



Cultural Heritage Maintenance of *Ru-Ketu* Tradition of Sabu People

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Abstract*

This research describes the Sabu People's attempts to preserve their tradition, especially the Ru-ketu tradition. This is a descriptive qualitative study. This study gathered data by interviewing as primary data and documentation as secondary data. The descriptive qualitative approach was utilized for data analysis, with stages of finishing the transcription process of interviewing, data analysis, and concluding. Unstructured interviews and documentation were employed as data-gathering instruments. The study's findings indicate that the Sabu people still maintain the Ru'ketu tradition due to some views (1) as a symbol of kinship and love for family and their birth. (2) Death custom that collects and brings together living people as faces of the departed. (3) As a socio-cultural symbol of the Sabu people that explains the feeling of love for their native land which is considered the center of the world.

1. Introduction

Preserving cultural identity helps maintain a sense of belonging, heritage, and traditions, which can contribute to the community. The importance of preserving heritage, tradition, and race is unique to a nation. It's an identity that can be shared with the world. Cultural heritage affirms our identity as a people because it creates a framework for preserving cultural heritage, including cultural sites, old buildings, monuments, shrines, and landmarks that have cultural significance and historical value. Culture and its past shape values, beliefs, and aspirations, thereby defining a people's national identity. Preserving our cultural heritage is crucial, as it safeguards our collective identity. The wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through intangible cultural heritage is what makes it important.

Sabu Island, also known as Sawu Island, Seba, Havu, Hawu, or Hawoe, is one of Indonesia's outermost islands, the second southernmost island after Rote Island. This island is in

the territory of East Nusa Tenggara and is part of Sabu Raijua Regency. "Made" or died according to the beliefs of the Sabu people is a situation where someone will return to the creator (Deo Ama) to gather together with the ancestors. The spirits of the deceased will depart from Iki Keli port, by boarding a boat called Ama Piga Laga to Yuli Haha (Cape Sasar) near the island of Sumba.

Death for people who still adhere to customs is a very important process. For them, if someone dies, there are still some ritual processes that the surviving family must carry out. This is done so that the person who died can go home calmly and safely. Therefore, there are differences in the rituals or ceremonies carried out between the two types of death. Here are some rituals: 1.) Huhu kebie is a story about family genealogy (descendants). People who do Huhu kebie are people who are naturally able to do it or what is usually called a gift. Usually chanted by two or more people. When mourning a corpse, the person who performs Huhu kebie will be wrapped or covered with a cloth or what they call a blanket. In Huhu kebie, the lineage that is chanted is the lineage of the mother and father. The genealogy that is recited is usually very long, starting from the genealogy of the person who died to the first descendant. 2.) Customary event to marry a woman whose husband has died. In Sabu culture, if a woman's husband dies, then after the burial ceremony, in the evening the woman's brother or the wife of the deceased husband can ask that their sister be brought home with them. However, if their children don't agree then they will say, "Mama has milk that hasn't dried yet, so we still want mom to be with us," meaning they still need love from their mother. Meanwhile, the family of the husband who has died will say, "We will take her (mother/wife) with well, so if she is experiencing problems and losses, we can't just let her go." This must be done because it is a customary rule. 3.) If a Sabu person dies outside the island of Sabu, their hair will be taken with them from people who have died, but now the items they can bring can be in the form of photos or clothes. This ritual is called Ru-ketu. This is done to show the family in Sabu that one of their family members has died. Apart from that, in the culture of the Sabu people, every Sabu person belongs to the land of Sabu. Wherever he travels, he must return to his hometown. Pickup at Ru Ketu is carried out using customs.

In this issue, the researcher comports to point number 3 where the writer is deeply enlightened about the Ru'Ketu tradition. The ru-ketu tradition is also a form of a traditional ceremony that describes world conditions spirit (cosmological concept of the spirit world) in jingitiu religious beliefs. The practice of the traditional ru-ketu ceremony is still carried out by the majority of Christians in the West Sabu administrative area of Sabu Raijua district have brought the consequence of the emergence of various pro and con views among the community. On the one hand, Jingitiu culture such as the ru-ketu traditional ceremony is seen as a traditional pagan culture that must be abandoned and shunned because it is contrary to the teachings of Christianity. On the other hand, there is also the view that the traditional ceremonial practice is ru-ketu is a symbol of kinship and love of the Sabu people for family and land his birth. The ru-ketu tradition is a death custom that collects dan bringing together living people as the faces of the departed (Ngefak-Bara Pa, 2017) in Moru:2022. The practice of maintaining the ru'ketu tradition is still carried out today by Christians because it is a traditional tradition of the Sabu people.

