

## The Existence of Totokng Dance as the Cultural Identity of the Dayak Salako Tribe

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the existence of the Totokng dance in the Nurutni ' Ceremony as a representation of the cultural identity of the Dayak Salako community in West Kalimantan. The dance functions not only as a performative expression but also as a medium of spiritual communication that connects humans, ancestors, nature, and God (Jubato). This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, using participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and field documentation in Pelanjau Hamlet, the central site of the ceremony. The findings show that the Totokng dance is a sacred ritual passed down vertically through the ancestral lineage of the Panglima Kayau. The structure of the performance consists of preparation, main performance, and post-ritual stages, with strong symbolism reflected in the movements, music, costumes, and offerings. The dance embodies cosmological and spiritual values, turning the dancer ' s body into a living archive of collective memory. The shift in the function of the dance from a symbol of power to a ritual of gratitude for the harvest illustrates the adaptive capacity of local culture in facing social change. The process of intergenerational transmission through direct ritual experience strengthens the preservation of its meaning. In conclusion, the Totokng dance not only maintains ancestral traditions but also acts as a cultural instrument that reinforces the identity and resistance of the Dayak Salako community in the face of global cultural homogenization.*

### KEYWORDS

Existence  
Totokng Dance  
Cultural Identity  
Nurutni ' Ceremony  
Dayak Salako

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### INTRODUCTION

In an era where everything can be folded into a phone screen, local cultures are increasingly in conflict with modernity. This situation presents a dilemma between preserving cultural heritage or adapting it to increasingly dominant global tastes. In this context, the Totokng dance, as a representation of the spirituality and cosmology of the Dayak Salako community, serves as a concrete example of a tradition that maintains its identity amid a fluid social landscape. As a dance rich in spiritual values and ritual function, its presence remains an integral part of Dayak Salako community life. They strictly uphold customary traditions inherited from their ancestors, as these are directly connected to the structure of their religiosity as an indigenous society.

In line with the statement by Marselus et al. (2023), the Dayak community still highly honor the moral and spiritual values passed down by their ancestors, especially within their collective agrarian lifestyle. As argued by Peursen (2016), local wisdom not only contains cultural values but also acts as a defensive mechanism for communities to preserve their identity against the dominance of foreign cultures. This indicates that cultural preservation is not merely about maintaining external forms but also about safeguarding the meanings

embedded within. Within this framework, the Totokng dance reflects the living relationship between values, rituals, and identity in the collective memory of the Dayak Salako community. The dance functions as a medium of spiritual communication and a symbol of cultural continuity for the Dayak Salako community. Amid the challenges of modernity and the penetration of global culture, the existence of the Totokng dance stands as a firm assertion that local identity still has space and vitality.

So far, several studies have been conducted to examine the Totokng dance from various perspectives. Nurbalika et al. (2014), investigated the musical aspects through a study of Totokng music among the Kanayatn community in Landak Regency, revealing the structure of musical composition within the context of the Notokng ritual. Imanisa et al. (2016), in their research on symbols and the meaning of movements in the Totokng dance during the Notokng traditional ceremony in Sengah Temilak District, analyzed the symbolism and philosophical values of the dance movements in traditional rituals. On the other hand, Petrisia et al. (2018), through a study on the performance form of Totokng *Padi* in Sibale Village, Samalantan District, Bengkayang Regency, focused on the presentation of the dance within the agricultural context of the Kanayatn community.

However, these three studies explicitly focus on the Dayak Kanayatn ethnic group and on the Notokng or Totokng *Padi* ceremonies. To date, no study has specifically explored the existence of the Totokng dance in the context of the Nurutni' Ceremony of the Dayak Salako community in West Kalimantan. In fact, the variant of the Totokng dance examined in this study has fundamental differences in terms of performance form, movement characteristics, spiritual function, and the cultural dimensions of its supporting ethnic group. The Nurutni' Ceremony is held as an expression of gratitude for the new rice harvest, as a tribute to the spirits of the *tengkorak kepala kayau*, and as a means of protection against mystical disturbances and agricultural pests. *Tengkorak kepala kayau* refers to the head of an enemy obtained through the *ngayau* (headhunting) tradition practiced by the Dayak Salako community in the past.

