

## The Meaning of Ujungan Tradition in Seren Taun Ceremony: A Phenomenological Study of Kasepuhan Cibadak Community

Nugraha Sugiarta<sup>1</sup>, Risa Anggraeni<sup>2</sup>, Faisal Reza<sup>3</sup>

Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia

Correspondent: [nugrahasugiarta@unibi.ac.id](mailto:nugrahasugiarta@unibi.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The Ujungan tradition is an attraction performed by a group of people, where participants whip each other using rattan. This tradition is held once a year during the Seren Taun traditional ceremony. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences, motives, and meanings of the Ujungan tradition for its performers within the Kasepuhan Cibadak community, Lebak Regency, Banten. This study employs a qualitative method with Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach. Primary data collection techniques include active participant observation and semi-structured interviews, while secondary data are obtained from document studies/documentation. The study involves four key informants who are Ujungan performers and two supporting informants, consisting of spectators and cultural experts. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation. The findings reveal that the performers experience emotional enjoyment. The "because motives" are influenced by the role of traditional leaders and the performers' self-awareness as part of the Kasepuhan Cibadak community. Meanwhile, the "in-order-to motives" focus on preserving the Ujungan tradition as a cultural heritage. For the performers, the Ujungan tradition carries meanings of tradition, ritual, and karesmen (artistic expression). Therefore, the Ujungan tradition in the Kasepuhan Cibadak community, Lebak Regency, Banten, is regarded as entertainment with local wisdom values. The tradition also fosters values of togetherness and trust, symbolizing protection for circumcised boys, ensuring their safety from misfortune.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology, Meaning, Ujungan Tradition, Seren Taun, Kasepuhan Community.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Ujungan tradition is an attraction performed by a group of people in which participants whip each other using rattan. According to Nawi (Suryanti & Soewardjo, 2023), Ujungan is a martial arts

game involving striking and blocking skills using rattan as a weapon. In the Kasepuhan Cibadak community in Cibeber District, Lebak Regency, Banten, the Ujungan tradition is an ancestral custom passed down through generations. This tradition is usually performed during the Seren Taun traditional ceremony, which is a form of gratitude for the harvest (Erusmiati & Busro, 2022). The Kasepuhan Cibadak community practices Seren Taun because most of its residents are farmers. As the harvest season approaches, they express gratitude through this ritual.

The Ujungan tradition serves as entertainment during the parade and procession of the Seren Taun ceremony. Specifically, it is performed in an event known as Helaran Gede, a large-scale cultural performance (Yadi, 2020). Within the Kasepuhan Cibadak community, the Ujungan tradition upholds the value of togetherness. It is conducted to strengthen solidarity and mutual cooperation among community members. This is evident from the enthusiasm of people from different regions who participate in the Ujungan performance, regardless of social status. The large number of Ujungan enthusiasts from outside the Kasepuhan Cibadak area facilitates inter-community communication and fosters a sense of brotherhood (UNESCO, 2022).

However, allowing people from outside the Kasepuhan Cibadak community to participate in Ujungan may lead to shifts in its perceived meaning. Many participants from other regions may not fully understand the deeper cultural significance of the tradition, which raises concerns about the potential erosion of its values. These changes are closely related to socio-cultural transformation, which refers to shifts in functions, values, norms, institutions, and other aspects resulting from human interactions and community dynamics (Abdulaeva et al., 2019). Such transformations are common in traditional societies facing modern influences and globalization, as cultural practices are continuously reshaped through cross-community participation and exposure.

Over time, the cultural values embedded in the Ujungan tradition have gradually faded due to modernization and globalization. Globalization influences societal changes and the living environment, accelerating the pace of global development and triggering social dynamics. This shift has led to changes in attitudes toward pre-existing cultural values, resulting in a transformation of cultural value systems that also affects social interactions within society (Setyaningrum, 2018). In this context, the Kasepuhan Cibadak community is expected to preserve its cultural identity and traditional customs—not only as unique cultural heritage but also as an effort to safeguard the values they embody. This is particularly relevant in the case of the Ujungan tradition, whose meaning is beginning to shift.

The increasing number of Ujungan participants from outside Kasepuhan Cibadak fosters interpersonal communication among individuals with different cultural backgrounds. When examining intercultural communication, the focus shifts to variations in human behavior and communication styles among individuals from different ethnic or cultural groups (Hasibuan & Muda, 2018). Interactions between people from different regions lead to variations in both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Chaley H. Dood (Sobarudin, 2019) states that intercultural communication involves interactions between individuals or groups that emphasize cultural differences influencing communication behavior. Similarly, Andrea L. Rich and Dennis M. Ogawa (Sobarudin, 2019), in their book *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, define intercultural communication as interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, such as ethnic groups, races, and social classes. Likewise, Samovar and Porter (Sobarudin, 2019) argue that intercultural communication occurs between message producers and receivers with different cultural backgrounds. From these definitions, it can be concluded that intercultural communication processes are uncertain, as different ethnic groups may perceive and respond to messages differently, particularly when they lack an understanding of each other's cultures.

