

Conference Paper

# Strengthening the Local Culture of the Oral Tradition of *Berahoi* to Develop Creative Industry

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## Abstract

'*Berahoi*', traditional Malay culture, is an asset supposedly from Langkat history from the area of Batubara County. Since 200 years, '*Berahoi*' tradition has existed in Bahorok, a district in Langkat, which symbolizes the cycle of farming as a tradition in the country that has existed as an agricultural country for a long time. Revitalizing the tradition of '*Berahoi*' requires another vehicle in the form of an annual minimum number of regular performances on a local and even national scale; and then on an international scale, a colossal festival was initiated in realizing the creative industries.

**Keywords:** *Berahoi*, creative industries, local culture

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## 1. Introduction

*Berahoi* tradition comes from the art of planting rice, which involves a traditional customs ceremony. This communal activity of the people of Melayu Langkat in North Sumatera in the past describes the life cycle of farming, namely plowing, sowing, planting, harvesting, and others done in the *Berahoi* tradition or known as the *Berahoi* tradition ceremony.

In terms of the community collective memory, the *Berahoi* tradition has been a part of the life of the agrarian community of the people for a long time, yet it is in line with the demands for changes of today's era, and such ceremonies have almost died out in the land of Langkat. Aside from acting as the collective memory of the supporting community, this tradition is a representation of the members of the community of Melayu Langkat who work in the spirit of participation in their communal activities known as 'mutual cooperation ceremonies'. In the *Berahoi* tradition, the supporting community tramples rice while chanting a poem along with the words *ahoi-ahoi*. No

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one knows who created the tone, rhythm, and lyric of the song because the creation of the lyric of the song was carried out en masse. One person became the leader of the song, and was then followed by the serving group while they trampled on the rice. The use of the terms *ahoi* or *hooi* is a customary way of the people of Melayu Langkat to call someone to join or work hand in hand. In ancient times, this activity was done at night when the full moon shone on the yards of the houses of the people of Melayu Langkat. Thus, this *ahoi* expresses the culture of the communal community, who really appreciate social togetherness and oral communication.

The word 'oral' is often used as the main criterion to assess a certain science or research on oral tradition. The tradition of *Berahoi* can be categorized as the art of oral tradition even though it can be considered as folklore. Folklore is usually determined in its relation to a certain material that is transmitted orally, and the term 'oral' is the basic term in the studies of oral formulas and oral literature, which are the subjects being discussed today. In the past, people who considered themselves folklorist were usually considered to be in the category of local bachelors and native speakers, and anthropologists were categorized in the researchers' category as outsiders and/or as superiors, but these differences started to fade.

The tradition of *Berahoi* is categorized as an oral tradition, namely a tradition of a ritual ceremony of trampling rice. *Berahoi* is performed by singing, chanting, and stomping feet together musically. The dances and songs of *Berahoi* describe the farming activity of the agrarian people of Melayu Langkat who use the 'fixed' system based on 'consistent' and well-organized orders with the cycle of plowing, sowing, planting, and harvesting. First, the traditional system of *open rows* is conducted with a land opening ceremony named *penotauan* (landscaping). This *penotauan* ceremony in the past was sacred and magical and involved the role of a *pawang* or *datu*. Secondly, providing the terms of *njamu sawah* or *njamu ladang* ceremony (*menjamu bendang/sawah*). Thirdly, the *pawang bendang* prepares the materials needed for a potion. Fourthly, a serving ceremony is held with several terms. Fifth, nurturizing the young rice plant. Sixth, the rice is trampled as a conjoint activity.

In Bohorok Langkat, a long time ago, there was a ritual procession of *ngerbah hutan* when trees were cut to clear an area for farming, namely preparing materials and potions as well as a set of tools with magical power, giving offerings to the masters of the forest (mystical creatures), performing animal slaughtering ceremonies (chickens, goats, and buffaloes), serving rice seeds, nursing and supervising rice that is starting to ripen, cutting rice using a sickle (*ani-ani*), and trampling rice hand in hand.

