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## Tradition of Burning Barges in Rokan Hilir Regency: Art and Culture Studies

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**Abstract.** Every society inherits traditions from its predecessors, creating a cultural continuum that defines social identity. In Indonesia, one of the unique cultural traditions is the Barge Burning Ritual, known as "Go Ge Cap Lak," which is deeply rooted in the Chinese ethnic community of Bagansiapiapi, Riau. This annual ritual, celebrated on the 16th day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, serves as a tribute to ancestors who migrated to Bagansiapiapi in search of a better life. The ritual involves burning a replica of a barge to symbolize their commitment to settling in the new land, as well as to honor the sea gods Ki Hu Ong Ya and Tai Sun. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using Feldman's theory of art criticism, encompassing description, formal analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Data collection methods include observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and the Mak Teduh community, and documentation review. The study applies source triangulation for data reliability and follows a systematic process of data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The findings reveal that the Barge Burning Ritual holds significant historical, religious, and cultural meanings. It reflects the Chinese community's struggle, resilience, and devotion to their deities. The ritual is also believed to influence economic prosperity, as the direction in which the barge falls after burning is interpreted as a sign of fortune—whether from the land or the sea. Additionally, the ritual fosters communal solidarity and preserves ancestral heritage. However, differing religious perspectives within the broader community influence participation and perception of the event. In conclusion, the Barge Burning Ritual is a profound manifestation of cultural identity, spiritual belief, and historical commemoration. It serves as both a means of worship and a cultural spectacle that strengthens ethnic cohesion while contributing to the region's cultural tourism. Future research could explore its socio-economic impact and its role in intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** Tradition, of Burning Barges, in Rokan Hilir Regency

### INTRODUCTION

Every society on this earth always inherits traditions from its predecessors. A society's relationship with its former society will never be completely lost. Interconnectedness is important in society. Today's society would be a society if it had no connection with its history. Society is people living together who produce culture. Therefore, there is no society that does not have culture, and vice versa there will be no culture without a society as a place for the growth and development of that culture. According to E.B. Taylor Culture is a complex whole in the form of: Beliefs, Arts, Morals, Laws and Customs, habits and all the abilities and habits acquired as members of society. Selo Soemardjan and Soelaiman Soemardi said that culture is a means of the work, taste and creation of society (Melisa & M.Si.Par, 2021).

The work of society produces material and cultural technology or masters supporting nature so that its strengths and results can be captured for the needs of the community associated with certain ancestors, but these identifying characteristics can be in the form of language, hearth area, physical form and a combination of these characteristics will produce culture separately. In Indonesia, there are many regions that have their

own history and each history or event has different characteristics in each region, including Bagansiapiapi which has a characteristic in the form of the Bakar Barge Ritual which is the culture of the Chinese people in Bagansiapiapi (Wirman et al., 2018).

Previously we explained what a ritual is, a form of ritual is often also called a form of religion, a form of ritual is an exertion of energy carried out routinely by a group of people which is regulated by the applicable laws of society. The implementation of rituals has rules and procedures that have been determined by the community or group that created the ritual, so that each ritual has differences, both in terms of implementation and clothing. 4 The Tongkang Burning Ritual or what is known as "Go Ge Cap Lak" is one of the traditional arts of the Chinese ethnic community in Bagansiapiapi, where this custom is carried out every 5th of the month "Go" on the 15th Chinese "Cap Lak" every time (Pratama & Shsrini, 2022).

The Tongkang Burning Ritual is the story of the Chinese people's bitter struggle to find a better/decent place to live and also ended up in Bagansiapiapi. The ethnic Chinese outlanders came from the Asian contingent, due to disasters or containment of chaos in that country. They had to leave the country. countries, looking for safer areas to live in. The Tongkang Burning Ritual is one of the religious communities for the Chinese community in Bagansiapiapi. This ritual event is carried out by burning a replica of the barge. This culture is unique and there is only one in Indonesia and even in the world, videlicet di (Harsono, 2019).