The cultural traditions of indigenous communities must be protected and preserved. Indigenous communities in Indonesia possess diverse local wisdom and cultural traditions, which vary by region. Each community has unique customary practices and regulations (Nicholas et al., 2020), yet they all share a common goal: to maintain and pass down cultural traditions from generation to generation. According to (Erniwati et al., 2022), traditional cultural expressions play a crucial role in preserving national identity and cultural heritage in Indonesia (Susanto, 2021). Governance frameworks also significantly influence the sustainability of cultural preservation efforts, as highlighted (Susanto, 2021), who examined the role of policies, institutions, and governance practices in maintaining Indonesia's cultural heritage. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge preservation, particularly through cultural documentation and transmission, is essential in safeguarding traditional practices and ensuring their continuity for future generations (Wibisono & Santoso, 2020). These studies emphasize the importance of governmental and community efforts in maintaining indigenous traditions, which are increasingly threatened by modernization and globalization.

One example of a thriving indigenous community is the Kasepuhan Banten Kidul community, residing in Kampung Cibadak, Cibeber District, Lebak Regency, Banten. The people living in Kampung Cibadak are referred to as the Kasepuhan Cibadak community. The term "Kasepuhan" signifies a traditional leadership system based on ancestral customs and wisdom. It derives from the word "sepuh" or "kolot", meaning "elders." Thus, Kasepuhan refers to age-old traditions or the customs of ancestors (Firmansyah et al., 2018; Hasibuan & Muda, 2018).

Based on this background, this study adopts Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach. Alfred Schutz is a social scientist recognized for his contributions to phenomenology, particularly in understanding intersubjectivity. Fundamentally, this study seeks to answer key questions such as: How do individuals interpret their experiences, motives, and actions? How do they understand the existence of others? How do reciprocal relationships develop? (Hamzah, 2020).

Schutz developed the "human action model" using a process called typification, which provides tools for identifying, classifying, and comparing social actions and interactions. His typification method categorizes types of actions, behaviors, speech, personalities, etc., as a means of uncovering phenomena.

To explore the meaning behind actions, Schutz divides motives into two categories:

1. "Because-of" motives (past-oriented), which explain why an action was performed.
2. "In-order-to" motives (future-oriented), which describe the intended goal of an action.

In this study, the meaning of the Ujungan tradition for the Kasepuhan Cibadak community is analyzed by examining the experiences of the performers and the motives behind their participation.

Therefore, this research is crucial in exploring the local wisdom embedded in the Ujungan tradition, particularly in strengthening solidarity and fostering mutual cooperation. Through this tradition, social bonds among Ujungan participants can be further nurtured, ensuring that the tradition continues to develop and gain wider recognition within Lebak Regency, Banten, and beyond.

## **METHOD**

This study employs Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach. According to Neuman (Hamzah, 2020), phenomenological research focuses on the study of phenomena—anything that appears and is experienced. Creswell further describes phenomenological studies as narrative studies that capture common lived experiences of individuals, highlighting what is experienced and how it is experienced (Hamzah, 2020).

Schutz's typification method refers to different types of actions, behaviors, speech, and personalities as a means to uncover the essence of a phenomenon (Schutz, 1972). A crucial part of this method is understanding the motives behind actions, which Schutz categorizes into two types:

1. "In-order-to" motives – future-oriented, involving goals, intentions, plans, and interests.
2. "Because" motives – past-oriented, shaped by an individual's past experiences influencing present actions.

This study utilizes both primary and secondary data collection techniques:

- Primary data: Collected through active participant observation and semi-structured interviews.
- Secondary data: Collected through document studies and documentation analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

The study uses purposive sampling, selecting informants based on specific criteria (Sugiyono, 2015). The criteria include:

1. The informant must be an Ujungan performer within the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.
2. The informant must be a member of the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

Data analysis involves organizing, categorizing, synthesizing, and interpreting data gathered from interviews, field notes, and documentation.

This study follows (Moustakas, 1994) phenomenological analysis steps:

1. Epoché stage – Setting aside biases and preconceived notions.
2. Imaginative variation stage – Exploring multiple perspectives.
3. Synthesis of meanings and essences stage – Identifying the core meanings and essences of the experiences.