Culture cannot be separated from the customs and belief systems of the supporting community. Hadi states that ritual is a form of celebration closely related to a specific belief system or religion, marked by distinctive characteristics that evoke a deep sense of reverence (Firmayanti et al., 2024). Schechner (2013) adds that ritual helps community navigate social transitions and conflicts through symbolic actions within a performative space. The performance studies approach views ceremonies as arenas that unfold within space, time, and socio-cultural contexts, while also functioning as a medium for the production of collective meaning. Therefore, ritual dances such as the Totokng dance are not merely expressions of tradition, but also symbolic practices that connect values, belief systems, and symbolic power within the community.

The Totokng dance in the Nurutni' Ceremony represents a living form of spiritual communication in which the Dayak Salako community construct symbolic relationships with *Awo Pamo* (ancestral spirits), nature, and *Jubato* (God). According to Peursen societies such as the Dayak Salako tend to be situated at the mythical stage, where daily reality is understood through relationships with supernatural forces (Yessa et al., 2021). In this context, the Totokng dance mediates the connection between humans and the cosmos through the symbolism of movement, music, and ritual structure. Performative elements such as the dancer's lineage, performance procedures, and spiritual taboos reinforce the function of the dance as a cultural boundary marker that distinguishes Dayak Salako identity from other sub-ethnic groups.

The transformation of the function of the Totokng dance from a welcoming ritual for the *Panglima Kayau* to a ceremony of gratitude for the harvest reflects a form of social adaptation accompanied by a shift in symbolic meaning. Movements that once signified bravery and strength in the context of intergroup conflict (*ngayau*) are now used to express gratitude and hope for fertility. This transformation is not merely functional, but also indicates a shift in the relationship between humans, their environment, and the spiritual dimension. Within the framework of symbolic anthropology, particularly through Geertz's approach, the Totokng dance can be understood as a cultural text, a system of symbols that reflects the structure of meaning shaped and sustained by the community. Geertz (1973) emphasizes that symbols and ritual practices do not merely represent beliefs, but also organize and reinforce the social and cosmological order. The changing meaning of the dance demonstrates how communities reshape symbols to respond to new social contexts without eliminating the ritual function and spiritual connection to nature and ancestral spirits. Similar phenomena can be observed in other indigenous communities in Southeast Asia.

In the Nalitm Taun ritual of the Dayak Benuaq community in East Kalimantan, for example, elements such as *Belian Sentiu* and *Momaaq* are used to communicate with the spirit world and to maintain balance between humans and the spiritual realm (Yunhadi & Carolina, 2016). Meanwhile, in the Kwangkai funeral ceremony, gong music and collective dance are used to guide the soul to the ancestral realm and to strengthen social solidarity as well as the community's cosmological structure (Rata, 2017). The Totokng dance is not merely a local practice, but part of a broader pattern in which performing arts serve as ritual instruments that sustain the connection between humans, nature, and ancestral spirits. Geertz's symbolic approach helps to explain how societies interpret social change through symbols and cultural practices that are continually recontextualized.

The system of cultural transmission is a crucial element in sustaining a tradition. In the context of the Dayak Salako community, the continued existence of the Totokng dance is the result of the intergenerational transmission of values, knowledge, and cultural practices through a vertical transmission mechanism (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981). This system relies on families and communities as the primary mediums for instilling and preserving traditions in younger generations from an early age. According to Soedjono, cultural change can result from both internal (endogenous) and external (exogenous) factors (Bisri, 2007). The ability of the Dayak Salako community to adapt to external influences without sacrificing the spiritual essence and social values of the Totokng dance demonstrates a high level of cultural adaptability.

