

MEANING OF INSTRUMENTS APEIN THE LIFE OF THE KENYAH DAYAK TRIBE

¹Damri A Hanaou, ²Dewi Tika Lestari, ³Junita Batubara

^{1,2}Institute Agama Kristen Negeri Ambon, Indonesia

³Univeristas HKBP Nommensen, Indonesia

Email Korespondensi: damriapriyono@gmail.com

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Abstract

Sapeis a traditional musical instrument of the Dayak Kenyah people which not only functions as a means of entertainment, but also becomes an important symbol in various traditional rituals of the Dayak Kenyah people. This study aims to analyze the meaning of musicSapein the context of Dayak Kenyah cultural rituals. With a qualitative approach and ethnomusicological approach, this study combines field observations, in-depth interviews, and literature reviews. The findings show thatSapenot only accompanies traditional rituals, but also has a socio-spiritual function in strengthening community relations, cultural identity, and the continuity of tradition. Dayak Kenyah is one of the sub-tribes of the Dayak group that inhabits the interior of Kalimantan, especially in East Kalimantan and North Kalimantan, with a distribution that is also found in the border region of East Malaysia (Sarawak). In the life of the Dayak Kenyah community, musicSapehas a very special place. Not only is it a part of artistic expression,Sapealso integrated into religious rites, traditional ceremonies such as harvest festivals, welcoming guests, and various spiritual processions that are full of meaning. This musical instrument is considered a medium of spiritual communication and a means of inheriting ancestral values. Through the plucking of its notes,Sapebe an intermediary in conveying prayers, hopes and respect for the spirits of ancestors. This study specifically focuses on the Dayak Kenyah community, to highlight howSapenot only maintained as a cultural heritage, but also brought to life in the daily lives of the community as an identity that unites and strengthens solidarity amidst the increasingly rapid flow of modernization. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of traditional music such asSape, not only as a cultural artifact but as part of cultural identity.

Keywords: *Dayak Kenyah, Traditional Rituals, Cultural Identity, Ethnomusicology.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a country with extraordinary cultural richness, with more than a thousand ethnic groups spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago (Antara., Yogantari,2018;293). This diversity is reflected in customs, languages, belief systems, and musical arts which are an important part of the cultural identity of the community. Alifa Savira et al (2024;383). One of the communities that has a unique culture is the Dayak Kenyah Tribe that inhabits the Kalimantan Penina Uring region (2015;69). This tribe is known for its traditional musical instruments,Sape, which not only functions as entertainment but also as a means of spiritual connection with ancestors in traditional rituals.

In the Dayak Kenyah community, musical instrumentsSapeplays an important role in various cultural and religious events, such as death ceremonies, weddings, harvest thanksgiving, and rituals for welcoming honored guests (Irawati, 2014;747). The music produced bySapebelieved to be able to convey prayers, gratitude, and hopes to the gods and ancestors (Fachrissal in Kiring 2023;60). Therefore,Sapebecome an inseparable part of the life of the Dayak Kenyah community, as well as a symbol of identity that strengthens social solidarity amidst the rapid influence of modernization. Study of musical instrumentsSapehas become an important concern in cultural studies, especially those related to the Dayak Kenyah community. This instrument is not merely seen as a sound-producing device or a means of entertainment, but rather as a cultural entity that represents a system of social symbols in the life of the community (Arimbawa.,

Santhyasa (2010;4). Sape has an essential role as a medium that bridges the relationship between humans, the social environment, and the spiritual dimension. In the realm of traditional rituals, the presence of Sape is believed to not only enrich the aesthetic value of the ceremony, but also strengthen emotional bonds and collective solidarity between community members in maintaining the continuity of Dayak Kenyah traditions and cultural identity (Fachrissal, 2021;262).