The culture of Malay farming is countrified and traditional and cannot be separated from the local beliefs and customs of the supporting community of the farmers themselves. Traditionally, when a Malay sees a star (natural cosmos) called *sandaran lemang*, they go the field and start to plant rice [1, p. 137]. The Malay people of North Sumatera (East Sumatera) generally plant rice by farming on dry land even though in several other areas (in accordance with the residential area) they plant rice in a rice field.

Like the farmers, the people of Melayu Langkat are also a maritime community known as the fishermen community, whose economic life is based on the products of the seas. Both forms of communities, namely farmers and fishermen, are generally categorized as a rural community.

## 2. Methods

Discussion about an oral tradition is limitless because it refers to a sequence of habits and values inherited from one generation to another in a particular community.

Endaswara [2, p. 151] summarized the definition of an oral tradition as a product that is spread from mouth to mouth from one generation to another and has the following characteristics:

1. Born from a traditional and literate society as well as traditionally
2. Describes the culture of certain collective property and it is not clear who the creator is
3. More emphasis on aspects of fantasy, insinuation, humor, and educational message
4. Often describes certain collective traditions
5. Oral traditions reveal many word clichés
6. Oral traditions are often patronizing

In references to Espinosa (by Maria Leach and Jerome Fried, 1949) there is a mutual exchange between the oral tradition and written tradition, the rapidity of cultural change and exchange, the revival that is an essential part of the popularization of survival is as important as the quality of character, and the final responsibility is on the accumulative and collective feelings as well as a number of people's judgments rather than a few people's feelings and judgments.

*In the reciprocity of oral and written tradition and the flux of cultural change and exchange, revival plays as important a part as survival popularization is as essential as scholarship, and the final responsibility rests upon the accumulative and collective taste and judgement of the many rather than a few (Aurelio, M. Espinosa in Maria Leach and Jerome Fried, eds. 1949. Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend, Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York, p. 398).*

Early oral tradition approaches are mostly designed to explain the history of specific (narrative) forms in relation to originality, diffusion, or evolution. Furthermore, the theories of oral traditions developed their theoretical understanding.

Dundes (1969) and Holbek (1987) in Finnegan [3, p. 29] discussed the development and decline of theories: Fairy tales are fragmented myths that descend from higher levels to the level of children and/or lower-class level; epics are developed from a mixture of folk songs, and similar theories.

*Development and deterioration theories: fairy tales are broken down myths, sunk down from higher levels to that of children and/or of lower classes; epics developed from composite folksongs; similar theories (Dundes, 1969; Holbek, 1987; in Finnegan [3, p. 29]).*

According to Finnegan [3, p. 29], oral traditions anthropologically developed by Andrew Lang who claimed that forms (oral traditions) such as legendary narratives, narrative stories that make people wonder what the next that comes from a period of narrative seems irrational based on its primitively, but because it was understandable, the story was inherited/revealed from generation to another.

Furthermore, Finnegan stated that in oral tradition, the stories of natural mythology are stories of and from the forces (phenomena) of nature, especially the sun. This was also related to the theory of 'linguistic disease' and Indo European mythology developed by Max Muller. And this was similar to stories that were monogenetic versus stories that were polygenetic (stories that were monogenetic were often adopted in India as the center of diffusion/spread).

*Berahoi* traditions include the creations of traditional traditions categorized as folklore because they contain metric expressions, pantuns, proverbs, folk songs that are verbally spoken, mantras of community belief or superstition, and traditionally, performances and dance.

Bascom in Leach et al. (1949) reported that in the anthropology context, the term 'folklore' may be used to refer to myths, legends, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, poems, and various other forms of artistic expression conveyed through the medium of spoken language. Therefore, folklore can be defined as an oral art.

