



Character analysis of the symbolic value of the Ngasa tradition

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ABSTRACT

The Ngasa traditional ceremony is one of the traditional ceremonies that still survives today. The Ngasa tradition is a tradition that aims to show gratitude for the abundance of blessings and graces given by God. This study aimed to determine the character values in the series of events and the tools used during the Ngasa tradition process. The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach with content analysis methods. Content analysis is used because the data to be studied are video documentation taken from several YouTube channels to explain the symbols of the Ngasa traditional ceremony in the Jalawastu area, Brebes Regency. The symbols in the tradition are interpreted to obtain the values contained in them. The character values studied in this study include the meaning of religion, togetherness, cooperation, hard work, simplicity, chastity, and sincerity. .



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INTRODUCTION

The development of the globalization era has had various influences on various aspects of human life (Pratama, 2019; Rasyid, 2015). In general, with the development of the times, humans will increasingly benefit (Alam, 2014) because in principle, the development of the times makes it easier for humans to live their lives. However, there is a dilemma, especially among those who want to maintain their locality by minimizing global environmental influences. We are no strangers to the term Westernization, influences from outside, especially from the Western world. Some of the impacts of external influences are the increasingly forgotten cultural heritage of the nation itself.

So far, cultural issues have become a dilemma due to the development of the times with the spirit of globalization. Local cultures that want to maintain the inherited lifestyle from their ancestors are starting to be considered ancient rites that need to be updated (Budiarto, 2020). This view appears mainly among young people, although not a few also come from the elderly. Local culture, which is no longer relevant to people's lives today, is increasingly being abandoned, with globalization giving rise to cultural invasions that aim to penetrate one culture into another culture that is considered weaker (Budiarto, 2020). It is not only cultural activities that are left behind, but human values, the values that govern the pattern of life in the world, provided mainly by local culture, are also increasingly being abandoned.

There are many character norms or values contained in local Indonesian culture (Sukmayadi, 2016). As ancestral heritage, the term rite that is around is not only about non-sense practices that

only smell of occult matters, but if we want to study it more deeply, there are many noble values (Humaeni, 2012) which were exemplified by our ancestors that can be used as a reference for social life. References to Eastern ways of life that demand manners are increasingly difficult to see, especially among young people. One factor that influences this is that the younger generation is reluctant, or worse, they need to remember the cultural roots of their ancestors.

Indonesia is one of the many countries with rich ethnic and cultural diversity (Satianingsih et al., 2020). Based on several main factors, one of the causes of cultural diversity in Indonesia is the background of the geographical conditions where they live. Communities scattered around the coast have a culture that, in practice, will be different from those who live in mountainous areas. However, the essence will be the same as a sign of gratitude for the abundance of blessings that have been given. Mountain alms are one of the traditions or traditional ceremonies that still exist in Indonesian territory. Although the term given to this tradition varies depending on the region, the aims and background of its implementation have some similarities.

Jalawastu, as one of the areas in the border area between Central Java and West Java, has interesting characteristics to note. Its uniqueness lies in the acculturation of Javanese and Sundanese culture. In terms of the location of the Jalawastu region, it is indeed in the Central Java region. However, the culture being carried is Sundanese culture, the language used in Sundanese, which is the hallmark of the West Java region. The uniqueness of the use of language here does occur in several areas of Brebes, where some of these areas use Sundanese. If this fact is examined more deeply, it will be found how Sundanese culture has had a relatively significant influence on cultural development in these areas.

Technological progress can indeed be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has a negative influence when viewed from a cultural perspective. Moral degradation related to preserving the culture of its ancestors has been reluctant because it is considered ancient, and obsolescence is unavoidable. However, globalization and advances in science and technology have also benefited culture. With technology and modes of communication, more and more people concerned with cultural values have started broadcasting local culture on social media. However, even though the development of technology is increasing rapidly, it does not mean that local culture can be forgotten. One of the things that can be done is to develop the area as a tourist attraction. Mukhlis and De Costa (2021) explains how technology and tourism development can be developed in indigenous territories without eliminating existing cultural values.