Various studies have been conducted on musical instruments Sape from various academic perspectives. Irawati (2018;1-127) discusses organology and playing techniques Sape in the Dayak Kenyah traditional ritual, while Kiring (2023;59-70) examines the contextualization of Sape in worship at the Indonesian Gospel Tabernacle Church. Istianingrum et al. (2023) discuss Ngendau as a form of singing accompanied by Sape to express the feelings of the Dayak Kenyah people. These studies prove that Sape not only has aesthetic value, but also contains social, spiritual and cultural identity meaning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnomusicological approach that aims to understand the role of Sape music in the socio-cultural context of the Dayak Kenyah community. This approach allows researchers to explore the symbolic meaning, the function of Sape music as a cultural identity through direct interaction with research subjects. As stated by Denzin & Lincoln (2018; 43), qualitative research places researchers directly in the context of real life through interpretive practices based on field notes, interviews, photographs, recordings, and documents. (Jacob in Raco (2010;34). Nazution (2023;11) also emphasized that qualitative research aims to understand human behavior in natural conditions, by prioritizing the exploration of meaning and social context. The research location is centered in Mara I Village, West Tanjung Palas District, and extends to Teras Baru Village and Tengkapak Village in Bulungan Regency. Information was collected through key informants, namely craftsmen Sape, players, and traditional figures of Dayak Kenyah, including Mr. Asa Agang, Mr. Mikael, Mr. Ishak Sung, and Mrs. Eli Irawati. The focus of the research is directed towards, social functions, and meanings in the dynamics of Dayak Kenyah culture.

Data collection was carried out through documentation, direct observation of Sape music practices in traditional rituals, and in-depth interviews with related sources. (Nurcahyawati, et al., 2022;72). Primary data is obtained from direct interaction, while secondary data comes from documents, books, articles, and academic literature (Patipeilohy., et al., 2022;667). To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, namely by comparing information from various sources, verifying data through different methods, and collecting data at varying times. (Arnild Augina Mekarisce, 2020;148). Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (in Nazution 2023; 132) which includes data collection, reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data is analyzed continuously through filtering and simplification, then presented in narrative and visualization forms to facilitate interpretation. The entire process is carried out by maintaining scientific objectivity and integrity, so that it is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Sape music in the cultural life of the Dayak Kenyah community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between traditional music Sape and the cosmocentric view of the Dayak Kenyah people reflects the depth of their philosophy of life that upholds balance and harmony with nature. For the Dayak Kenyah people, nature is not just a background of life or a resource that can be exploited, but is a living entity that has spiritual power. Nature is part of an interconnected web of life, and humans are in it, not above it. This view is known as the cosmocentric view, where humans, animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and natural spirits are considered part of a cosmic unity that is interdependent and whose harmony must be maintained (Interview with Mr. Asa Agang, January 20, 2025, 14:46 WITA)



Figure 1. Interview with Mr. Asa Agang, January 20, 2025.

In daily life, respect for nature is manifested through strict customary practices. The Dayak Kenyah community has unwritten and written rules regarding the use of natural resources, such as a prohibition on cutting down trees in sacred forests, maintaining the cleanliness and sanctity of certain rivers, and carrying out customary ceremonies to seek permission or blessings from nature spirits before opening fields or harvesting crops. Through these methods, they maintain a spiritual and ethical relationship with the environment, instilling a sense of responsibility for the survival of nature and their community. In the midst of this spiritual and ecological context, traditional music Sape plays a very important role as a link between humans and nature and the spirit world. This typical Kalimantan plucked instrument not only functions as a means of entertainment, but also as a medium for spiritual communication and expression of human relationships with nature. In his melodies, Sape often imitates natural sounds such as the gurgling of river water, the rustling of wind in the trees, and the chirping of birds in the forest. This imitation is not merely a form of aesthetics, but reflects a deep understanding of nature as an inspiration and source of life.

More than that, music Sape also serves to express emotions and moods of nature, soft melodies can reflect the peace of the forest at dawn, while strong and dynamic melodies can describe a storm that shakes a tropical rainforest. Musicians Sape not only playing tunes, but telling stories about nature, about human life in ecological balance, and about the existence of spirits that are invisible but believed to be real in their beliefs. Even in some ritual contexts, Sape considered as a medium of communication with the spirits of nature. The music is believed to be able to call or greet the guardian spirits of the forest, rivers, and mountains to ask for protection, blessings, or as an expression of gratitude for an abundant harvest. In this case, Sape become a kind of sacred "natural language" that is not only heard by humans, but is also believed to be understood by spirits and supernatural powers that regulate the balance of the world.