To ensure data credibility, the study employs source triangulation, comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and cultural experts (Guion et al., 2011; Patton, 1999). Triangulation enhances the validity of qualitative research by verifying information across multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Experiences of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community**

Experience refers to something that is consciously experienced or an action deliberately performed. In this study, the researcher explores the experiences of individuals who participate in the Ujungan tradition in the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

Based on their experiences, informants expressed different emotional responses while participating in the Ujungan tradition. Through data analysis, the researcher identified the following findings, which are presented in the table below:

**Table 1.** Experiences of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community

<b>Experiences of Ujungan Tradition Performers</b>
Feeling happy participating in the Ujungan tradition as it helps enliven the Seren Taun ceremony.
Experiencing personal satisfaction and pride in being able to whip others without causing physical or psychological harm.
Developing a desire to be whipped among seasoned performers who are accustomed to the Ujungan tradition.
Viewing the Ujungan tradition as a place to build friendships rather than seek conflict.

Source: Research (2024)

The findings indicate that each informant's experience varies depending on their role within the Kasepuhan Cibadak community. The researcher discovered that the presence of the traditional leader and the Ujungan leader plays a significant role in ensuring the safety of participants during the event. This was emphasized by Ama Dalim, the traditional leader of Kasepuhan Cibadak, who stated that both the traditional leader and the Ujungan leader hold crucial roles since all pre-ritual preparations for the Ujungan tradition are carried out under their supervision.

### **Motives of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community**

The discussion of motives is divided into two categories:

1. Because of Motives (*past-oriented motives*).
2. In Order to Motives (*future-oriented motives*).

### **Because of Motives of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community**

Past-oriented motives (*because of motives*) refer to how past experiences influence individuals to participate in the Ujungan tradition. One of the primary reasons participants join the Ujungan tradition is their sense of belonging to the Kasepuhan Cibadak community. The key informants' past-oriented motives for participating in the Ujungan tradition are summarized in the following table:

**Table 2.** Because of Motives of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community

<b>Because of Motives</b>
Due to the role and responsibility of traditional leaders, who are trusted by the community to oversee the Ujungan tradition.
Due to a sense of self-awareness as part of the Kasepuhan Cibadak community, where the Ujungan tradition is a cultural heritage.
Due to belief in the significance of the Ujungan tradition, which is performed for the safety of both participants and circumcised children.
Due to the desire to contribute to the celebration of the mass circumcision parade during the Seren Taun ceremony.

Source: Research (2024)

Based on interviews with four key informants, the findings reveal that the primary reason for their participation in the Ujungan tradition stems from a sense of responsibility. All four informants acknowledged that they initially joined the tradition because of different personal responsibilities, which are influenced by their respective roles in the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

Ama Dalim and Dayat, who serve as traditional leaders, participate in the Ujungan tradition because their presence is essential for ensuring that the tradition is conducted smoothly and safely.

Meanwhile, Yusuf and Jardi join the Ujungan tradition because they enjoy it and wish to contribute to the festivities of the Seren Taun ceremony. They recognize that the Ujungan tradition is an integral part of Kasepuhan Cibadak culture, and they feel a sense of duty to preserve the tradition and prevent it from fading away (Haryanto & Setiadi, 2021).



### **In Order to Motives of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community**

The in order to motives refer to intentions, goals, benefits, expectations, and other future-oriented purposes. These motives relate to the reasons why performers from the Kasepuhan Cibadak community participate in the Ujungan tradition, focusing on present and future objectives.

Based on interviews with informants, one of the primary reasons for participating in the Ujungan tradition is to contribute to the celebration of the Seren Taun traditional ceremony. The following table presents the future-oriented motives (in order to motives) of Ujungan tradition performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak community, as derived from key informant interviews:

**Table 3.** In Order to Motives of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community

<b>In Order to Motives</b>
To preserve the Ujungan tradition as a cultural heritage from ancestors so that it can be passed down to future generations.
To contribute to the festive atmosphere of the Helaran Gede parade during the Seren Taun ceremony.
To ensure the safety of circumcised children, protecting them from misfortune.
To build friendships and strengthen social ties, particularly among members of the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

Source: Research (2024)

All four informants share a common primary goal in performing the Ujungan tradition: to enliven the Seren Taun traditional ceremony and preserve Ujungan as a cultural heritage from their ancestors so that it can continue to be passed down to future generations. This shared hope serves as the main reason why they actively participate in the Ujungan tradition.

This commitment is evident from their past-oriented motives, particularly their sense of responsibility to ensure the survival of the Ujungan tradition. Supporting the informants' statements regarding both past and future motives, cultural expert Wisnu Wirandi offers his perspective on the significance of the Ujungan tradition, emphasizing its strong connection to the community's efforts to uphold its customs and culture. Furthermore, Wisnu Wirandi describes the Ujungan tradition as a cultural phenomenon closely tied to the local wisdom of the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

### **The Meaning of the Ujungan Tradition for Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community**

Based on Alfred Schutz's phenomenological perspective, understanding human actions necessitates considering individuals' biographical situations, as interactions are shaped by past experiences. Schutz emphasized that meaning emerges when actions are linked to previous experiences, influenced by motives. He introduced the concepts of "because-motives," which relate to past experiences, and "in-

order-to motives," oriented toward future goals (Schutz, 1972). This study explores the meaning of the Ujungan tradition for its performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

Based on interviews with the four key informants, the findings are summarized as follows:

**Table 4.** The Meaning of the Ujungan Tradition for Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community

Meaning of the Ujungan Tradition
A mandatory annual tradition held during the Seren Taun traditional ceremony for spiritual protection and safety.
A place for gathering, making friends, and strengthening social ties.