*In anthropological usage, the term folklore has come to mean myths, legends, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, verse, and a variety of other forms of artistic expression whose medium is the spoken word. Thus, folklore can be defined as verbal arts. Anthropologists recognize that an important group of individuals known as folklorists are interested in customs, beliefs, arts and crafts, dress, house types, and food recipes; but in their own studies of the aboriginal people of various parts of the world, these diverse items are treated under the accepted headings of the material culture, graphic and plastic arts, technologies and economics, social and political organization, and religion, and all are subsumed under the general term culture [4].*

Furthermore, Bascom added that anthropologists discovered that a group of individuals known as folklorists were interested in the traditional culture, beliefs, arts and handicrafts, clothing, types of houses, and food recipes; but within the studies that they have conducted concerning native inhabitants or indigenous various areas in the world, several items were put in their acceptable topics such as material cultures, graphic and visual arts, technology and economy, social and political organizations, and religion, and all were categorized within the term 'culture'.

The tradition of *Berahoi* that can be categorized as some oral folklore such as the traditional ceremony (pulverizing the young rice plant, the trampling rice ceremony/berlonang) is then categorized as folklore instead of oral due to the *gambang* instrument (traditional music of *tolonang*), and food and drink indigenous to Melayu Bahorok such as *pulut tuai*, pepper water (*nira*) and Malacca fruit cake.

The structure of the activity of the *Berahoi* tradition consists of (1) *tepak sirih* (passing the beetle box), (2) opening speech from the head of customs/Pak Imam, (3) reciting the book of *barzanji*, (4) cultivating rice, (5) forming a circle to arrange the rice on top of coarse-plated mats, (6) trampling rice, (7) shaking down by foot while chanting (singing), (8) cleaning rice waste (*ruman* rice), (9) pounding rice, (10) winnowing rice, and (11) pulverizing rice on top of the *lonang* (a wooden bolt as a place to hold on).

Next, Finnegan [2] believed that oral tradition is 'development' and 'modernization', which affect the process of analyzing oral work that includes to an 'oral tradition' that can be interpreted, especially myths gathered from strangers or folklore based on European tradition. The interest focusing on the originality thus putting the research on works of oral literature on the phases of 'purity', 'originality', or 'tradition' that are 'not contaminated' by 'outside influences'.

Stories or songs considered 'traditional', 'populist', or 'tribal' can be analyzed as the life sustainability of the community in several phases before that. The assumptions on the oral forms (tradition) gathered from the past, colonized people who are not

European, can basically be analyzed as a different form in the oral tradition that comes from Europe (people), and close to the 'nature' that fits with the preconception of the nineteenth century that some still use today.

A member of the community that has the will to hold a *Berahoi* tradition will have to invite the children of *beru* both young and old, and ask the children of *beru* to hold the *Berahoi* tradition directly. The task accepted by the children of *beru* is to invite their peers, that is, those children of *beru* who are young will invite the youth, whereas the old ones invite the parents of both male and female parents.

Before *Berahoi* starts, the master of verse (*ahli bait*) will send the children of *beru* to invite people who were having *Berahoi* in other places. During that time, the messenger of *ahli bait* will invite the youth who were resting for one round in *Berahoi*. A box of beetle leaves is given by the children of *beru* to the *ahli bait* when they come to invite people to trample the rice in the evening and the time to go to the house of *ahli bait* who are holding the *Berahoi*.

Three days prior to the execution of the *Berahoi* tradition, the nuclear family will come to the house of *ahli bait*. They will work together to clean the place for the *Berahoi*, create a hut (*teratak*), raise the house, and create a hose. Among other activities, the mothers will collect some firewood.

A long time ago, the activity of the *Berahoi* tradition was an event for Malay boys and girls to meet to get to know one another and to find a mate. The activity of the *Berahoi* tradition involved a game of reciprocity of rhyming poems (*pantun berkait*) that were chanted by the boys during the break. This game as a part of the spoken arts of the community of Melayu Bahorok (Langkat) was used as a way to communicate between the youths and an opportunity to probe some hearts, which was normally done while singing and performing the *Berahoi* during the break after getting tired of working or trampling rice. The arena for *Berahoi* is usually created in the yard of the house. The youths and several elders work together to trample the rice and clean the rice grains separated from their stem (called *ruman*). The girls of Malay will be on the porch of the house on stilts and from above they will be able to see a number of boys below who are doing the *Berahoi*. In the recess period (after one round), the youth will pack a cigarette leave as well as tobacco and throw it up to the porch, where the girls are sitting and talking, as well as playing around. The girls will accept the pact thrown by the boys and start rolling (rolling cigarettes). After the second round, the *Berahoi* starts, then the cigarettes that have been rolled are given back to the boys.