Thus, Sape not only a symbol of art and cultural identity of the Dayak Kenyah, but also a reflection of their perspective on nature is a perspective that places humans as part of nature, not the rulers over it. This music is a marker that art, spirituality, and ecology are a complete unity in the lives of indigenous peoples who still live in line with the rhythm of the universe. (Interview with Mrs. Eli Irawati, April 12, 2025; 12:47 WITA). Sape plays a crucial role in various rituals and traditions of the Dayak Kenyah community, not only as a musical instrument to accompany ceremonies, but also as a spiritual, symbolic and social medium. The presence of Sape beyond mere entertainment; its melody is believed to play a role in building a sacred atmosphere, conveying religious messages, and strengthening social ties within the community.

Symbolically and spiritually, Sape considered to have the ability to act as a bridge between humans and the supernatural world. As expressed by Shin Nakagawa (2000;41) The supernatural also often plays a role in the formation of collective and individual identities, providing a sense of connectedness to the past (ancestors) and an order greater than oneself. The music he produces is used in various rituals to open communication channels with the spirit world, call upon the presence of ancestral spirits, and ask for blessings and protection from the Almighty. In this context, Sape become an important instrument in facilitating transcendental relationships.

Its melodies are believed to open the "door" of communication between the real world and the spirit world, allowing ancestors to be present in ceremonies to provide guidance and blessings. In addition, the use of Sape Summoning the spirits of ancestors also serves as a form of respect for their services, as well as a prayer that they will always look after and protect their living descendants. On the other hand, games Sape in the ritual of asking for blessings reflects an attitude of humility and submission to divine power, in the hope of receiving love and spiritual protection. In carrying out various traditional ceremonies, Sape play various roles according to the type and purpose of the ceremony. In birth ceremonies, Sape played to welcome a newborn baby and to pray for the baby's health and strength in facing life. In

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wedding celebrations, music Sape accompanying the wedding procession by creating an atmosphere full of wisdom and joy, while also symbolizing the hope that the bride and groom will always live in harmony and prosperity. Meanwhile, in the death ceremony, the strains of Sape used to accompany funeral processions, as an expression of sadness and final respect for the spirits of the deceased, while also implying prayers and hopes for life after death. As for the harvest ceremony, Sape played as a form of gratitude for the abundant harvest, as well as a request that the next harvest will also be blessed with success.

Not only in the context of rituals, Sape also has a vital function in preserving the oral traditions of the Dayak Kenyah people. Through songs accompanied by strumming Sape, various folk tales, myths, legends, and community histories are passed down from generation to generation. These songs serve as a medium for teaching moral and spiritual values inherent in the culture of the community. Mythological stories and ancestral legends are often packaged in song lyrics accompanied by Sape, making it not only as entertainment but also as a means of instilling social values and norms. In addition, through historical songs accompanied by these instruments, the Dayak Kenyah people record and pass on stories of migration, war, and other important events that shape their collective identity. Thus, Sape become a cultural instrument that plays a role in strengthening collective memory and cultural identity. Traditional songs accompanied by Sape also functions as a medium of cultural education for the younger generation, conveying values such as togetherness, honesty, courage, and respect for nature through implicit messages in the lyrics and melody.

Overall, Sape not only present as a traditional musical instrument, but also as a spiritual symbol, social instrument, and medium for preserving culture that plays an integral role in the life of the Dayak Kenyah community. Its multidimensional role makes it one of the cultural heritages that has historical, social, and religious values that are very important in maintaining the sustainability of traditional traditions. Sape not only functions in a spiritual and ritual context, but also plays a very important role in the social and cultural life of the Dayak Kenyah community. This traditional musical instrument is a medium for expressing emotions, a means of strengthening social relations, as well as a symbol of cultural identity that strengthens the existence of its community (Interview with Mr. Iban Imang, April 01, 2025; 19:17 WITA.)