The root causes of character problems can be divided into inherited values based on reason (Thoma & Walker, 2017). However, there is a skeptical view of the intervention of cultural values toward freedom in thinking and interpreting good values into a dilemma. Cultural issues are complex, especially regarding the meanings of character values in traditional symbols. The symbolic meaning contained in each tradition is exciting to study. The symbolic meaning is related to a meaningful way of life and gratitude to the creator. The essence of this tradition is usually related to the people's belief that survival and the universe are never separated from the Almighty, be it God Almighty, the gods, or the wisdom of the ancestral spirits. This enduring belief will later give birth to a sense of gratitude, symbolized through mountain alms, as alluded to earlier.

One culture that has survived today is the indigenous people of Dukuh Jalawastu in the Brebes Regency. For the people of Jalawastu, the Alms Mountain tradition is a traditional celebration passed down from generation to generation. It is still carried out as a form of gratitude for the blessings that have been given and a form of rejecting reinforcements for the disasters they face. The importance of understanding the cultural roots of the Jalawastu people, especially those related to the Ngasa traditional ceremony, is an exciting thing to study.

However, many studies have highlighted the cultural problems of the Jalawastu community, such as the research conducted by Fadlillah and Supriyanto (2020) underscoring the local traditions depicted in the Ngasa ceremony. These traditions include centong war, salvation, village cleaning, and processions, or research conducted by Asrawijaya (2022), which focuses on how acculturation occurs between Islamic teachings and the local cultural roots of the Jalawastu people. The two studies did not examine the values of local wisdom, which could be further developed to become a reference for social life procedures.

Another research conducted by Darusman (2020) highlights how the local wisdom of the Jawastu community can be used as a tool in helping to preserve the environment. This research has similarities, but the research conducted in this article is more specific in the meaning of a series of relevant Ngasa traditional ceremonies used as rules/guidelines of life in society.

METHOD

This research is qualitative descriptive research with a type of content analysis approach. Krippendorff (2004) content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matters) to the contexts of their use. In general, the design used includes the following steps: (1) data procurement which is divided into several parts, including determining units, samples, and recording; (2) data reduction, which includes inference and analysis. This research method makes researchers function as instruments as well as data collectors.

This research will provide an overview of the Ngasa tradition and classify a series of Ngasa traditional ceremonies that, if they have relevant special meanings, are used as guidelines and controls for social life. The instrument used is the Human Instrument. Data obtained from the results of recording and written documentation that is considered relevant to the research subject. The data procurement steps include: determining the sample, recording, and determining the unit. Data validity was carried out by consulting with experts and cross-checking data transfer. At the same time, the data analysis technique is carried out by classifying, interpreting, and concluding.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Lickona (1991), character education includes three things, namely, knowing what is good (knowing the good), loving good (desiring the good), and doing good (doing the good). Talking about character means talking about understanding, loving, and doing. Kindness is not just something that is only learned but must be actualized to have a real impact on one's life. FW Foerster 1869-1966 (Rasyid, 2015). There are four basic characteristics in character education: First, each action's inner order is measured based on a value hierarchy.

Values become normative guidelines for every action. Second, coherence gives courage, makes a person firm on principles, not easily swayed in new situations, or afraid of risks. Coherence is the basis for building mutual trust. Lack of coherence damages one's credibility. Third, there is autonomy, where someone internalizes rules from the outside to become personal values. This can be seen through evaluating personal decisions without being influenced or pressured by other parties. Fourth, firmness and loyalty. Assertiveness is a person's resistance to desires that are considered good. Loyalty is the basis for honoring the chosen commitment.

The symbol comes from the Greek word symbols, a sign or sign that shows something to someone. (Turner et al., 1969) reveals that "the symbol is the smallest unit of ritual that retains the specific characteristics of ritual behavior. It is the ultimate unit of a specific structure in a ritual context. This means that the symbol is the smallest unit in a special ritual. Symbols are the basic units of the unique structure in ritual contexts. Messages of religious teachings, norms, and ethical values are symbols that contain basic units in ritual contexts. Its function is as a way of life for the people concerned to live an orderly and harmonious life.