The Totokng dance is performed specifically during the Nurutni' Ceremony, which is held in mid-February in conjunction with the first rice harvest season. In this context, the dance serves as a medium that connects humans, ancestors, nature, and God. Based on an interview with Ignasius Mito, the traditional leader of Pelanjau Hamlet, it is known that the Totokng dance has been practiced for over 200 years and is currently being passed down to the fourth generation. This indicates that the dance is not merely a preserved form, but a means of maintaining collective memory. The concept of cultural memory is highly relevant in explaining this phenomenon, as each movement and ritual of the dance carries narratives of the past and the community's beliefs that continue to be revived and embodied (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

Based on the above explanation, this study was conducted to examine in depth the existence of the Totokng dance in the Nurutni' ceremony as a representation of the cultural identity of the Dayak Salako community in West Kalimantan. The focus of the study includes the identification of the dance presentation form within the context of ritual

implementation, the interpretation of its symbolic and spiritual functions within the community's belief system, as well as the exploration of the transmission system and preservation efforts carried out by the local community. This research is expected to reveal the role of the Totokng dance in maintaining the continuity of spiritual values while also strengthening the cultural identity of the Dayak Salako community amid the dynamics of changing times.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive method with a qualitative approach, aiming to gain a deep understanding of the cultural dynamics involved in the transformation of the Totokng dance function as a cultural identity of the Dayak Salako community. This approach allows the researcher to explore the symbolic meanings, social structures, and spirituality embedded in the cultural practices of the Dayak Salako community, based on the experiences and narratives of cultural practitioners in the field. The research location was purposively determined in Pelanjau Hamlet, Bukit Sigoler Village, Tebas Subdistrict, Sambas Regency. This hamlet serves as the center of the Nurutni' ceremony and holds significant cultural representation for the Dayak Salako, as it preserves authentic ritual practices actively performed by the indigenous community.

Fieldwork was conducted for approximately three months, covering the period before, during, and after the ceremony. The researcher was directly involved in observing the ceremonial process and the Totokng dance performance, documenting key aspects such as the form of dance presentation in ritual contexts, symbolic and spiritual dimensions in belief practices, as well as the mechanisms of cultural value transmission and preservation strategies implemented by the community. Data were obtained through passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation study. Observations were carried out directly at the ceremony site, recording the atmosphere, symbolic actions, and the dance movement structures that contain specific meanings (Moleong, 2006). Interviews were conducted with three main informants: Ignasius Mito (Head of Customary Affairs, Pelanjau Hamlet), Leonardus Joko (local cultural practitioner), and Budianto (Totokng dance performer).

Supporting documentation includes photographs, performance videos, field notes, and customary archives. Data triangulation was carried out by combining direct observation, interviews, and visual documentation to strengthen the validity of the information obtained (Moleong, 2006). The researcher also upheld research ethics by obtaining formal permission from customary leaders and respecting the sacred boundaries of rituals and symbols, particularly in relation to sacred heirlooms such as *tengkorak kepala kayau*. The data analysis process was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, a technique that enables the researcher to identify and organize key themes from field data. Coding was carried out inductively, identifying meanings that emerged directly from field narratives and practices.

The analytical themes generated in this study include the presentation of the dance in ritual contexts, symbolic and spiritual meanings, the community's belief structure, the system of cultural transmission, and local preservation strategies. Thematic analysis is considered appropriate as it provides space to understand layered meanings of cultural experiences and symbols that are not always explicit. In addition, the performance studies framework of Schechner (2013) was employed to interpret the Totokng dance as a social act reflecting the identity and dynamics of the community. Meanwhile, Symbolic anthropology approach strengthened the understanding of the dance as a cultural text that represents value structures, belief systems, and spiritual relationships among humans, nature, and ancestors



(Geertz, 1973). The data were analyzed through three main stages of data reduction: filtering relevant information based on the research focus; data presentation, which involved organizing the information systematically to facilitate interpretation; and conclusion drawing, which involved formulating thematic understandings of the field findings (Sugiyono, 2013). This process was carried out reflectively and iteratively to ensure that the results of the analysis accurately and contextually represent cultural reality.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Presentation of Totokng Dance in the Nurutni' Ceremony

The Totokng dance is a ritual expression that integrates both performative and spiritual functions within the Nurutni' ceremony of the Dayak Salako community. This dance is passed down from generation to generation as part of a collective system of knowledge and belief. Within the structure of the ceremony, the Totokng dance holds a significant role as the opening rite, marked by the lowering of the *tengkorak kepala kayau* from the storage house onto the stage (*tarub*). This moment marks the beginning of the sacralization process of space and time, binding the dancers' bodies and the community into a collective spiritual dimension that transcends worldly boundaries. The performance takes place on the *tarub*, a special structure built in the courtyard of the *tengkorak kepala kayau* storage house. This arena is designed to be open so it can be viewed from multiple directions, highlighting the public yet sacred nature of the performance.

