

Research Article

“*Ngigeulan Jaman*”: Compromise between Tradition and Modernity in the Seren Taun Ceremony

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Hartati Sulisty Rini: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2456-2935>**Abstract.**

The purpose of this study is to explore how indigenous people in Kasepuhan Cisungsang, Lebak, West Java, Indonesia approach modernity in the Seren Taun celebration. Seren Taun is a series of rituals which express gratitude for the abundant rice harvest. They also mark the end of the planting season of the year and the commencement of the next one the following year. This research uses a case study approach, involving six informants who are local traditional figures, and using interview, observation, and documentation techniques in collecting data. The results of the study show that the Seren Taun celebration in Kasepuhan Cisungsang received positive reactions and enthusiasm. This is marked by bringing together the local values of the indigenous people and the values of modernity together with the principle of *ngigeulan jaman* (such as dancing and being in harmony with the changing era). Traditional rituals remain the main things that must be upheld, while performances and modernity that are visible both in the real and virtual world benefit society.

Keywords: kasepuhan cisungsang, negotiate, ngigeulan jaman, modernity, seren taun

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1. Introduction

Indigenous communities are cultural entities that have survived until now amidst the pace of modernity and globalization. They are historical actors who have navigated time amidst the waves of world change in various aspects of their lives. These indigenous communities still exist with cultural values, customs, and ritual preservation that are indeed maintained in such a way. In certain situations, the dynamics of social and state life sometimes rise a pressure and difficult situations for them. It brings the complex consequences that they live without many choices to determine about themselves in the society. In some cases it can be mentioned as follows: the struggle of indigenous communities to maintain their lives sometimes has to face difficult situations that they have never faced before. The marginalization of their position in the context of their



existence in an entity that is an important part of the state (1), pressure on the commodification of local resource potential in the name of tourism which has an impact on the economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of indigenous communities (2), and the absence of a mechanism for protecting customary land in the area of indigenous legal communities (3).

However, in the midst of the complexity of modernity, there are still conditions where indigenous peoples survive and hold fast to their principles of life. Among them are indigenous peoples living in Cisungsang village, Lebak district, West Java province, Indonesia. This indigenous community is known as Kasepuhan Cisungsang. Their existence with all their uniqueness and principles of local values that are still held fast in this global era is interesting to explore further. One thing that continues to be maintained is the *seren taun* tradition which has been preserved from generation to generation for hundreds of years. This tradition not only involves agrarian expressions as an expression of gratitude, but has also become a cultural tourism object that quite well-known and attracts public attention. Interestingly, the indigenous peoples in Kasepuhan Cisungsang are trying to manage this traditional side to be brought into society in the modern and global era. For this reason, this study was conducted to see what principles that must applied in responding and managing the implementation of traditional face modern and global values.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Indigenous People

There are several literatures that can be seen related to the understanding of indigenous people. The UN sees the concept of indigenous peoples which is closely related to several characteristics as follows: self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and acceptance by the society as its members; historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture and beliefs; form non-dominant groups of society; and resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (4). The use of the term indigenous peoples itself is a long process. This is a resistance to the negative terms that are often attached such as primitive peoples, isolated tribes, or people who hinder development and the like that tend to be inhumane. The term

indigenous peoples was echoed by a civil society called AMAN (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara) which states that they are communities that live based on ancestral origins from generation to generation on a customary territory, which have sovereignty over land and natural resources, socio-cultural life regulated by customary law, and institutions that manage the sustainability of the lives of their people (5). Global data records that there are as many as 476 million people worldwide who are part of indigenous peoples who speak 4000-7000 languages, where it is feared that these languages will disappear by 2100 (6). According to AMAN, in Indonesia there are 2371 indigenous communities whose members are 70 million people with 10.86 million hectares of mapped land, and are distributed as follows: Sumatra Island 392 indigenous communities, Java Island 55 indigenous communities, Kalimantan Island 772, Sulawesi Island 664, Maluku Island 176, and Papua 59 (7).