Value is everything that has meaning for humans as a subject, something good and bad involved in it as an abstract thing, an intention, a view of various experiences that have been felt with a strict selection of behavior. As long as humans live, values are interpreted as a response to attitudes, behavior, and everything related to community activities. The impact of the values that appear as positive and negative things. Positive if it has a good impact on society, but if it hurts the object, it is negative (Sulaiman, 1992).

Mardiatmadja (1986) explains that value cannot be separated from one's attitude towards good things. Human understanding of good and bad events is valuable. The basics of this understanding will later be developed into something meaningful, which forms the outline of the pattern of community life that we know as civilization. The messages in a tradition should contain the values of ancestral heritage, which need to be studied more deeply to maintain this heritage.

The ceremony is considered as an important event. According to Koentjaraningrat (2002), there are several important aspects when someone holds a ceremony: a. The place where the ceremony is held; B. Time of ceremony; C. Ceremonial objects and tools. The traditional ceremonies in this study illustrate how community rites or activities maintain their culture, intending to pass it on to the next generation. The study of traditional ceremonies cannot be separated from understanding the true meaning of the series of events and the tools used in the ceremony. Sometimes the symbolic meanings that exist in local culture escape the general public's attention so that they lose their true meaning, which is basically the main essence of all activities carried out.

Character Values in Local Wisdom

Talking about local wisdom, the first thing that comes to mind for most people is regionalism, ancient, not modern. A thought that actually cannot be faulted as a whole. Talking about local wisdom, the discussion will revolve around a community's belief in things inherited from their ancestors and their authenticity is maintained. The conception of local wisdom can be simplified as follows (Rasyid, 2015): (1) that local wisdom is created by members of the community/society themselves; (2) being a role model for the community members in carrying out their daily lives; and (3) local wisdom cannot just appear, but is the result of the revitalization and transformation of knowledge and culture. Meaning is a point sticking out of an object due to the reader's efforts. Meaning cannot be born by itself because it comes from interactions between elements inside and outside oneself. The unity that refers to itself certainly has no meaning because it cannot be broken up in the interaction of its units (Hanum et al., 2013).

Brodbeck in Sobur (2004) argues that meaning has three varieties which are divided about the object or symbol in question, namely: (1) Inferential meaning, namely the meaning of a symbol or symbol in the form of objects, assumptions, ideas, perceptions that show many references; (2) The meaning of significance is the meaning of a meaning related to another concept; and (3) The intentional meaning is the meaning that can be interpreted by the person or society that uses the symbol. This meaning basically cannot be proven through reference or empirically because it is contained in one's ideas and is only owned by him. The intentional meaning of one person with another person may be similar but different.

Symbol in Nagasa Traditional Ceremony

The symbol of the caretaker's white shirt (kuncen)

Kolot and Kuncen councils wear long-sleeved white shirts, white headbands, and white trousers similar to the clothes worn by kyai, which have been passed down from generation to generation. The all-white clothes symbolize physical and spiritual purity (Mubarak et al., 2019). The meaning of white clothes, especially among Indonesian people, is always synonymous with purity. Several video shows and research notes are available as material for study. The caretaker wears white clothes, and almost all participants in this ritual wear these clothes. This symbol can be used as a lesson for the general public about how human nature is white and clean, and when we are going to face the Creator through worship, it would be nice if we also prepared ourselves with these natural conditions.

Nasi Jagung (Corn Rice) Symbol

Corn rice is a mandatory dish served during the Nagasa ceremony. Corn rice is considered native food and a staple dish of ancient ancestors. Nagasa forbade providing food made from rice/paddy because, according to the story long ago on Mount Kembang, a man named Ki Guriang lived there. Ki Guriang is an influential person with the gift of power that exceeds ordinary human abilities and is believed to have never eaten rice. Once upon a time, there was an evil person who wanted to harm Ki Guriang, who was meditating, the person's name was Ki Braja. Knowing he was weak against rice, Ki Braja forces Ki Guriang to eat the rice he had prepared and finally dies after eating it. Based on this belief, rice is prohibited from being served at the Nagasa ceremony.

