

TRANSMISSION OF THE PENGUTON DANCE IN KAYUAGUNG: A STUDY OF CULTURAL VALUES AND PRESERVATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This research focuses on examining the inheritance of the Penguton Dance in Kayuagung, Ogan Komering Ilir Regency, South Sumatra, focusing more on the cultural values contained and the preservation strategies implemented by the supporting community. The Penguton Dance is the oldest traditional dance in South Sumatra, created in 1889 and is still maintained as the sekapur sirih dance of OKI Regency. This research uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods to deeply explore the symbolic meaning, ethnopedagogical values, and cultural inheritance strategies carried out by the Kayuagung community. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, cultural figures, and the younger generation, as well as documentation studies. The results of the study indicate that the Penguton Dance contains cultural values that include the value of respect for ancestors and distinguished guests, the value of togetherness represented through the involvement of nine clans (Marga Siwe), the value of sacredness and social strata, and aesthetic values reflected in the movements, costumes, and dance properties. The preservation strategies adopted by the community include standardizing the dance as an official regional dance, maintaining the integrity of the nine dancers, staging performances at state events, and regeneration efforts through the involvement of the younger generation. This study concludes that the inheritance of the Penguton Dance requires an integrated approach between preserving cultural values and strategic innovation that adapts to changing times without losing the essence and sacredness of the dance.

Keywords: *Penguton Dance, cultural heritage, cultural values, preservation strategies, Kayuagung*

INTRODUCTION

The Penguton Dance is an intangible cultural heritage that was born and developed in Kayuagung, Ogan Komering Ilir (OKI) Regency, South Sumatra. The Penguton Dance was created in 1889 by Aisyah, daughter of Prince H. Bakri, then in 1920 it was perfected as a welcoming dance to welcome the arrival of the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies (Susanti, 2014). Since then, the Penguton Dance has become an integral part of the cultural identity of the Kayuagung community and was designated as the sekapur sirih dance of OKI Regency in 1992 (Penguton Dance, 2019). The uniqueness of the Penguton Dance lies in its sacredness, where not everyone can enjoy or perform this dance because it has strict binding rules (Susanti, 2016). The dancers are selected from prominent families or descendants of local nobility and must be virgins, reflecting the social strata that is highly respected in the Kayuagung community.

The underlying problem of this research is the threat to the sustainability of the Penguton Dance as a cultural heritage. The relatively few forms of performance have caused this dance to be forgotten and abandoned by the community, especially the younger generation (Susanti, 2014). Some elements of the performance, such as the presence of pencak silat, are starting to disappear due to the lack of successors, and public interest in watching the performances is decreasing. This condition threatens the existence of the Penguton Dance as part of the cultural identity of OKI Regency. On the other hand, the noble values contained in the Penguton Dance have great potential to be integrated into character education and strengthening the cultural identity of the younger generation. Research

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on the cultural values and preservation strategies of the Penguton Dance is important to be carried out so that this cultural heritage can continue to be maintained and passed on to future generations. This study aims to identify the cultural values contained in the Penguton Dance and analyze the preservation strategies implemented by the Kayuagung community in passing down the dance. Using a qualitative approach and ethnographic methods, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the meaning and function of the Penguton Dance within the socio-cultural context of the Kayuagung community, as well as formulate recommendations for effective preservation strategies to maintain the sustainability of this cultural heritage in the future.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in-depth the symbolic meanings, cultural values, and inheritance strategies employed by the community supporting the Penguton Dance (Creswell, 2014). Ethnographic methods allow researchers to understand cultural phenomena from the perspective of the local community through direct observation and interaction with key informants. The research location was Kayuagung District, Ogan Komering Ilir Regency, South Sumatra. Kayuagung was chosen as the center of the birth and development of the Penguton Dance and where its values and traditions are still maintained to this day. The research was conducted over a six-month period, from January to June 2026.

The research participants consisted of key informants with in-depth knowledge of the Penguton Dance, including Kayuagung traditional leaders, cultural figures and dance artists, young people involved in dance preservation, and the general public knowledgeable about this tradition. Participant selection was conducted using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to ensure the involvement of informants most relevant to the research topic. The data collection instrument in this study was the researcher herself, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, and related documents. The interview guidelines were semi-structured to allow for in-depth exploration of the informants' experiences and perspectives. Participatory observation was conducted by attending various cultural activities and Penguton Dance performances in Kayuagung. The data collection procedure included initial observation, in-depth interviews with key informants, participant observation, documentation studies of archives and written sources, and data triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Data from various sources were categorized based on emerging themes: cultural values, preservation strategies, and heritage challenges. Data validity was achieved through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking with key informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History and Existence of Penguton Dance

The results of the study show that the Penguton Dance is the oldest dance in South Sumatra, whose existence predates the Sriwijaya Gending Dance. This dance was born from the initiation of Prince H. Bakri and his daughter Aisyah as a form of respect and welcome to distinguished guests visiting Kayuagung. Since its inception, the Penguton Dance has had a close relationship with the social structure of the Kayuagung community which consists of nine clans, which were later known as the Siwe Clan. This information was obtained based on the results of an interview with a Kayuagung traditional leader, Mr. H. Sarifuddin on May 15, 2026, where he stated that the Penguton Dance is not just a dance, but a reflection of the Kayuagung community which consists of nine clans. Every movement and property used has a deep meaning, which must be understood by future generations so as not to lose their identity as Kayuagung people.