2.2. Social Change and Globalisation

Discussing social change can be limited through several related contexts. Social change is a change in the mechanisms of social structure, which includes various changes such as cultural symbols, behavioral rules, social organizations, or value systems that have a social influence. Or we can conclude that social change is the significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns through time (8). When viewed in the current situation, social change is also inseparable from the discourse of globalization, which is a major current that is sweeping the world today. As a process of integration, globalization affects every aspect of human life ranging from economic, cultural, and political to social (9). In this case, local values are then confronted with modernity and even socio-cultural globality in this limitless world. All are mixed without any barriers that limit them. This raises the idea of how local values of indigenous peoples can be eroded or even lost or whether these local values can negotiate with global values that have stronger pressure. This phenomenon can be seen through the approach in several cases, such as this concern began to emerge in the penetration of modern lifestyles that infected local communities in the sedulur sikep/Samin community regarding the use of modern and digital tools, and also perspectives on education and work (10). Something that is not much different is seen when associated with other local entities, which are faced with change and globalization. Traditional arts such as sintren (11) and lengger (12), ultimately have to find a suitable way to adapt to the conditions of the times. This is a social reality where they will survive or they will fade in the shadow of change.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a case study approach which involves an empirical knowledge-seeking process in conducting investigations and research into various phenomena in real-life contexts, with complex social phenomena that can be understood in depth (13). Data collection techniques use interviews, observations, and documentation. The informants involved in this study were 6 traditional figures from the Cisungsang Kasepuhan. The data validity technique uses source triangulation. And the data analysis technique uses an interactive model (14).

4. Research Result and Discussion

Kasepuhan Cisungsang is one of the traditional communities in Lebak district. A rural area on the southern side of West Java province, Indonesia. Located at the foot of Mount Halimun, the Kasepuhan Cisungsang area has local strength supported by very strong local agrarian wisdom. The values of this wisdom have been going on for hundreds of years and have been maintained from generation to generation. One way of maintaining local wisdom within a very strong customary framework is an activity called Seren Taun.

The Seren Taun ceremony has a very deep meaning for the Kasepuhan Cisungsang community. The Seren Taun ceremony can be seen from the aspect of the words and the form of the series of activities in it (15). Seren means to hand over or give, while taun comes from the word year. Based on the equivalent of these words, seren taun means handover from the previous year to the coming year as a replacement. This ceremony is held once a year to give thanks for the harvest that has been planted by the community, and this ceremony is held for 7 days and 7 nights. This series of events includes prayers, celebratory ceremonies, and ends with putting the rice into the *leuit*/barn or rice storage warehouse located near the imah gede or traditional house of the village.

This traditional ceremony illustrates how a cycle of life is maintained and preserved in a way that pays close attention to the principle of sustainability. Agricultural products are not only used for consumption, but also stored as food reserves for the future and also used as seeds for planting rice in the following planting season. This indicates an effort to manage and maintain nature while still maintaining commodities without carrying out large-scale exploitation. Rice that has been harvested may also not be traded by residents, because this is a taboo and this rule is binding for its residents. Agriculture carried out by residents also continues to use organic farming that is free

from the involvement of chemical compounds that will have a bad effect not only on plants, but also on soil fertility levels. The harvest and planting season which are only held once a year are also in order to maintain and provide an opportunity for the soil to recover and rest, so that in the next planting season, it will provide more maximum results. For Kasepuhan Cisungsang, the implementation of the Seren Taun ceremony is an expression of gratitude that must be realized not only to God but also involving togetherness with the entire community. The community groups that were originally involved in this ceremony were local people or residents in Kasepuhan Cisungsang or residents in the surrounding area who were able to reach the area. However, in its development, the Seren Taun ceremony finally developed no longer into an activity that was only local and regional in nature, but has developed into a tourist attraction that is able to reach people from more distant areas. Moreover, in the current global context, with the development of information technology, people in a broader context can relatively easily access information about various things about the implementation of Seren Taun and can even make plans well in advance to be able to attend the activity.