From this activity, a boy will try to find a girl through her friends. This event will continue for several days and usually the meeting between the youths will be followed

up by a romantic relationship. The tradition of throwing tobacco and papers and rolling cigarettes is considered to be an essential part of boys and girls meeting in the *Berahoi* tradition.

Examples of poems about the event of throwing and getting the *pancapat* (cigarettes and tobacco) in the form of rhyming poems are:

1. *Tanjung Balai tepekong Cina*  
*Sungguhlah jauh dari Asahan*  
*Kami lalai melihat bunga*  
*Alangkah jauh di ujung dahan*
2. *Sungguh jauh dari Asahan*  
*Tongkang berlayar perahu Cina*  
*Sungguh jauh di ujung dahan*  
*Mau dipungkang takut tak kena*
3. *Tongkang berlayar perahu cina*  
*Sarat memuat si bunga rampai*  
*Hendak dipungkang takut tak kena*  
*Hendak dijolok galah tak sampai*

A rhyming poem in the tradition of *Berahoi* has the following characteristics:

1. The second line in the first poem is reused in the first line of the second poem. Then the fourth line in the first poem is reused in the third line of the second poem.
2. The second line of the second poem is repeated in the first line of the third poem, and the fourth line of the second poem is repeated in the third line of the third poem.

The community of Melayu Langkat comprehends a habit that is appreciated and practiced to form the habit into a law and way of life. They know and uphold the customs of Melayu Langkat that focus on the nature problem around it as the main teacher in forming and using the mutual interest.

The philosophy of Melayu Langkat arises from the knowledge and experiences of the surrounding nature or the sciences and law structure of the civilized community.

Prevention and suggestions as well as crisis are symbolized in the form of things that reflect the soul of the interest custom community.

The customs and habits of the community of Melayu Langkat are discovered in the open air called a pure custom hall (*balai adat murni*), which has the earth as its floor and the sky as its ceiling, intellect as the hoist with the hills as the wall, aspirations as the stairs and the stars as the curtains. This custom hall is conducting terms as a dynamic source or guides as the satisfaction of human taste and ratio of Melayu Langkat according to its place and time.

Certain plants have varied vitality. Therefore, those plants are used by the people of Malay as medicine to boost vitality. For example, *kalinjuhang* leaves when worn on the head or body or even held together with a ceremonial knife (*kris*) on the hand will boost the spirit to fight. If the *kalinjuhang* leaves spread to the sick, then the ghost stuck in the patient's body will run.

The things that can be found above, especially the rice seeds that are specially treated and pulverized, so that the seeds will have strong wills and have contents, so that if they are planted, they will produce dense, solid, big, and multiple fruits.

The community of Melayu Langkat believe that each myth contains symbols, namely the unity of two opposite elements. For example, the macrocosmic is the microcosmic, light – dark, sky – earth. In nature, deity has the characteristics of *jamal* (*vishnu*) and the characteristics of *jalal* (*shiva*) and both of these characteristics in terms of forms are opposite in the real realm.

There are paradox zones (different territory) such as *spirits and body, heaven and hell, earth and sky, angels and demons, breeze and thunder, wind, calm and wavy water, tame and wild animals, living happily and in difficulties*.

Within human themselves, Malays (Langkat) believe that there are characteristics of *love and hate, compassionate and angry, forgiving and vengeful* within humans themselves. Different in genders that differentiate *male* and *female* is a statement from the difference between two characteristics known as the paradox attitudes.

### 3. Results

The following is a description of the paradox zone division of deity, nature, and human within the scope of the community of Melayu Langkat.

In a dictionary, local wisdom consists of two words: wisdom and local. In the Echols and Syadily Indonesian–English Dictionary, *local* means of the same place, whereas

TABLE 1: The cosmology paradox of Melayu Langkat.