## **METHOD**

The research method in this study uses descriptive qualitative, referring to analysis and literature study approaches as well as Feldman's theory of art criticism. The theory of art criticism refers to four aspects, namely description, formal analysis, interpretation and evaluation. The appointment of Feldman's theory of art criticism is based on the need for in-depth analysis of the object of study, namely krumpyung music, in a more objective manner. Data collection stages used observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and the Mak Teduh community regarding the Barge Bakar Tradition of Rokan Hilir Regency, and written documentation. Data reliability techniques use source triangulation. Data analysis uses four stages starting from data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The tradition of Go Ge Cap Lak or Burning the Bagansiapiapi Barge**

The Go Ge Cap Lak tradition or barge burning is a tradition that has been carried out for generations by the Bagansiapiapi ethnic Chinese. This tradition has become a culture that is deeply rooted and in the veins of the Chinese ethnic group there. Every year this tradition is carried out on the 16th day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar or Chinese annual calendar. This traditional celebration is carried out to commemorate, honor and preserve the heritage of their ancestors. Bakar Tongkang or in Hokkien is called Go Gek Cap Lak, an annual tradition of the Bagansiapiapi Chinese community. The beginning of the history of this tradition was when the first group of Chinese immigrants crossed over from their homeland to settle in the Sumatra region, specifically in Bagansiapiapi, Riau Province (now region). This event is believed to have started in 1826 (Wahidin, 2016).

The Bagansiapiapi ethnic Chinese community believes that their ancestors were the Tang-lang people from the Hokkien generation who came from Tong'an (Tang Ua) District in Xiamen, Fujian Province, South China. Three barges on an expedition led by Ang Mei Kui carried out the exploration but only one ship managed to dock on the shores of the Riau sea. They landed in an uninhabited swampland because they followed the flashing fireflies. This is why the area is called Bagansiapiapi or "Land of Fireflies". These immigrants had the desire to settle in the area and would not return to their homeland, which was then proven by burning their barges. The act of burning the barge was not carried out without reason, but there is a historical and cultural basis behind it. The difficulties of life and prolonged conflict in their home areas require them to flee and look for a more decent life in other areas (Poerava et al., 2023).

In some versions, the ethnic Chinese who arrived in Bagansiapiapi were those (ethnic Chinese) who fled from the Songklah region (southern Thailand) due to conflict with local residents. The various actions and conflicts they had received led to their determination not to return to their original area and chose to start life in a new place, so they decided to burn the ship they had used until they reached the Bagansiapiapi area. One of the religious philosophical (theological) values of this barge burning tradition is as a form of respect for the courage and service of their ancestors crossing the ocean to arrive at the Bagansiapiapi area (Melisa & M.Si.Par, 2021).

Apart from that, nowadays this tradition is carried out as a form of respect for the sea god Ki Hu Ong Ya and the god Tai Sun for the abundance of fish caught there and the protection given to their ancestors so that they can rest safely. On the other hand, in the beliefs of the Bagansiapiapi Chinese ethnic community, these two gods have protected and guided their ancestors to the Bagansiapiapi area. In the data presentation, it is said that the ship that anchored safely contained statues of the gods Ki Hu Ong Ya and Tai Sun. On this basis, the ethnic Chinese community of Bagansiapiapi always carries out the tradition of burning barges as a form of worship to these two gods. Wasisto Jati said that belief or religion can also be a way of liberation from oppression carried out by the authorities or the privileged (Wirman et al., 2018).

The meaning of divinity makes humans become someone who wants freedom without oppression from others who basically have the same position. Apart from the reasons above, history records that the Bagansiapiapi region has extraordinary marine wealth. The ethnic Chinese people who arrived here realized this potential and chose to settle here by taking advantage of the existing natural wealth. The Bagansiapiapi region was once recorded as the second largest fish producer in the world after Norway. His research also stated that in the population survey (it is possible that this was a pre-independence version of the population survey) in 1930 there were 54.7% of ethnic Chinese people in the Bagansiapiapi area working in the fisheries sector. In that year there were approximately 9,811 ethnic Chinese people living in the Bagansiapiapi area (Pratama & Shasrini, 2022)

### **Barge Burning Ritual**

Ritual is a form of ceremony or celebration related to belief. Rituals according to Ni Wayan Sumitri, are sacrificial ceremonies carried out with the aim of restoring and maintaining harmonious relationships with God, ancestral spirits and natural spirits, which include worship speeches to communicate with the universe or with God in the context of culture or society, including ceremonies, customs, state ceremonies and religious ceremonies. In terms of purpose, rituals can be divided into 3, namely: 1. there are rituals which aim to give thanks to God; 2. there are rituals which aim to get closer to God in order to obtain salvation and grace; 3. And there are those whose aim is to ask for forgiveness for the mistakes they have made. According to Mariasusai Dhavamony, Saying Rituals can be divided into four types, namely as follows: 1. Magical acts, which are associated with the use of materials that work due to mystical powers. 2. Religious acts, the cult of the ancestors, also work in this way. 3. Constitutive rituals that express or change social relations by referring to mystical understandings, in this way life ceremonies become distinctive. And 4. Factive rituals that increase productivity or strength, or purification and protection, or in other ways increase the material well-being of a group (Isnaini, 2012).