Gedong Symbol

You could say that gedong is a mosque for Muslims, a church for Catholics, and a temple for Hindus. This place has been a place for local people to pray and worship their ancestors for generations. This place's sacred and sacred values are highly believed and guarded by the community because Gedong is believed to be the dwelling place of their ancestors. The belief in gedong as the legacy of their ancestors makes the community respect and preserve the building.

Teleng Symbol

Teleng means the location or place of origin of something. Besides that, it is also a sign of something, including the distance and nature of a place. The origin of Teleng is still unclear to this day, whether it was formed naturally or was the result of the work of our ancestors in ancient times. However, what is clear is that Teleng is a sacred and important place in implementing the Nagasa Ceremony. Teleng is a symbol with a philosophical value that humans must focus on their goals in life. As long as it is good, whatever is expected will indeed be granted.

Swallowing Symbol

Ngukus is a procedure for offering prayers and hopes to the Ancestors of Dukuh Jalawastu, passed down from generation to generation since ancient times. When doing Ngukus, the community or traditional leaders burn incense. This burning is carried out as a form of obedience to the ancestors because it is a legitimate procedure from the ancestors. Regarding rites, the Ngasa tradition is very thick with Hindu-Buddhist overtones, but prayers are performed in an Islamic manner. From this form, the values of inter-religious tolerance can be increased. In addition, the verses and prayers that exist show great gratitude for all the abundance of blessings bestowed by the creator. Gratitude for the almighty creation makes humans more aware of their limitations and keeps them from being arrogant and arrogant.

Nagasa Ceremony

Nagasa ceremony has many meanings, Nagasa itself can mean prayer (Permata & Birsyada, 2022) or can be interpreted as Nagasa-Nagasa or tasting the typical food of Jalawastu Hamlet in the form of corn rice and side dishes. Nagasa can also be interpreted as alms (according to ability) because it is an obligation as a host to be able to serve guests as well as possible. Interesting things from the culture of society jalawastu may occur in various other areas, namely the acculturation of local culture (Asrawijaya, 2022) with religion (in this case, the religion of Islam). This form of acculturation illustrates that there has been an attitude of tolerance and an open attitude toward new cultures that come.

Gratitude for the abundance of blessings given by nature to the Jalawastu people is symbolized through the Ngasa ceremony. The various kinds of rites also have many meanings and educational values. The importance of the existence of indigenous peoples is one of them preserving the environment because human dependence on nature cannot be avoided. This is in line with the results of research conducted by Darusman (2020), where indigenous peoples, through their local policies, provide a very large role in environmental preservation by prohibiting damage to the surrounding environment with the consequences of customary law.

The Ngasa ceremony for the people of Jalawastu hamlet has a different meaning, and this follows the impression they feel when the ceremonial procession is about to begin. The people see it as a holiday for the locals, and almost everyone prepares the Nagasa ceremony as best they can. Before the ceremony takes place, residents gather to work together to clean the village area and prepare dishes that will be used to eat with the guests. However, in the end, the main meaning for the Jalawastu indigenous people, the Ngasa tradition, is more of a way of life for the local community (Fadlillah & Supriyanto, 2020).

Tradition as a form of ancestral heritage deserves to be preserved, especially concerning its relevance to current references and ways of life that are increasingly immoral. Truth values in every cultural ritual are meant to strengthen people's daily lives. Along with the development of information that is increasingly accessible, people are increasingly forgetting their cultural roots.

How cultural values must be maintained to be used as a reference in life is very important. We must interpret the meaning of these various rituals to achieve this goal. Several important things can be used as our guide in living life. Efforts to instill human values can be carried out using various methods, one of which is by instilling cultural values inherited from our ancestors, one of which is through the heritage of Sundanese cultures (Suhartini et al., 2019), this research illustrates how traditional values can be used as media in developing and instilling good values in society, especially students.