The Penguton Dance, as a symbol of the Kayuagung community, remains preserved to this day. Although the relatively few performances of the Penguton Dance have caused it to begin to be forgotten in Kayuagung, local traditional leaders are working to restore its authenticity. They hope that the dance will remain remembered by the community, recognized by the younger generation, and become a source of pride for Ogan Komering Ilir Regency. The standardization of the dance as the Sekapur Sirih Dance of Ogan Komering Ilir Regency in 1992 marked a significant milestone in the preservation of the Penguton Dance, granting formal legitimacy and official status to this cultural heritage.

Penguton Dance Presentation Form

Based on the findings of this study, the Penguton Dance is presented in three sequential ceremonial sequences. The first sequence is the wearing of Kepundang as a headdress for men or the garlanding of flowers. The second sequence is a welcoming ceremony by a ten-member pencak silat troupe, demonstrating their skills in using various props such as branches, tridents, keris, spears, and swords. The third sequence is a welcoming ceremony by nine young women who are the core of the dance performance. These findings align with previous research that revealed the unique presentation structure of the Penguton Dance and its specific rules (Susanti, 2014). The nine female dancers are maintained as a tribute to their ancestors and a symbol of the nine clans in Kayuagung. These nine clans are Kayuagung Asli, Perigi, Kotaraya, Kedaton, Jua-jua, Mangunjaya, Paku, Sukadana, and Sidakersa. The dancer formation consists of one tepak (a traditional Indonesian traditional dance), one pridon (a traditional Indonesian traditional dance), one fan and pridon (a traditional Indonesian traditional dance), four ladies-in-waiting as accompanying dancers, one spear and one umbrella. Based on an interview with Ogan Komering Ilir cultural expert Elisme Simarmata (May 20, 2026), she explained that the formation of nine dancers in the Penguton Dance has the meaning that each dancer represents the nine clans in Kayuagung. The performance of the nine dancers represents the unity and togetherness of all clans representing Kayuagung in welcoming honored guests visiting Kayuagung. This conveys a powerful moral message about the importance of harmony in society.



Figure 1. Nine Penguton Dancers
Documentation: Eka Endang Lestari, 2025

Cultural Values in the Penguton Dance

Research reveals that the Penguton Dance contains profound and diverse cultural values. The first value is respect for ancestors and distinguished guests. This dance was created as a form of welcoming and honoring important guests visiting Kayuagung, as reflected in the offering of sekapur sirih (betel leaf) carried in a tepak (a basket) by the main dancer. The second value is the value of togetherness and harmony, represented by the involvement of nine clans in the dance performance. The nine clans in Kayuagung unite in one dance, demonstrating that although the community is divided into clans, they remain united in togetherness.

This is reinforced by a statement from an informant named Risky, a senior dancer in the Penguton Dance. The Penguton Dance teaches us that even though the Kayuagung community comes from different clans, they remain brothers. This is a lesson about unity that is highly relevant for today's younger generation, as these differences often become a source of conflict. (Interview, May 22, 2026) The third value is sacredness and social status. Not everyone can enjoy this dance, as it holds a certain level of sacredness and can only be performed at special events. The dancers are also chosen from distinguished circles or descendants of nobility, reflecting the existence of a respected social class within society. The fourth value is aesthetics, reflected in the movements, attire, and dance props, including the tanggai (hand puppets) worn on the dancers' fingertips, a characteristic of South Sumatran dances.

Symbols and Philosophical Meaning

The research results show that the Penguton Dance possesses rich symbolism and philosophical meaning. The nine dancers represent the Siwe Clan, or Nine Clans, which constituted the social structure of the Kayuagung community in the past. The tepak (a type of cloth) carried by the core dancers contains betel nut, offered to guests as a symbol of

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acceptance and respect. Dance props such as the *tanggai* (traditional hangings) attached to the dancers' fingertips have symbolic meaning as decorations and also serve as prominent props in the dance.



Figure 2. Betel Leaf
Documentation: Eka Endang Lestari, 2025

The sacredness of the Penguton Dance is also evident in the careful selection of dancers. Mr. H. Sarifuddin, in an interview at his residence, stated that Penguton dancers must be chosen from respectable families, virgins, and possess good character. This is not merely a technical requirement, but also carries a philosophical meaning: this dance is sacred and should only be performed by those with a pure soul and distinguished lineage (Interview, May 15, 2026). In the context of ethnopedagogy, the symbolism of the Penguton Dance serves as an effective means of character education. Each movement and prop conveys a moral message that can be instilled in the younger generation, such as respect, togetherness, discipline, and responsibility. This makes the Penguton Dance a medium for authentic and contextual learning of life values for the Kayuagung community, especially the younger generation.