Based on the opinion above, it can be concluded that ritual is a belief in God, ancestral spirits and mystical items, resulting in worship, prayer and so on. The Barge Burning Ritual is also a tradition of getting closer to God. So they believe this ritual can provide grace and ease in carrying out daily life activities. And also carrying out this ritual, the Chinese believe that God will forgive the previous people, who had first come to Bagansiapiapi (Wahidin, 2016). Ethnic Chinese also believe that with the Barge Bakar culture, this is where they determine their fortune, by means of if the barge pole leans or falls towards land, then this year's fortune will be mostly on land, and vice versa, if the barge pole leans or falls into the sea, then the year's fortune will be This is often found at sea. And apart from the Chinese ethnic group, indigenous people believe that after the Barge Bakar ritual is completed, rain will fall, because previously they experienced a long dry season, but not all indigenous people believe that, only a few people. And there are also some native people who don't want to watch, participate, etc., because it is a belief that is not Islamic (Rianti, 2023).

**Barge burning ritual** The barge burning ritual is an annual event carried out by ethnic Chinese in the city of Bagan Siapiapi. This ritual is a legacy of their ancestors which is continuously carried out. This ritual itself has been going on since 128 years ago. The purpose of this ritual itself is to honor the birthday of the Sea God or also known as Nam Kie Ong Yang. Usually, this ritual is carried out on the 16th of the 5th month in the Lunar calendar or people in Bagan Sapiapi call it Cap Ge Cap Lak. In this section, the author wants to try to discuss the sequence of the barge burning ritual, the materials used, the perpetrators and the symbols contained in it. The barge burning ritual ceremony begins several months before the celebration day. This ceremony begins with the ritual of asking the god. In this ritual there are usually two methods used, namely asking through a tank or asking through a stretcher (Rianti, 2023).

For this second method, the palanquin can only be carried by those who have been chosen by the god himself. These two methods are actually a form of communication between gods and humans, between those who are worshiped and those who worship. This initial ritual is very important because it can be said that this

ritual is the basis of all the sequences or procedures for the barge burning ceremony. It is also important because in this ritual the size and materials that will later be used to make the barge will be known. In other words, through this ritual the ethnic Chinese in Bagansiapiapi want to try to capture what the god desires. This ritual is followed by all temple administrators and *lo cu*. After the ritual, the next process is making the barge. This process is usually carried out one month before the ceremony takes place. In this process, anyone can be involved in making it. There is one taboo in this construction process, namely that not only one person can sponsor the construction of this barge (Kosanke, 2017).

This taboo is enforced with the aim that the blessings that God will bestow on humans will not only fall on one person, but that this blessing can be felt by more and more people. In this process it is very clear that the blessing or grace of salvation that will be bestowed is expected to have an impact on many people. This blessing is what humans then seek or hope for. This hope for the grace that will be bestowed is not only reflected in the manufacturing process, but also visible in the symbols used. The barge that is being built will then be decorated with various kinds of ornaments, all of which are symbols of hope (Harsono, 2019).

### **Barge Burning Ritual Procession Stage**

#### **1. Pray before the barge is paraded/buried at the Ing Hok Kiong Temple**

This prayer was carried out at 00.00 WIB on the 15th of the 5th month of the Chinese New Year, namely at the Ing Hok Kiong Temple. This temple is specifically dedicated to honoring God Kie Ong Ya and God Tai Sun. The pilgrims began to pray, and brought offerings that had their own meanings. Tanki and his entourage, namely delegates from various temples in Bagansiapiapi City and surrounding areas, took turns paying spiritual respects to Dewa Kie Ong Ya and Dewa Tai Sun at the Ing Hok Kiong Temple (Candra et al., 2023).

This ritual lasts until noon, until the time the barge is still picked up at the place where it was built. At around 16.00 WIB, the boat pick-up ceremony was carried out, the barge was driven from the place where it was made to the Ing Hok Kiong Temple

#### **2. Pray after the barge is laid to rest at the Ing Hok Kiong Temple**

After the barge was placed in state at the Ing Hok Kiong Temple, the worship activities at the Ing Hok Kiong Temple were stopped and closed for the time being, to provide an opportunity for the God of Kie Ong Ya and other Gods and Goddesses to entertain and enjoy the shingle that had been provided by the pilgrims. . This continued until 00.00 WIB, when it arrived on the 16th, the barge was inaugurated. The inauguration ceremony was carried out by an unseen scholar or often called *Tangki* or *Loya* along with an elder or one of the traditional figures of Chinese society. After the barge was inaugurated, the temple was opened again and prayers were held until the event was over when the barge was burned at the burning location which was inaugurated by the Regent of Roakan Hilir Regency in 2007, namely on Jalan Perniagaan Bagansiapiapi (Harsono, 2019).