These global conditions and needs demand an attitude and cultural strategy that must be implemented by the Cisungsang elders as a cultural entity as a guardian of local values. In this case, the strategy implemented by the Cisungsang elders is what is called *ngigeulan jaman*. *Ngigeul* in Sundanese means dancing. In this context, it is interpreted that the traditions and local wisdom possessed by the Cisungsang elders must be able to harmonize or go hand in hand with global dynamics in the context of modernity and unavoidable changes in the times, such as the harmony of dances played in a show. This strategic step is also an effort to negotiate for the Cisungsang elders to continue to survive amidst the changing times. Fighting change is an unwise step because change itself is inevitable, so what is best done is to adapt to the changes in the times themselves without having to abandon the basic things that are the main principles of the life of the Cisungsang indigenous community.

In implementing the principle of *ngigeulan jaman* in the context of the Seren Taun ceremony, there are several things that are done, namely:

1. Bringing together local and modern cultures

In the series of Seren Taun events, the Kasepuhan Cisungsang bridges the open access to hold rituals based on the nobility of local culture on the one hand, and can still provide opportunities for modern culture to participate to enliven the celebration of the event on the other hand. In other words, the Kasepuhan Cisungsang tries to carry

out the consistency of this cultural strategy effort so that it can continue to carry out local and modern things in the midst of today's global era.

The series of core Seren Taun events with local cultural nuances are:

- a. *Rasul Pare in Leuit*, is a sign of the start of the series of Seren Taun celebration events (harvest festival). This event is carried out by arranging and tidying up the rice that has been stored in the Leuit (barn) as savings for the agricultural products of the indigenous people in the past.
- b. *Bubuka*, marked by the reading of traditional verse that tell the journey of the ancestors of the Cisungsang indigenous people. Before the pantun is read, there is a *Salamat Beberes Ngueh* event, which is a ceremony that marks the completion of making cakes for the peak of the seren taun event.
- c. *Balik Taun Rendangan*, where all the heads of the traditional groups sit and report to Abah as the elder.
- d. *Ngareremokeun*, which is a ritual of marrying male and rice as a customary rule so that their farming brings blessings (not only successful, but also can bring a lot of leftovers), with the aim of honoring the goddess of rice/goddess Pohaci/goddess Sri (Nur, Siswayanti, & Nurrahmah, 2021).
- e. *Seren Taun*, is the peak event where the rice harvest that has been produced in that year is put into the barn as supplies for the future. This process marks the end of this year's planting season as well as the beginning of next year's season.

In maintaining the traditional values that exist in this indigenous community, anyone who wants to participate in various events and celebrations in the area is still required to follow the dress code that applies in the area. Men must wear a headband or cloth with a certain motif or can be in batik motif, to cover their heads. It called *iket*. While women must wear *sinjang* or cloth with a batik motif or plain dark as a bottom. Local cultural attractions that are also shown in the series of Seren Taun events include jaipongan, wayang golek, angklung, cultural parade and lais performances. In addition, local wisdom is also still shown by the Cisungsang indigenous people by continuing to entertain all guests who attend this Seren Taun event. Anyone who comes, from any background, either residents or guests, is welcome to enjoy the food provided. During this Seren Taun celebration, the traditional house provides food for 7 days and 7 nights non-stop, to serve anyone who attends. The food served is local agricultural products,

from rice, vegetables and side dishes. This is a custom that has been carried out since ancient times, as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty for the abundance of the harvest so that it must be enjoyed together.

Meanwhile, the supporting events that have a modern feel and aim to enliven the seren Taun tradition include:

- a. Several types of competitions such as: iket motif design competition (traditional head covering for men in traditional villages) on July 30, 2024, and Sundanese storytelling competition for elementary and junior high school students on September 26, 2024.
- b. Band Parade, which will be held on September 27 and 29, 2024, with a total of 6 bands performing. To organize the band's performance, the organizing committee will arrange when the band's performance can be held, due to the tight schedule.
- c. People's Market and UMKM exhibition. It was recorded that during the implementation of the seren taun activity, there were hundreds of medium and micro business actors involved in the activity.
- d. Sports competitions also enliven the activity, such as volleyball which is held in a field near the traditional house.
- e. Halimun off-road for 4WD car enthusiasts.

With the implementation of these activities, the indigenous community also did not reject the sponsor or event supporter elements who were present to support the implementation of the event. Several food, beverage, and cigarette products, both local and national, were displayed along the road to the traditional village area. Many banners from these sponsor products also indicated that this activity was quite interesting from a commercial perspective.