The Ngasa traditional ceremony has a role in shaping the social construction of society. This is related to the function of the Ngasa tradition, which has several functions, including educational, social, and educational (Permata & Birsyada, 2022). These three functions will later develop into forming the life order of the Jawastu community in carrying out their lives. The Ngasa tradition as a form of gratitude for the jalwastu community is an event routinely carried out every year and has a deeper meaning for residents, such as gratitude, togetherness, sincerity, and patience. This gratitude can be interpreted because the Nagasa ceremony is carried out when the rice age begins to fill, so it is a form of gratitude for the efforts made during the planting season. Gratitude is carried out by carrying out cooperation before the ceremony, and the community will gather to prepare the needs needed jointly. It can be interpreted as a moment of togetherness that is carried out during the preparation process until the end of the event because all villagers help and enliven this annual event.

In some instances, how character values are increasingly internalized in society. This is related to the fact that culture is the root that forms the identity of the Indonesian nation. Like the research conducted by (Satianingsih et al., 2020), which explains how instilling character values through local culture requires the right strategy not to eliminate national identity on the one hand and maintain local culture on the other.

Multiculturalism in Indonesian life is common, so the standardization of truth values in every society will experience differences, even though they are not striking. However, it is still necessary to strengthen character values by exploring local cultural roots as an alternative to character education for the community. According to researchers, one of the important cultures is the cultural roots of the Jalawastu community through the traditional Ngasa ceremony.

Through the traditional Ngasa ceremony, we can take some important moral messages, including the habit of working together, which is actualized by cleaning the Pagedongan location, which will be used for carrying out the Ngasa tradition. The spirit of gotong royong is a form of character that is getting weaker daily. A sense of egoism and individuality is the most visible characteristic of modern society. Through this tradition, the spirit of togetherness, gotong royong, and gotong royong will be nurtured in human beings.

Sincerity is one of the keys to mountain alms, namely giving alms according to residents' ability to provide side dishes of corn rice and accompaniments to be served later to the community and village guests. The simplicity of the banquet in the Ngasa traditional ceremony is a benchmark for the real condition of an agrarian society. This economic condition does not prevent the Jalawastu people from donating their crops to travelers and participants. However, a sense of sincerity will grow in the community if this is done selflessly.

All participants of the Nagasa ceremony felt the hard work because of the uphill road access to the location where the tradition took place. This illustrates that if humans want something, it must be done with hard work and patience in order to achieve something they want. An attitude of compassion and kindness because under any circumstances, we must be able to respect guests, regardless of social status, skin color, and religion. Travelers who follow this tradition come from the surrounding area and outside the area, regardless of their origin, showing that the Jalawastu people have a high sense of goodness, which should be an example for the wider community.

CONCLUSION

Tradition as a cultural root and ancestral heritage deserves to be maintained. Ritually, the Ngasa tradition is an expression of gratitude for the people of Jalawastu for the abundance of grace given by the creator. Each customer has a relatively long event procession, with many good values that want to be conveyed but not said directly, but from a series of traditional events and fittings that

depict symbols of ideal patterns of human life behavior. Some of the meanings symbolized in the rites and accessories of the Ngasa tradition in broad terms are regarding: purity symbolized by the use of clean white traditional clothes, illustrating that, in essence, the creator created humans with a holy state; teleng the location where the prayer is held and being in the pagedongan environment gives the meaning that the location is a sci location, a location that must be guarded; stroking a prayer procedure which is a form of acculturation of Hindu-Buddhist culture with Islam which means surrender to God; corn rice which depicts simplicity and in its presentation conveys human sincerity in sharing with others; gedong or pesarean as the main place where the Ngasa tradition is carried out symbolizes a world where humans with various backgrounds can live side by side, share food which conveys the message that there is a need for tolerance with others. The moral or character values that should be developed from a series of events and complementary tools to the Ngasa tradition include gratitude, togetherness, sincerity, and hard work.

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