Penguton Dance Preservation Strategy

The research identified several strategies for preserving the Penguton Dance employed by the Kayuagung community. The first strategy is to maintain the integrity of the nine dancers as a form of respect for ancestors and an effort to preserve the ancestral heritage that has been passed down through generations. This strategy is intended to The Penguton Dance is the pride of the people of OKI Regency and its surroundings. The second strategy is the standardization of the dance as the Sekapur Sirih dance of OKI Regency in 1992. This standardization provides formal legitimacy and official status for the Penguton Dance as an intangible cultural heritage of Ogan Komering Ilir, which then facilitates preservation efforts and inheritance to the next generation. This was clarified by Elisme Simarmata, a cultural expert from Ogan Komering Ilir Regency, who stated that by designating the Penguton Dance as the "sekapur sirih" dance of Ogan Komering Ilir Regency, the dance has a legal basis and the local government is responsible for its preservation. This is a strategic step that will significantly assist preservation efforts. (Interview, May 20, 2026). The third strategy is the implementation of performances at state and traditional events, although this frequency is limited. The Penguton Dance is currently presented for government purposes, which is one way to introduce the dance to a wider audience. However, the presentation format has changed over time, with the traditional procession, which was originally complete with a series of ceremonies, no longer fully utilized due to time and resource constraints.

Challenges of Cultural Heritage

Based on an interview with a senior Penguton dancer, young people are now more interested in pop culture and social media. They consider traditional dances like the Penguton Dance to be old-fashioned and irrelevant. This is a big challenge for us to make them interested and proud of their own culture. (Interview, May 22, 2026) From the following statement, several challenges were found in the cultural inheritance of the Penguton Dance. One of the main ones is the beginning of the disappearance of several elements in the performance, such as the presence of pencak silat due to the lack of successors. This indicates a regeneration problem in preserving the supporting elements of the dance. Another challenge is the decreasing interest of the public, especially the younger generation, in watching Penguton Dance performances, which threatens the sustainability of this tradition in the future. Social and cultural changes also pose challenges to the transmission of the Penguton Dance. Originally part of traditional ceremonies with strict rules, the dance has now undergone adaptations to meet contemporary needs.

Implications for Education and Cultural Preservation

The results of this study have important implications for cultural preservation efforts and the development of education based on local wisdom. The cultural values embodied in the Penguton Dance can be used as a contextual learning resource that connects students with their ancestral cultural heritage. This approach aligns with efforts to strengthen cultural identity and national character, as mandated by national education policy. The preservation strategies implemented by the Kayuagung community can serve as a model for preserving other traditional dances. Standardizing the dances, involving traditional leaders, and staging performances at official events are strategies that other regions can adapt to preserve their cultural heritage. However, these strategies need to be accompanied by innovations in transmission methods that are appropriate to the characteristics of today's younger generation.

The challenges faced in inheriting the Penguton Dance demonstrate the need for a more participatory approach and active involvement of the younger generation. The use of digital technology, the development of local curriculum, and collaboration between the government, the community, and the educational sector are key to the success of cultural heritage in the future. As stated by Ms. Elisme, a cultural expert from Ogan Komering Ilir, dance artists cannot rely solely on old methods to preserve the Penguton Dance. Dance artists need to adapt to the times, but without losing the essence and sacredness of the Penguton Dance. This is a challenge that requires creativity and cooperation from all parties. (Interview, June 2, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Penguton Dance contains cultural values that include respect for ancestors and distinguished guests, togetherness and harmony, sacredness and social class, and aesthetics. These values are reflected in various aspects of the dance performance, from the dancers' formations and the props used, to the rules that bind the dancers and audience. The symbolism and philosophical meaning contained in the Penguton Dance make it not merely an entertainment dance, but also a medium for character education and strengthening the cultural identity of the Kayuagung community.

The Kayuagung community's preservation strategy for the Penguton Dance includes maintaining the integrity of the dancers, standardizing it as an official regional dance, staging performances at state events, and promoting regeneration through the involvement of the younger generation. However, various challenges, such as limited regeneration, declining public interest, and socio-cultural changes, necessitate innovation in preservation strategies. An integrated approach between preserving cultural values and adapting to changing times is key to the successful future of the Penguton Dance.

This study recommends strengthening the documentation and digitization of the Penguton Dance, developing a local wisdom-based curriculum in schools, increasing the role of local governments in supporting preservation activities, and empowering the younger generation as agents of cultural preservation. With planned and sustainable efforts, it is hoped that the Penguton Dance will remain sustainable and become a source of pride for the Kayuagung community and Ogan Komering Ilir Regency.

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