2. Media coverage, both conventional and social media.

Several local and even national media appeared to be crowding the location of the Seren Taun event in the Cisungsang traditional village. Journalists were hunting for news and were seen carrying cameras and photographing various areas that were considered capable of providing an appropriate representation of the activities held once a year. It was also seen occasionally, several traditional figures were interviewed to obtain the latest information related to the updates that could be obtained, considering that the activities held were quite dense with quite a lot of guests coming from various regions

and various circles. Cars from several national TV stations were also seen lining up in the very crowded parking area near the Cisungsang Kasepuhan traditional house.

Meanwhile, on the internet, information about the Seren Taun celebration itself had been echoing since several months before the event was held. It is not only government websites, nor mass media that raised the theme of the Seren Taun celebration in their news, but also many bloggers or vloggers who chose content from the Seren Taun celebration as an interest attracter for their viewers. Social media users are also no less busy with uploads regarding the Seren Taun celebration. This indicates that, enthusiasm in the real world and in cyberspace for the implementation of this activity is very large.

3. The official account of Kasepuhan Cisungsang on Instagram as a means of promotion and publication

As an effort to reconcile with the mainstream of globalization, this indigenous community also uses the latest information technology by creating a social media account on Instagram with the name *kasepuhan_cisungsang*. As of December 2024, there have been 46 posts with 1649 followers, and following 50 other accounts. This account uploaded its first post on March 20, 2020 with a post reposting the Seren Taun Cisungsang Event in 2018. The majority of posts that have been made up to December 2024 are about the Seren Taun celebration which is indeed very iconic for this indigenous community. Thus, it is clear that this indigenous community is trying to become familiar with the global world and cyberspace to bring it together with local wisdom values through social media accounts. This is an opportunity that can be used to promote how the richness of local wisdom is to the international world and to the wider community in a more up-to-date manner.

Based on the efforts made by these indigenous peoples, it is increasingly apparent how they engage in dialogue with modernity and globalization in dialogical ways. Fierce resistance to modernity is not their choice in running the wheels of life and upholding the rituals that they have believed in for centuries as the breath of life. Nor is it a rejection of the great current of globalization and change that they are stirring up to continue to stand with the beliefs and noble values of their ancestors. However, they prefer to use a more flexible way to be able to adapt to changes that cannot be stopped. This is more acceptable to the local community as a way for them to negotiate with modernity and globalization. This is certainly different from the Baduy who consider adjustments to modernity to be a deviation from tradition (16). For the Cisungsang community, negotiation with modernity is also considered a way to respond to a life

that is constantly changing. Seren taun remains a bond to maintain what has been given by the ancestors, while the modernity in it is things that support how local values will continue to survive. Seren Taun promotion using social media is also an effective alternative, where it can reach people from further away. Instagram has proven to be effective as a promotional media accompanied by complete, clear, polite and correct information so as to increase visitor activity in traveling (media exposure has been proven to be strongly related to the effectiveness of information because it can increase awareness and knowledge) (17). Thus, in this Seren Taun celebration, the Kasepuhan Cisungsang indigenous community has a strategy to be able to dialogue and negotiate with modernity and globalization, both through real and virtual reality. This acceptance is a manifestation of the principle of *ngigeulan* which has been used as a basis for bringing together the local values of their lives and responding to modernity today whose existence cannot be denied.

5. Conclusion

From the explanation, it can be concluded that the negotiation strategy is a self-defense mechanism for indigenous peoples to be able to survive in the midst of socio-cultural changes and globalization today. For Cisungsang indigenous people, choosing to be in harmony with change and modernity through the concept of *ngigeulan jaman* is the most appropriate thing, rather than having to carry out extreme resistance and rejection. This means using more subtle, moderate, dialogical methods, giving each other space, and even using modern tools to expose, promote, and elevate local values and culture to a wider audience. And this does not mean abandoning local wisdom and basic principles that must be maintained as the identity of indigenous communities that have been preserved for centuries. The challenge ahead is how to prepare a young generation that is able to communicate and deal with more challenging future conditions. This is starting to become a concern, considering that most of the perpetrators of traditional rituals are old people whose existence requires regeneration.

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