rituals, and village initiatives are just a few ways to maintain *Handep* culture.

Handep culture serves as a genuine form of communication between diverse communities. It brings the community together to put aside their differences and strive toward shared objectives. This is especially noticeable in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village, where people practice a variety of religions, including Christianity. The village's Christians actively engage in *Handep* culture, despite being the majority. As long as they stay within the set parameters and rules, the church has never forbade its members from participating in cultural events or traditions. This is because *Handep* culture promotes healthy relationships and communication while embodying positive values.

Because of this, even people who were first apprehensive have been able to show their empathy and make a beneficial impact.

It is imperative that significant efforts be made to maintain *Handep* habits for the upcoming generation. Numerous obstacles to *Handep* preservation have been noted by researchers, including:

1. Education: Urban residents with higher education levels are more likely to offer material support rather than be physically involved in *Handep* activities.
2. Economy: The survival of *Handep* culture is threatened by the need to meet the growing demands of contemporary living. It is challenging for people to prioritize *Handep* practices because meeting material necessities comes first. Because of their dedication to meeting their everyday basic needs, the community—especially the church congregation—may not fully participate in *Handep* activities. Because of this, *Handep* is now viewed as a discretionary activity rather than a necessity. The practice of *Handep* has also been influenced by contemporary culture.
3. Traditional customs are being lost as a result of the infiltration of contemporary culture into *Tumbang Tambirah* Village's daily existence. The application and maintenance of *Handep* have been greatly impacted by the influence of contemporary culture, especially on youth and teenagers. Church youth and teens' limited participation in *Handep* activities—often merely as visitors without actively participating in *Handep* practices—is the result of their ignorance.

Different Christian church denominations, including GKE, GBI, and GPT, gather in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village to participate in *Handep* culture. For *Dayak Ngaju* people, this traditional practice is vital because it exemplifies moral principles like equality, tolerance, brotherhood, and strong togetherness. *Handep* culture is essential for encouraging social interaction and communication amongst members of the community and various religious groups. As a result, friendships within the community are strengthened and strong social solidarity and beneficial social relationships are fostered. Overall, through the practice of *Handep* culture, effective communication is established, fostering harmonious relationships among churches, religious communities, and the wider community. Furthermore, it serves as a mechanism for passing down cultural norms to future generations.

The relationship between communication and culture is crucial to understand because culture plays a significant role in shaping how people communicate. As Hall states, culture is communication and communication is culture. There are three main reasons why culture influences communication: it teaches important rules, rituals, and procedures; it reinforces values; and it teaches individuals how to interact with each other. Culture is rich in positive values, including moral and social values that are prevalent in the *Ngaju Dayak* community. Therefore, the role of *Handep* culture is integral to group communication, which involves three or more individuals aiming to obtain various information, take care of themselves, or solve problems. As Husni [8] reveals, *Handep* is a tradition used to address common interests and solve problems within the community. For instance, *Handep* is employed in activities such as renovating bridges and cleaning the village for the common good. The positive effects of *Handep* are further supported by research findings that show the residents of *Tumbang Tambirah*

Village can cooperate and support one another for the benefit of everybody, preserving their group's status as a *Dayak Ngaju* tribe.

In life of people in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village, the group communication technique known as *Handep* is very important. The four purposes of communication are social, expressive, ritual, and instrumental, according to William I. Gordon's view [2]. These roles are interrelated, and in *Handep* culture, social communication is especially important. A person's self-concept is greatly influenced by social communication. Mead asserts that social interaction and communication shape a person's sense of self. According to this hypothesis, tribalism and religion have a significant impact on how people perceive themselves, which also holds true for the development of ethnic identity. A person's communication style affects how other people see and respond to them. The *Handep* culture, which actively shapes the self-concept of members of the *Tumbang Tambirah* Village community by encouraging them to actively participate in village events and reaffirm their identity as members of the *Dayak Ngaju* Tribe, is consistent with this hypothesis.

Meetings, seminars, and deliberations are just a few of the contexts where communication serves as a vehicle for self-expression. For example, *Tiwah* ritual, which is a component of *Handep* culture, is one of the important events that the community in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village organizes. According to research, the community first establishes an activity committee before holding talks and debates about the event and its related expenses. After considering the expenses of *Tiwah* ritual, it is usually decided to practice *Handep* in order to carry out the event.