The formation of dancers consists of one male performer as *Panglima Kayau* and six female performers as *Anak Kayau*, all of whom are descendants of the *Panglima Kayau* lineage. According to Budianto, "*penari perempuan daan boleh agek datang bulan, bunting, ataupun lekak beranak kelak bise datangkan Boo' atau sial*" (interview, 23 January 2024). This means that the participation of female dancers is restricted by requirements of bodily purity; they must not be menstruating, pregnant, or in postpartum recovery, as such conditions are believed to bring *Boo'* (misfortune). This reinforces the role of the dancer's body as a sacred medium, not merely an aesthetic performer but a channel of genealogical legitimacy and the embodiment of spiritual values. Within Schechner's (2013) embodied archive framework, the dancer's body serves as a living archive that stores and activates collective memory, spirituality, and inherited history across generations.

The presentation of the dance comprises five main elements: movement, floor pattern, music, costume, and ritual offerings. The movement structure consists of four meaningful gestures: *nyamboh*, *binaul menyula'*, *ngayau*, and *nyuampe*. The *nyamboh* movement symbolizes reverence to *Jubato* (God) and *Awo Pamo* (ancestral spirits). The *Binaul menyula'* movement imitates the motion of the sacred eagle as a guardian of spiritual power. The *ngayau* movement represents the bravery of the *Panglima Kayau* in headhunting, while *nyuampe* movement becomes the climax of exaltation, when the *Anak Kayau* raise the *tengkorak kepala kayau* as a symbol of triumph in *ngayau* (headhunting). These movements utilize horizontal and circular floor patterns. The horizontal pattern is used during the act of honoring the *tengkorak kepala kayau*, indicating a linear relationship between humans and the profane world. In contrast, the circular pattern symbolizes spiritual interconnectedness among humans, ancestors, and the cosmos.

Female dancers circle around the *Panglima Kayau* counterclockwise, then shift to clockwise, creating a dynamic motion that symbolizes the cycle of life and death, allies and enemies, center and periphery, as well as the integration of individual authority into collective structure. From the perspective of liminality (Schechner, 2013), the dance space

becomes a threshold between the human and spirit worlds, where transition, transformation, and cross-dimensional communication occur. The accompanying music is played using traditional Dayak Salako instruments: *dalu*, *gerantukng*, and *ketambung*, with repetitive and monotonous rhythmic patterns. The simple yet consistent rhythm enhances the transformative atmosphere and guides the dancer's body into a liminal state. Although the *kelaban* chant as a musical prayer has now disappeared, spiritual power remains present through the suggestive repetition of sound. In Schechner's (2013) view, this is an example of restored behavior, where old patterns detached from their original context are symbolically reactivated as a continuity of ritual through time. The dancer's costumes are also rich in symbolism. White represents purity, red signifies courage, black symbolizes spiritual protection, and gold denotes prosperity. Accessories such as necklaces and headbands are not merely visual elements but also markers of spiritual and social identity that are embedded in the dancer's body.

The most distinctive performative feature of the Totokng dance in the Dayak Salako tradition is the direct involvement of the *tengkorak kepala kayau* in the *nyuampe* movement. The *tengkorak kepala kayau* is not merely raised symbolically but is spiritually believed to attach itself to the head of a dancer who shares a bloodline with the ancestors of the *Panglima Kayau*. Within the community's belief system, the *tengkorak kepala kayau* is not simply an inherited object but an active entity containing the *sumangat* (spiritual power) of the ancestors. The female dancer's body functions as an incarnational medium, a temporary dwelling for ancestral spirits. This distinguishes the Totokng dance of the Dayak Salako from the Totokng dance of the Dayak Kanayatn (Imanisa et al., 2016), which presents the *tengkorak kepala kayau* only as a symbol without direct interaction with the dancer's body during the performance.