Figure 2. Artist Sape Kenyah Dayak Tribe



Figure 3. Sape Kenyah

As a means of emotional expression, Sape allows the Dayak Kenyah people to channel various feelings, both personally and collectively. In a celebratory and festive atmosphere, Sape serves to create a festive and joyful atmosphere. Its dynamic and rhythmic melody is able to raise spirits, invite people to dance together, and enliven togetherness. On the other hand, Sape also a medium to express sadness and grief, especially in funeral processions. Its melancholic melody provides space for people to vent their sadness and remember those who have passed away. Not only that, Sape often used to convey feelings of love and longing, whether for loved ones, family, or hometown (Noor. F, 2022; 46). Melody Sape Romantic and full of feelings becomes an emotional channel to express messages of love that are not easily expressed through words. In the social realm, Sape has an important function as a glue for relationships between members of society. Music Sape act as a unifier in various social gatherings, from traditional events to daily activities, by creating an atmosphere of togetherness that strengthens the bonds of brotherhood. (Interview with Mr. Mikhael, January 29, 2025; 20:02 WITA).



Figure 4. Interview with Mr. Mikhael January 29, 2025

The presence of this music becomes a “universal language” that is able to bridge individual differences and strengthen communal solidarity. Furthermore, Sape also facilitates social interaction, such as in group dancing activities, where the rhythm becomes a guide for movement that allows participants to interact harmoniously through body movements. In addition, Sape also functions as a symbolic and metaphorical communication medium. Through the accompanying song lyrics Sape, society conveys moral messages, social criticism, subtle satire, or wise advice in an implicit but meaningful way.

More than that, Sape become one of the main symbols of Dayak Kenyah cultural identity. The uniqueness of its shape, decoration, and playing style make it Sape as a unique representation of culture that distinguishes Dayak Kenyah from other ethnic groups in Kalimantan. This uniqueness not only shows the richness of traditional art, but also becomes an integral part in maintaining the existence of culture. Sape also serves as a means of passing on cultural values, where the younger generation is taught about history, customs, and the philosophy of life through music that is passed down from generation to generation. Thus, Sape become a means of cultural education that maintains the continuity of tradition. In addition, Sape fostering a sense of cultural pride among the Dayak Kenyah community. Playing or listening to music Sape fostering a sense of ownership, love, and pride in one's own cultural heritage, while strengthening self-confidence as part of the Dayak Kenyah community amidst the changing times. Overall, Sape not only functions as a traditional musical instrument, but also as a multifunctional media that unites the emotional, social, and cultural identity aspects of the Dayak Kenyah community. Its multi-layered role makes it one of the important pillars in maintaining the sustainability and integrity of local culture.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the traditional musical instrument Sape' has a very important position in the life of the Dayak Kenyah community, not only as a means of entertainment, but also as a spiritual medium, a symbol of cultural

identity, and a tool for social unification. In the introduction, it is explained that Sape' is an integral part of the Dayak Kenyah culture that is integrated into various traditional rituals such as marriage, death, harvest, and welcoming guests, as well as being a symbol of local wisdom and continuity of tradition that strengthens community solidarity amidst the flow of modernization. In the research method, a qualitative approach was used with an ethnomusicological framework to explore the meaning of Sape' in a cultural context, through in-depth interviews and direct observations in several villages in North Kalimantan involving Dayak Kenyah players, craftsmen, and traditional figures, and applying interactive analysis and triangulation to ensure the validity of the results. The results of the study show that Sape' functions as a spiritual link between humans and ancestral spirits, as a medium for conveying prayers, gratitude, and requests in various traditional ceremonies, and reflects the cosmocentric view of the Dayak Kenyah community that places humans as part of the universe. In addition, Sape' has a strong social function as a means of togetherness, inheritance of oral traditions, emotional expression, and cultural education for the younger generation, while the uniqueness of its form and playing techniques make it a symbol of identity that distinguishes the Dayak Kenyah from other ethnic groups. Thus, Sape' is a representation of spiritual, social, ecological values, and cultural identity that are integrated in the life of the Dayak Kenyah community, and therefore it is important to be maintained and preserved as a living cultural heritage that is resistant to changes in time.

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