Source: Research (2024)

The researcher concluded from interviews with the four informants that the Ujungan tradition is perceived as both entertainment and a means of protection within the Seren Taun ceremony, carrying local wisdom values in the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

For its performers, the Ujungan tradition holds a deeper significance beyond entertainment. One of the core beliefs embedded in this tradition is that it serves as a protective ritual for circumcised children, ensuring their safety from misfortune. This belief has been passed down for generations and remains deeply rooted in the community's faith.

Additionally, another significant value found in the Ujungan tradition is the strong sense of friendship among its participants. The tradition emphasizes togetherness, mutual cooperation, and kinship within the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

The researcher also found similar interpretations from supporting informant Wisnu Wirandi, a cultural expert, who described the Ujungan tradition as both a ritual and a profane activity—meaning that it functions as both a sacred ceremony and entertainment. He identified three main concepts within the Ujungan tradition:

- The relationship between humans and other humans.
- The relationship between humans and nature.
- The relationship between humans and the Creator.
- In the context of cultural performances, Seren Taun serves several functions, including:
  - Preserving cultural traditions.
  - Entertaining visitors attending the ceremony.
  - Teaching moral and ethical values.
  - Reflecting the community's religious values.

According to (Erusmiati & Busro, 2022), Seren Taun also reflects human identity, promoting social values and self-awareness toward God. The Ujungan tradition, as a part of the Seren Taun ceremony, is not only a form of entertainment but also a means of cultural preservation.



Through Ujungan performances, participants learn values of goodness, including:

- Strengthening brotherhood.
- Enhancing mutual cooperation and solidarity.
- Providing spiritual protection for circumcised children, believed to prevent misfortune.
- Other positive values conveyed through the Ujungan tradition include teaching self-control during the performance and forgiving one another afterward to prevent resentment or conflict.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research findings and discussions presented in the previous sections, the researcher draws the following conclusions:

1. Experiences of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community  
The study found that performers of the Ujungan tradition experience emotional enjoyment. The joyful experiences of the tradition's participants include:
  - The excitement of participating in the Ujungan tradition, as it contributes to the festive atmosphere of the Seren Taun traditional ceremony.
  - A sense of pride and personal satisfaction in being able to whip others without causing physical or emotional harm, as it is part of the tradition.
  - The Ujungan tradition is seen as a social gathering platform where participants can make friends and strengthen social ties.
  - Additionally, some performers develop a desire to be whipped, particularly those who have regularly participated in the Ujungan tradition.
2. Motives of Ujungan Tradition Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community  
The study identified both past-oriented motives (because of motives) and future-oriented motives (in order to motives):
  - Past-oriented motives ("Because of motives"):
    - The role and responsibility of traditional leaders, who are trusted by the community to oversee the Ujungan tradition.
    - A sense of self-awareness as members of the Kasepuhan Cibadak community, where the Ujungan tradition is a long-standing cultural heritage.
    - Belief in the protective significance of the Ujungan tradition, ensuring the safety of both performers and circumcised children.
    - A desire to contribute to the mass circumcision parade, which is part of the Seren Taun ceremony.
  - Future-oriented motives ("In order to motives"):
    - To preserve the Ujungan tradition as a cultural heritage from ancestors, ensuring it is passed down to future generations.

- To enhance the festive atmosphere of the Helaran Gede parade during the Seren Taun ceremony.
  - To ensure the safety of circumcised children, protecting them from misfortune.
  - To make friends and strengthen social ties, especially among members of the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.
3. The Meaning of the Ujungan Tradition for Performers in the Kasepuhan Cibadak Community  
The Ujungan tradition is perceived as a sacred ritual and cultural practice that embodies family values, mutual cooperation, and solidarity. Additionally, it is seen as a form of artistic expression within the Seren Taun ceremony, incorporating elements of martial arts performances accompanied by traditional music.
4. The study identifies three key meanings of the Ujungan tradition for its performers:
- A mandatory annual tradition in the Seren Taun ceremony, performed for spiritual protection and safety.
  - A gathering place for making friends and strengthening social ties.
  - A cultural performance that reinforces solidarity, cooperation, and kinship within the Kasepuhan Cibadak community.

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