**Figure 1.** *Panglima Kayau* (male dancer) and *Anak Kayau* (female dancer)  
(Doc. Slamet, 2024)

## 2. Structure and Symbolic Meaning of the Totokng Dance of the Dayak Salako Tribe

The Totokng dance, when analyzed through the lens of performance studies theory developed by Schechner (2013), can be classified into three main phases: proto-performance, performance, and aftermath. Each phase carries its own function and holds deep symbolic meaning within the cultural and spiritual context of the Dayak Salako community. These

three phases form an integral ritual process that not only reflects artistic expression but also affirms the transcendental relationship between humans, nature, *Awo Pamo* (ancestors), and *Jubato* (God). The explanation of each phase is presented as follows:

### Proto-performance Phase

The proto-performance phase is the initial stage that plays a crucial role in determining the continuation of the rite, as this is when the structure of the ceremony begins to take form and is collectively interpreted by the participating community. This process is not merely technical but is also laden with spiritual dimensions that signify a transition from a profane space to a sacred one. In the context of the Dayak Salako community, particularly in Dusun Pelanjau, this phase begins with the determination of the ceremony's timing based on customary knowledge passed down through generations. Spatial arrangements are carried out with care and wisdom, marked by the construction of a *tarub* (open stage) in the yard of a house that keeps the *tengkorak kepala kayau*, which serves as the main location for the Totokng dance.

The construction of the *tarub* is carried out collectively by the villagers one day before the ceremony begins, representing not only social cooperation but also a collective action imbued with spiritual meaning. In addition to preparing the performance space, the community also prepares offerings as an essential requirement that cannot be separated from the Totokng dance. These offerings include *tumpi'* and *poe'*, traditional rice-based foods symbolizing life, abundance, and gratitude for agricultural harvests. Other important components include *antek* (betel leaf, areca nut, gambier, and tobacco) and *arak*, which function as offerings to welcome the presence of *Awo Pamo* (ancestral spirits) and *Jubato* (God). Coconut oil is used to purify the *tengkorak kepala kayau*, as a form of reverence toward the spirits believed to still reside within them. Seven stalks of rice and yellow rice are also prepared as symbols of life, fertility, hope, and blessing.



**Figure 2.** The Construction of the Open Stage (*Tarub*) and the Preparation of Musical Instruments for the Totokng Dance (Doc. Slamet, 2024)

From the perspective of Geertz (1973), all of these offering elements are part of the webs of significance, a network of meaning woven by the community through symbolic actions. The offerings are not merely seen as objects of devotion but as a collective narrative that communicates values of life, spirituality, and social structure within the Dayak Salako culture. These meanings are not expressed verbally but are materialized through objects and actions structured within the ceremonial sequence. This renders every element of the



preparation, including offerings, musical instruments, costumes, and the dancer's bodily readiness, as a part of the cultural text that conveys the community's relationship with nature, ancestors, and *Jubato*. The dancer's body is not merely an artistic medium but serves as a channel of communication between the human world and the spirit world, enabling spiritual transformation within the sacred space. Therefore, the preparatory stage of the Totokng dance does not merely facilitate the technical execution of the ceremony but also affirms the physical and spiritual readiness of the community to enter a liminal space, a transitional space between the tangible world and the spiritual realm to be realized in the religious rites of the Dayak Salako community.



Figure 3. Preparing Offerings for the Totokng Dance (Doc. Slamet, 2024)

### Performance Phase

According to Schechner (2013), the performance phase is the core of the rite, the moment when sacred actions are manifested tangibly in space and time that have been sanctified through the preceding stages. In the context of the Nurutni' ceremony, the Totokng dance becomes the climactic moment that unifies spiritual, emotional, and social elements within a culturally meaningful event. This phase begins with the recitation of prayers and the offering of ritual items, followed by the dance performance involving the community in its entirety, both as performers and witnesses. Every individual present no longer occupies a passive role but is immersed in the sacred atmosphere, becoming an inseparable part of a transformational collective experience. At this stage, everyday boundaries are lifted, and all participants enter a liminal space, a threshold between the profane and the sacred where spiritual connection becomes dominant.