All the people who attended the prayer asked for prayers for long life, sustenance, safety, prosperity, eliminating obstacles on the path of life. On this second day, the entire group of Spiritual Teachers called *Tanki* who came from various temples in Bagansiapiapi City were also present and took turns paying spiritual respects to Dewa Kie Ong Ya and Dewa Tai Sun. Each *Tanki* is dressed in traditional clothes representing the Gods and Goddesses who are part of *Tanki's* Spirituality (Spiritual Temperance). The *Tanki* prostrate themselves facing the Gods and Goddesses giving expressions of deep respect, then surround the Altar table for prayer to awaken the quality of the spiritual aura, consisting of each *Tanki* (Kosanke, 2017).

These *Tankists* were also given the opportunity to show their skills in front of the Altar offering table. The mystical atmosphere became very thick. At 15.00 WIT, after all the barge paraders had gathered in the yard of the Ing Hok Kiong Temple, the procession immediately headed to the barge burning arena, here the *Tankists* and their respective entourages also accompanied the barge parade by showing various attractions, lion dance performances, drums bands, carnivals (traditional Chinese clothes, clothes that resemble Gods and goddesses and so on) and followed by tens of thousands of pilgrims behind them carrying burning incense sticks whose fragrance fills the air, spreading the effect of purity and symbolizing the merits of wisdom, encouraging a spiritual aura to resist all satanic temptations and generate good things and sincere deeds (Isnaini, 2012).

The barge was paraded around the town of Bagansiapiapi from the Ing Hok Kiong Temple to the burning location which is approximately 2 km away. Arriving at the burning arena, first determine the direction of the bow of the barge according to the instructions of Dewa Kie Ong Ya, which according to

their philosophy is a guide to good fortune or goodness for the business and safety of the Bagansiapiapi Chinese community. However, usually the direction of the barge's bow is towards the sea, like a new ship getting ready to sail. After the course of the barge was determined, the barge was placed on Kim's pile of paper. After it was placed, the ship's mast installation officers began carrying out their duties, namely installing the ship's mast. After finishing, there were big guests, such as Ministers, the Governor of Riau, the Regent of Rohil and other officials. and the elders of the Chinese community had the opportunity to board the ship with the aim of praying according to their respective requests. The barge that was ready to be burned was burned (Pratama & Shasrini, 2022).

The person responsible for burning the barge is not determined, but is usually the local regent and one of the Chinese community leaders. In a matter of minutes, thousands of paper offerings turned into a large fire and burned all parts of the ship until the ship was reduced to ashes. While the barge was being burned, the Chinese people stood around the burning barge praying according to their respective requests and the tankers ran around or around the burning barge by showing off their respective abilities. The end of this ritual event is seeing the direction of the fall of the barge pole, which they believe determines the direction of good fortune for the next year (Wirman et al., 2018).

If the direction of the fall is towards the sea, it means that the source of good fortune for the next year will be better or more will come from the sea and conversely if the direction of the fall will be on land, it means that the source of good fortune for the next year will be better and more will come from land. After the ship's mast fell, the barge burning ritual ended.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Barge Burning Ritual or Go Ge Cap Lak is a religious culture for the Chinese people of Bagansiapiapi to commemorate their ancestors and express gratitude to the God Kie Ong Ya and the God Tai Sun, by burning a replica of the barge, which is held once a year, namely on 16 months 5 Chinese calendar. The barge burning ritual was born from the history of the arrival of the ancestors of the Chinese people in search of a suitable place, namely with the guidance of Dewa Kie Ong Ya and Dewa Tai Sun until they found a suitable place and finally found Bagansiapiapi, so that they could not go anywhere (to stay) anymore, they agreed to burn the barge they were using. The barge burning ritual procession has two stages, namely prayers before the barge is buried and after the barge is buried and inaugurated, until the peak event is the burning of the barge replica and waiting for the ship's mast to fall. The function of the barge burning ritual for the Chinese people, Bagansiapiapi, which they believe in is a prediction of the direction of good fortune for the next year, if the fall is towards land then the designation/source of good fortune will come from land and conversely if the fall of the ship's mast is towards the sea then the designation/source of fortune will be better. it's better to come from the sea. Another function is cleaning, purifying assets and removing negative aura. In the barge burning ritual there are also adaptation functions, goal fulfillment functions, integration functions and pattern fulfillment functions.

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