In general, the stages of the ru-ketu procession begin when the family of the deceased arrives on the island of Sabu after hearing the news of the death of their family overseas. The family of the deceased will follow up on news of the death by collecting 74 large family groups on the island of Sabu to determine who will be going to take the dead man's Ru'ketu from the overseas land. Usually in traditional Sabu people, the family is from the father's lineage. He will go to carry out his duties as a mandate bearer in completing the initial procession of Ru'Ketu of

the deceased and his immediate family can be brought back to Sabu island. Over time, this process has become more flexible by not only demanding a process for retrieving dead ru-ketu from overseas land but can also be replaced by the process of delivering Ru'ketu from the deceased for several important reasons such as busy families in Sabu, transportation difficulties, costs, and others (Ngefak-Bara 2017) in Moru:2022.

The usual process of picking up or delivering Ru-Ketu to Sabu Island is carried out during special customary calendar seasons related to the post-monsoon season harvest (hole season). This is related to the belief of the Sabu people that on during this traditional calendar period, God's grace is "together" with the land and the people of Sabu so that their environmental conditions are in a "deteriorating" state. This condition will help the spirit of the dead find a good path to immortality or heaven. Next, in the procession of delivering or picking up the ru-ketu, the person who is trusted to guard the ru-ketu package (ru-ketu packages usually contain the dead man's hair or clothes along with sandalwood, hemoi, and nutmeg, which are covered by Sabu sarongs for women and Sabu blankets for men) is not allowed or prohibited from talking to people he meets on the street (must be inside stationary condition) and must not let go of the item underneath it (is in his lap) until the package of goods arrived at his mother's house in Sabu Island. This is related to the Sabu people's belief that the ru ketu package or the item below is the soul of the dead person brought home by his relatives (Ngefak - Bara Pa, 2017) in Moru:2022

After the ru-ketu is disembarked from the ship or other means of transportation, the family. Those who bring the ru-ketu will be picked up according to certain traditional traditions as follows a symbol of welcoming the soul of the dead through the "pengu ei" procession (traditional poetry procession and a splash of sugar water) as a symbol of giving a "welcome greeting" in tradition Sabu people. After that, the extended family will carry the dead ru-ketu home parent (especially for the ru-ketu of a wife whose husband has not died will still sent to her husband's main house, not to the woman's family house) who will greeted with a traditional ceremony in the form of chanting lamentation poetry (li tanggi) and a procession certain customs with the aim of giving a "welcome" greeting to the spirit of the dead who has arrived back at his mother's house (Ngefak - Bara Pa, 2017). The homeowner will prepare a dish in the form of a chicken that was killed by the husband and cooked by the wife and then several small parts of the dish will be placed in the container eaten from woven palm leaves (kerigi wore), then placed next to ru-ketu along with drinking *water*. This activity is called hapo ru-ketu (Ngefak - Bara Pa, 2017) in Moru:2024”.

After all the family gathers, the dead person's ru-ketu wrap is covered by a sarong or blanket. The methamphetamine is then opened on a mat (depi) to show the dead person's belongings as a symbol for proclaiming that the deceased had died in overseas lands and as the proof is the ru-ketu package (which opens the ru-ketu package known as beni or mone pili d'ida) (Ngefak - Bara Pa, 2017) in Moru:2022. When the extended family saw the contents of the ru-ketu package, the family would cry or mourn the sad incident through poetry that tells the story of the person's life. The poems contain songs about life and death in culture Sabu people. The poetry that is sung is an expression of the meaning of life which feels short, nothing is eternal, and everything that lives will return to the lap of Deo Ama, the owner of life.

In the series of ru-ketu traditions and their meanings, the Sabu people believe that Death is an event of farewell to the phase of life in the world then will move on to the next phase of life together with the ancestors of the Sabu people in a place called Juli Haha (a place of rest and gathering the spirits of the dead). The process towards July Haha will be carried out via Sabu Island and the spirit of the dead will be delivered by the Ma Piga Laga boat (ancestors of the Sabu people) from the island of Sabu to the seventh place (July Haha). In the process of opening the contents of the ru-ketu package, the family of the deceased considered the oldest or most

influential in the clan, will play an important role in telling the genealogy of the deceased based on the lineage of the father and mother.

The large family that is gathered together will listen to the genealogy story while chatting with each other about their origins so that each of them can know the long history of their family tree and the ties of brotherhood that exists in the family. After the procession, the items are in a ru-ketu package that has been taken from the deceased's overseas land and distributed first to beni or mone pili d'ida (a woman or a man from the mother's clan or a cousin of the deceased's biological mother as well as a ru-ketu officer) and then to the entire immediate family, especially the eldest brother or elder in his family was on the island of Sabu, after that it was on to the other family members. Matter: This symbolizes kinship between the deceased and his family (Ngefak - Bara Pa, 2017) in Moru:2022. If what's below is a strand of the dead man's hair, then that hair will be placed in the main house (bow for men and stern for female gender) as a symbol of the dead having returned with their ancestors on the houseboat. After completing the procession, the next event will follow the friendly stage in the form of eating together and chatting with each other's family members as a form of expression of letting go of longing for a long time and not meeting up. The traditional ru-ketu procession will close with a goodbye kiss between the two families present in the traditional procession as a form of expression of closeness kinship and at the same time saying goodbye between them (a typical nose kiss Sabu culture) (Ngefak - Bara Pa, 2017) in Moru:2022. Apart from deductions hair, a symbol of self used in ru-ketu packages can also be a stone small items from graves, clothes from the deceased, sarongs, or cloth purchased from figures (Ngefak - Bara Pa, 2017).