The dancers perform the Totokng dance solemnly, following movement structures and floor patterns that have been passed down through generations. These movements do not merely reflect choreography but serve as symbolic expressions of the cosmological values and spiritual beliefs of the Dayak Salako community. One important movement is *binaul menyula*, resembling an eagle flapping its wings, symbolizing vigilance and protection of the surrounding world. Another distinctive movement is *nyuampe*, in which a female dancer, *Anak Kayau*, carries the *tengkorak kepala kayau* on her head. This movement holds profound spiritual meaning as it may only be performed by individuals with a direct bloodline to the ancestral *Panglima Kayau*. In local belief, the *tengkorak kepala kayau* contains the *sumangat* (spirit) of the ancestor, which, when borne by the *Anak Kayau*, is believed to merge with her head. Therefore, the dancer's body in this ritual does not merely serve as an artistic instrument but as a medium of communication between humans and the spirit world.



The presence of the *tengkorak kepala kayau* as the ritual center deepens the sacred space of the performance. It is believed that the *tengkorak kepala kayau* must first experience the harvest before it can be enjoyed by humans, in order to protect the agricultural yields from mystical disturbances and pests. This reflects a hierarchical structure in the relationship between the spirit world and the human world. From Geertz's (1973) perspective, this phase is an example of thick description, where layers of meaning are woven into symbolic acts. The dance movements, offerings, and collective participation in the rite can be read as a system of signs conveying narratives of cosmology, ethics, and power structures within the community. Therefore, the performance phase of the Totokng dance does not merely represent cultural heritage but becomes an arena for the realization of spiritual and social values passed down across generations. This recurring collective act serves as a way for the Dayak Salako community to maintain the continuity of their relationship with nature, ancestors, and *Jubato*.



Figure 4. Totokng Dance Performance (Doc. Slamet, 2024)

### Aftermath Phase

According to Schechner (2013), the aftermath phase is the stage when the rite has concluded, and the participants gradually return to everyday life, yet carry the transformative experience they gained while within the sacred space. In the context of the Totokng dance, this phase is marked by a series of closing actions such as returning the *tengkorak kepala kayau* to its sacred storage place, dismantling the ceremonial stage (*tarub*), and releasing the attributes and offerings that were used. Outwardly, the ritual activities may have ended, but their spiritual resonance remains alive in the community's collective consciousness. This phase functions as a reintegration process, where individuals and groups who have undergone a spiritual transformation in the liminal space return to the profane world with a renewed inner condition.

The participants, including dancers, customary leaders, and the general community, gradually detach themselves from the sacred atmosphere of the rite and return to their homes to resume daily routines. However, this return does not signify going back to the same state as before, but rather entering a phase of life believed to be more balanced and blessed. In the belief of the Dayak Salako community, after participating in this ceremony, individuals and the community as a whole are granted improvements in three main aspects of life: *untukng* (sustenance), *sedo* (health), and *sunio* (safety). This demonstrates that the ritual experience is not merely temporary but has a direct impact on communal well-being and social harmony. Their spiritual relationship with *Jubato* (God), *Awo Pamo* (ancestral spirits), and nature is

believed to become closer and more harmonious, creating a sense of security, order, and continuity within their cosmological order.

Therefore, the aftermath phase in the Totokng dance should not be understood merely as a ceremonial closure, but as an integral part of a continuous life cycle that is always in motion and self-renewing. Within Geertz's (1973) framework, this phase indicates that the symbols and actions of the rite do not end within the ritual space but continue to function in shaping meaning systems and value structures in everyday life. What takes place during the ritual becomes a form of cultural text that is constantly read and reinterpreted through the community's social practices. Thus, the entire cycle of proto-performance, performance, and aftermath in the Totokng dance is not only a form of cultural preservation, but also a living epistemological system, revitalizing spiritual relations, reinforcing communal ethics, and sustaining the cosmological structure of the Dayak Salako community.