According to Mulyana's thesis, participants in talks or problem-solving procedures would inevitably hold varying perspectives, reflecting people's social nature and need to express themselves through social communication. *Dayak Ngaju* tribe help one another both materially and morally, and *handep* is an important part of all social activities as a means of self-expression and group communication. Additionally, the people of *Tumbang Tambirah* Village use expressive communication to convey sympathy through non-verbal behaviors. For instance, the local pastor demonstrates sympathy by assisting in funeral arrangements when a community member passes away, indirectly encouraging others to participate in the communication process.

The *Tiwah* ritual activities of the *Tumbang Tambirah* village community involve expressive communication and ritual communication. People from different religious backgrounds participate, with Christians supporting the ritual as spectators. During the *Tiwah* ritual, individuals convey words and symbolic behaviors to show their commitment to their family, tribe, culture, nation, and religion. Rituals serve as a way for individuals to express emotional commitment and strengthen group cohesion. In addition to ritual communication, instrumental communication aims to motivate, change attitudes and behaviors, and achieve personal and collective goals in the short and long term. The *Handep* culture also plays a significant role in communication, facilitating interactions between communities, churches, and cultures. Although there may be conflicts between some cultural values of the *Dayak Ngaju* Tribe and Christian faith, the church, particularly GKE, has established guidelines for congregational involvement in traditional or cultural rituals. However, the *Handep* culture has been embraced as a positive influence, enabling the church to communicate effectively with the *Dayak Ngaju* community. Through *Handep*, the church performs its social functions and fosters cooperation among churches and between churches and culture. Culture acts

as a unifying force, influencing communication through socio-cultural elements. Culture is an integral part of communication behavior, and vice versa, communication helps preserve and pass on culture. Therefore, it is important for the church to establish effective communication with society and culture. According to several sources in the research, the church supports the practice of *Handep* by incorporating it into sermons to raise awareness among the congregation about participating in *Handep*. This is because the church believes that *Handep* is beneficial for community life and fosters unity among the people in the village. The research findings indicate that Christian churches in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village, specifically GKE, GPT, and GBI, have successfully integrated forms and functions of communication through the practice of *Handep* culture. When *Handep* culture is able to facilitate communication between churches and cultures and fulfill its communication functions effectively, it will not only survive and be preserved, but it may also become more widely recognized as the identity of the *Dayak Ngaju* people.

4 Conclusion

In a culture, there are also meanings that need to be conveyed to the community, as is the case with *Handep* culture. *Handep* culture is a concrete form of communication between the church and the culture, especially within the *Dayak Ngaju* tribe in Central Kalimantan. This makes *Handep* culture play an important role in communication. This important role is attributed to the moral and social values contained within the *Handep* culture. Additionally, *Handep* culture plays a crucial role in group communication, where each member of the community or church realizes that they live together in a community of *Dayak Ngaju* people who support each other and work together for common interests. Therefore, *Handep* culture acts as a form of social communication within the *Tumbang Tambirah* village community and among churches. *Handep* culture also plays a role in expressive communication, as individuals convey their sympathy through behavior or non-verbal communication in *Handep* practices. Furthermore, *Handep* culture serves as a form of ritual communication, with the people of *Tumbang Tambirah* Village actively participating in *Handep* practices. This reinforces the commitment of each community and church member to uphold positive cultural values such as *Handep* culture and adhere to various customary norms that are integral to their family, tribe, culture, nation, and religion. Moreover, *Handep* culture serves as instrumental communication, serving as a means to establish communication and cooperation within the community and church. This is evident through the involvement of pastors and members of GKE, GPT, and GBI congregations in various social community activities in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village.

The presence and practice of *Handep* culture in social and church life in *Tumbang Tambirah* Village cannot be separated from various challenges related to education, economy, and culture. These challenges affect the involvement of the community or congregation in the implementation of *Handep* culture. While education does not seem to be a significant barrier for community or church members, economic factors have transformed the nature of *Handep* culture from an obligation to a voluntary practice. Additionally, the influence of modern culture, especially among young people, poses a challenge to the preservation of *Handep* culture as it competes with globalized

entertainment and comfort facilities, ultimately affecting the continuity of local cultural values.

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