2. Research Methods

This is a descriptive-qualitative study where explanations of data have been elaborated in words rather than numbers to be interpreted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Afrizal, 2014) in Bire & Hambandima, 2023, p.66. The data were collected from June to July 2024 and focused on the Ru-ketu tradition. Interviews and documentation were the methods used for collecting the data. The writer interviewed the informants as the primary data collected and documentation as the secondary data collected. The analysis uses a descriptive qualitative method.

3. Result and Discussion

The study's finding indicates that the Sabu people still maintain the Ru'ketu tradition due to some views, they are:

1. As a symbol of kinship and love of the Sabu people for family and their birth.

Sabu people as a symbol of familial relationships and love for family and birth have a deep meaning in their culture. Some aspects that reflect this are:

- **Respect for origins:** Clothes brought by deceased people from overseas symbolize that they remain connected to their mainland, showing love and respect for Sabu.
- **Respect for the dead:** Clothes brought by people who have died overseas become a symbol that they are still valued and remembered by their distant family.
- **Family values:** The Sabu people highly value family relationships and funeral rituals reflect a love and respect for deceased family members.
- **Celebration of life:** Society celebrates the life of the deceased with various rituals and offerings, showing how important they were in family life. Through these symbols, the Sabu people show how strong family ties are their love for each other, and their appreciation for birth and life.

2. Death custom that collects and brings together living people as faces of the departed.

In Sabu culture, there is a death tradition that gathers and unites living people as faces of the dead. Some aspects of this tradition include:

- *Clothing as a symbol*: Clothes brought by deceased people from overseas become a symbol of their honor, showing that they are still remembered by distant family. Not only to be remembered but also as a symbol of them being brought back to the land where they were born.
- *Prayer rituals*: Families and communities perform prayers to pray for the souls of the deceased, creating an atmosphere of reverence. Shared prayer is a form of respect for the person who died and also brings together distant families to pray together for the person who died so that the deceased's soul will rest in peace in his/her new place.
- *Food offerings*: Food is prepared and offered as a form of respect, symbolizing sharing and gratitude for the life of the deceased and praying that the Ru-ketu tradition process has been carried out well and runs smoothly.
- *Music and traditional instruments*: Music is often played during rituals to add to the atmosphere and honor the deceased.

Through these methods, the people of Sabu not only remember those who have died but also celebrate their lives with gratitude and respect.

- *Respect rituals*: Families and communities perform rituals to remember and honor the deceased, creating bonds between the living and the dead.
- *Celebration of life*: Communities celebrate the lives of the deceased in various ways, including prayers and offerings, which bring family and friends together to remember. This tradition reflects the family values and deep respect in Sabu society, where the deceased remains a part of the life of the surviving family. Kinship relations between families and one another will remain well maintained.

3. As a socio-cultural symbol of the Sabu people that explains the feeling of love for their native land which is considered the center of the world.

The Socio-cultural symbols of the Sabu people reflect their love for their homeland which is considered the center of the world. Some of these symbols include:

- *Clothing as a symbol of identity*: Clothes brought by people who have died overseas become a symbol that they remain connected to their homeland, showing respect and love for Sabu. This is why Sabu People who migrate when they die should be brought back to Sabu as their homeland in the symbol of clothing.
- *Rituals and Traditions*: Various rituals to honor the dead reflect family values and a sense of belonging to the homeland. Sabu people honor the tradition of respecting their homeland where the deceased should be brought back to their homeland as the symbol of love.
- Funeral rituals in the context of love for the land of birth in Sabu have a deep meaning. Some of these meanings include:
- *Respect for origins*: Clothes brought by people who have died overseas become a symbol that they remain connected to their homeland, showing love and respect for Sabu.
- *Strengthening family ties*: The processes involving family and community create opportunities to gather and strengthen bonds between family members and remind them of the importance of their homeland. Emphasizing to the people of Sabu how important their homeland and strong bonds of brotherhood are.
- *Cultural Identity*: This ritual reflects Sabu's cultural values which the value of connection to the homeland, making it the center of community identity and life. Thus, the funeral ritual is

not just a process of burying the body but is also an expression of deep love and respect for the land of birth.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study have addressed the research question that was posed. The writer concludes the tradition in three ways: first, the Ru-ketu tradition symbolizes the kinship and love that the Sabu people have for their family and birthplace; second, the Ru-ketu tradition is a death custom that gathers living people to act as the faces of the departed; and third, Ru-ketu tradition is a sociocultural symbol that explains the Sabu people's love for their homeland, which is thought to be the center of the world.

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