Figure 5. Placing the *tengkorak kepala kayau* into the *Tempayotn* (Doc. Slamet, 2024)

### 3. The Preservation of Totokng Dance among the Dayak Salako Community

The preservation of Totokng dance in the life of the Dayak Salako community cannot be separated from the social, geographical, and spiritual structures surrounding Dusun Pelanjau, the location where the Nurutni' ceremony is held. This relatively remote area, not yet fully penetrated by modernization, has created a relatively intact cultural ecosystem where belief systems, rituals, and traditional art practices remain part of daily life. In this context, Totokng dance is maintained not only as ancestral heritage but also as a knowledge structure regulating the relationship between humans, nature, spirits, and God. Referring to Peursen (2016), the Dayak Salako community can be described as still existing in the mythical stage, a cultural mindset phase in which community perceive their lives surrounded by invisible but real supernatural forces. In this stage, as Van Peursen emphasizes, cultural identity is not merely symbolic but constitutes a structure of life meanings active in the community's collective consciousness. *Awo Pamo* (ancestor spirits), *Jubato* (God), and other spiritual entities are not metaphors but present concretely in the bodies, movements, and rituals of the Dayak Salako community. Therefore, Totokng dance represents an existential identity, where culture is the main medium for the community to understand and negotiate their existence in the world.

Within this framework, Totokng dance can be understood as a performative act that not only stages cultural identity but also functions as resistance against the homogenization of modern culture. As the outside world increasingly pushes for uniformity of values and lifestyles through formal education, media, and market economy, the Dayak Salako community preserves a very particular cultural expression with strict rules on who may

dance, when music may be played, and how the body must be spiritually prepared. This phenomenon aligns concept of infrapolitics, subtle forms of resistance not appearing as direct confrontation but manifesting through everyday cultural expressions that maintain the autonomy of local meanings (Scott, 1990). Furthermore, the endurance of Totokng dance can be analyzed through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, a system of dispositions formed through social practice and reproduced through the body and habits. Totokng dance is part of the habitus of the Dayak Salako community, where values, beliefs, and cosmological structures are embedded through rituals and bodily movements. However, as younger generations start to lose connection with the spiritual meanings that accompany this practice, the habitus risks disruption. If Totokng dance is performed merely as a spectacle without deep understanding, what Bourdieu terms empty preservation occurs, where cultural practices lose their vitality and become mere rituals without meaning.

According to Peursen (2016), culture must be understood as a strategy for the future, not merely as heritage to be remembered. Therefore, the preservation of Totokng dance should be aimed not only at maintaining its form but also regenerating its meanings. This strategy includes education on local values, media innovation faithful to the original meanings, and spaces for intergenerational dialogue. Thus, Totokng dance remains a symbolic arena that affirms the identity of the Dayak Salako community and becomes a cultural strategy adaptive to changing times.

#### **4. The Effort of Totokng Dance Transmission in the Dayak Salako Community**

In the current era of globalization and modernization, culture is no longer viewed as a fixed and material entity, but as a social construct that continuously develops and shapes new identities over time (Irianto, 2016). This process occurs because humans as cultural creators play an important role in producing, maintaining, and transforming culture. As explained by Poerwanto, humans and culture form an inseparable unity; although humans will die, culture continues to live through transmission from one generation to the next (Sukman & Gusmail, 2019). Cultural transmission in the Dayak Salako community can be understood through the approach of Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman (1981), which distinguishes between vertical transmission and horizontal transmission. In the context of Totokng dance, transmission occurs exclusively through the vertical pathway, namely through blood relations between parents and children, as only direct descendants of the *Panglima Kayau* ancestors are permitted to perform this dance. This means the transmission process not only involves dance skills but also the maintenance of spiritual legitimacy and customary lineage. Consequently, transmission through studios or non-formal institutions (horizontal transmission) is considered not only irrelevant but also a violation of the community's sacred norms. This indicates that in sacred traditions such as the Totokng dance, forms of cultural transmission cannot be separated from the value system, beliefs, and kinship structures that are highly upheld.