No.	Zone (Territory)	Forms of Paradox
1	Deity	<i>Jamal - Jalal</i> characteristics Compassion - anger Merciful - punisher
2	Nature	Seas - lands; earth - sky Night - day; mountain - valley Fire - water; hot - cold Fragrant - foul; clear - muddy
3	Human	Love - hate; generous - stingy Old - young; boy - girl Big - small Beautiful - ugly; good - bad Loss - profit; filled - hollow Poor - rich; sick - health

*wisdom* is the same as prudence. In general, the *local wisdom* can be understood as the local ideas that are wise, full of prudence, have good values, are embedded, and are followed by the members of the community.

Local wisdom exists within the society, community, and individuals. Thus, local wisdom is a traditional view and knowledge that has become a reference in terms of behaving and has been practiced for generations to meet the needs and challenges in the life of a community. Local wisdom is able to function and be meaningful in the community in preserving the natural and human resources, customs and cultures, as well as being useful for life.

History has shown that each ethnic tribe has their own local wisdom. For example, (without mentioning all tribes and ethnicity in Indonesia), the Batakese are known for being outspoken, the Javanese are known as being graceful, the Maduranese have a high sense of pride, and the Chinese are known for their perseverance. Moreover, each ethnicity gets along and is friendly toward the natural environment surrounding them. That local wisdom definitely did not appear instantaneously; rather it went through a long process that has finally proven that wisdom is good for their lives. It was tested in a way that made the local wisdom become a culture that has become embedded within the tradition, strongly attached to the life of the community. This means that within certain boundaries, there are perennial values strongly rooted in each culture locality aspect. Overall, aside from the differences in its intensity, incubate the vision of creating a dignified, prosperous, and peaceful life. Within the frame of this local wisdom, the community is able to show their existence and coexistence toward one another.

The Indonesian people should have returned to their identity through reunderstanding the meaning and the reconstruction of their noble cultural values. Within the frame, the effort that needs to be made is exposing the substantial meaning of the local wisdom. For example, openness is developed and contextualized into honesty and a bundle of other derivative values. Smoothness is formulated into sincere hospitality. Pride is placed in the effort to develop achievement, etcetera. At the same time, the result of reconstruction needs to be down to earth, and spread to all communities so that it becomes the solid identity of the nation, instead of only a certain tribe or community identity. Therefore, sincerity is indeed needed to be the basic foundation of all nations. Sincerity to admit all weaknesses, and the sincerity to put away ego and greed, as well as to share with others as an entity of the same nation. The elites at various levels need to be the leading pioneers, not only in what they say, but also in their concrete practices. The local wisdom that has been dug up, polished, packed, and well maintained can function as the alternative guidelines of human life in Indonesia nowadays and can be used to filter new/foreign values so that they are not opposed to the national personalities and keep the relationship between humans and God, the surrounding nature, and fellow beings in harmony (*tripita cipta karana*). Furthermore, as a big nation that owns and inherits the *adiluhung* culture legally, reflecting on the Bengali mirror of the prudence of the ancestors can help us in finding a solid position in this global arena.

#### 4. Conclusion

There are two big problems that fall upon Indonesian people nowadays, namely the unity and civilization of the nation. The unity and entity of the nation of the people of Indonesia is crumbling and weak due to a conflict of interest based on the interest of a certain class, group, and tribe. The wisdom of the *Berahoi* tradition is deemed to be appropriate as the perfect solution to overcome the disunity of the nation. Humanity and culture of living in a community and country experience moral and spiritual crisis including a crisis to have a noble character, crisis in culture and crisis in religion. The wisdom of the *Berahoi* tradition is deemed appropriate to handle the moral crisis happening to Currently, Indonesia, according to the World Bank, is included in a group of 10 countries with the largest economy in the world because of its human resources of around 250 million people and the high potential of the natural resources that have not been fully developed in addition to its rich cultural resources due to its variations. Therefore, within this context, we need to establish a culture revitalization so that it

becomes a culture industry or creative industry and thus in the free trade of MEA 2015 is a country with a strong competitiveness that can be achieved when the development policies set in the RPJMN 2005–2025 are followed consistently.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this research.

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