The role of parents in this transmission process is crucial. They are not only active dancers in the ritual but also cultural educators who gradually introduce the meaning, values, and techniques of the Totokng dance to the younger generation. This process is conducted informally but intensively, especially within the context of the Nurutni' ceremony, which lasts for three consecutive days. Children and grandchildren of the dancers are invited to directly witness the dance procession, observe every movement and floor pattern, and listen to the accompanying music. They are not yet allowed to touch sacred properties such as the *tengkorak kepala kayau*, but they begin to actively participate by imitating movements and



rhythms repeatedly. At this moment, parents simultaneously provide verbal guidance, correction, and concrete examples that enable deep learning without neglecting the ceremony's sanctity. This learning model relies heavily on the power of experience and emotional involvement. This aligns with the concept of memory after image by Nurasih (2014), which explains that visual and emotional experiences embedded in cultural moments leave strong impressions and trigger internalization of knowledge. Children do not only memorize dance movements but also understand the sacred atmosphere, spiritual values, and honor inherent in the tradition. Such transmission processes are not one-way or formal, but occur through togetherness, repetition, and appreciation of meaning within a living ritual space.



**Figure 6.** Transmission of Totokng Dance to the Younger Generations (Doc. Slamet, 2024)



**Figure 7.** Transmission of Totokng Dance Music to the Younger Generation (Doc. Slamet, 2024)

Nevertheless, this vertical transmission faces challenges. Not all younger generations have the courage or interest to continue a sacred and complex tradition such as the Totokng dance. Elements like the *tengkorak kepala kayau* can evoke fear or psychological burden among children. On the other hand, the absence of horizontal transmission limits cultural transfer strictly within family circles. To address this dynamic, it is necessary to consider complementary modern transmission strategies that still respect customary values. As explained by Soekanto and Sulistyowati, modern transmission patterns through media, educational institutions, or social organizations can be contextual alternatives if applied carefully (Wulansari & Hartono, 2021). In this regard, documentation, closed training, or collaboration with cultural institutions can strengthen regeneration without violating the sacred values protected by the community.

More than just preserving identity, cultural transmission such as the Totokng dance can also be part of the community's future strategy. Peursen (2016) explains that at the functional stage, culture can provide significant contributions to other sectors such as tourism. Therefore, if transmitted and developed carefully, the Totokng dance not only lives within ritual spaces but also becomes a symbol of cultural resilience capable of dialoguing with the outside world. Such transmission confirms that culture is not only about the past but also about how a community prepares for its future.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that the Totokng dance in the Nurutni' ceremony of the Dayak Salako community is a cultural expression rich in spiritual, symbolic, and social meanings. This dance functions not only as a ritual of thanksgiving for the harvest but also as a medium of communication between humans, nature, *Awo Pamo* (ancestors), and *Jubato* (God). In its performance, the Totokng dance is exclusive and sacred, allowed to be performed only by descendants of the ancestral *Panglima Kayau* under strict customary rules, especially concerning the purity of female dancers' bodies. The movements in the dance represent the cosmological and symbolic relationships of the Dayak Salako community, where the dancer's body acts as a living archive and spiritual vessel. The ritual function unfolds in three performative stages: preparation, performance, and closing, all containing layers of meaning about social structure and belief systems. The transmission process occurs vertically through family and is based on emotional experience within the ritual space, allowing cultural memory to remain alive and deeply internalized. The transformation of the dance's meaning from a symbol of bravery to an expression of gratitude also reflects the local culture's adaptive capacity to social change.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes significantly to broadening the understanding of ritual dance as a living cultural text, through an interdisciplinary approach combining performance studies and symbolic anthropology. These findings have important practical implications for cultural preservation efforts and character education within the Dayak Salako community. A deep understanding of the meaning and function of the Totokng dance can serve as a foundation for developing traditional art preservation programs and sustainable cultural value education. The researcher acknowledges the study's limitations, namely its focus on a single community in Dusun Pelanjau, which restricts generalizability. The qualitative approach relies heavily on subjective narratives and limited access to sacred elements. Documentation of the dance and rituals is constrained by customary rules, while observations were conducted over a limited time period. Further studies with long-term ethnography and inter-regional comparisons are needed for deeper understanding. The Totokng dance serves as concrete evidence that this ritual is not merely a form of heritage but a knowledge structure, value system, and a symbolic field of resistance against the homogenization of global culture.

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