
The *Senandung Asaban*: From a Magical Ritual to Performing Arts in the Community

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Abstract

The development of the *Senandung Asaban* tradition from magical rituals to performing arts involves understanding the causes of its evolution performing arts. This research result shows that this tradition still exists and has been evolving since 1980 among the *Asaban* people because it was always performed during magical events, such as when fishermen would go to sea by invoking the wind as a ritual to ensure a bountiful catch. Nowadays, the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition is rarely seen and has transformed into performing arts, and beliefs have waned. The factors influencing this transformation include sociological, philosophical, aesthetic, and identity-related factors. Sociologically, this tradition is now used for local community entertainment. Philosophically, the values embedded within the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition have become iconic symbols and distinct features of the predominantly Islamic community. Aesthetic factors are manifested through the uniformity of presentation, such as attire. Meanwhile, identity-related exhibits unique and shared identities within the tradition.

Keywords

Art, cultural, integration, learning, traditions

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Introduction

Indonesia, located in Southeast Asia, boasts a diverse array of cultures that constitute the nation's wealth, originating from the collective beliefs of its communities (Hannigan, 2015). Within these cultural riches lie beliefs, morals, arts, and customs. Preserving and continuously developing this cultural diversity is essential to enhancing cultural resilience and, more significantly, to supporting the tourism sector (Nugroho et al., 2016). In addition, it is also better to be known by the students nowadays so this culture will not disappear and be forgotten. Besides, there is an integration of art in education (Bautista et al., 2016). Most art discussions put learners (students) in a very involved position, forcing or making them to try concepts and interpret them in their personal way (Kolodner et al., 2003).

Furthermore, one province that stands as a testament to enduring cultural diversity is *Asaban*, specifically the *Tanjung Balai* City in North Sumatra (Susetya et al., 2018). Concerning the conservation of local culture, it is advocated that preserving the nation's ancient norms (local culture) involves upholding the values of artistic culture and traditional values while evolving them dynamically, flexibly, and selectively to adapt to ever-changing circumstances and developments. In North Sumatra, there exists a district that cannot be overlooked for its cultural and traditional wealth: *Asaban* Regency. The traditions and culture present in *Asaban* contribute to the natural wealth that reflects the lives of its inhabitants. One deeply rooted tradition within their society is the "*Senandung Asaban*" tradition in the *Asaban* Regency, specifically in *Tanjung Balai*, North Sumatra.

The "*Senandung Asaban*" tradition in the *Asaban* Regency, *Tanjung Balai*, has endured and persisted over time. This tradition was once highly recognized by the *Asaban* people and was frequently performed during magical ceremonies, particularly when fishermen embarked on their sea voyages to catch fish and invoked the wind through rituals to ensure a bountiful catch (Soiman & Marpaung, 2021). Furthermore, *Senandung Asaban* embodies a form of literary expression that conveys thoughts and emotions through carefully chosen words structured in verses, reminiscent of ancient poetry recitations (Ezir et al., 2023). Its free-flowing lyrics interlace seamlessly with the undulation of the melodies, forming a rhythmic harmony. The verses sung within the *Senandung Asaban* are laden with mystical language, infused with the wisdom and advice of past generations (Widyosiswoyo, 2004). Currently, the *Asaban* Tradition is transforming its implementation in *Tanjung Balai* City. In the past, only a few fishermen mystically and sacredly carried out this tradition to seek the wind's favor or venerate the wind to succeed in catching fish. However, at present, its implementation has undergone significant changes. Many artists now use lyrics and verses to create innovative musical works in various contexts, such as art performances, wedding ceremonies, and celebrations in *Tanjung Balai* City.

Methodology

Research design

The research used qualitative design. The qualitative research method is often referred to as the naturalistic research method due to its application in natural settings. Furthermore, it is labeled as a qualitative method because the collected data and its analysis have a qualitative nature (Sugiyono, 2008). In qualitative research, the researchers, or with the assistance of others, serve as the primary data collection tool. It is done because non-human tools were used and prepared in advance, as commonly practiced. This research aimed to explain and analyze the *Senandung Asaban* within the magical ritual of performing arts in the *Tanjung Balai* community, North Sumatra.

Research informants

In this research, the instrument used was the researchers themselves. Observations made directly by the principles of qualitative research explained by Moleong (2010) showed that humans are the main instruments because they act as planners, implementers, data collectors, and initiators of the research results. In addition, the researchers also used tools or supporting devices as instruments, such as note-taking devices such as pens and pencils, notebooks, and information recording devices, to facilitate the documentation process. In addition, researchers also used research instruments in the form of observation guides and interview guides.

Data collection

To collect various information, both in the form of general theories and concepts proposed by experts found in literary sources, a data collection approach was employed. The theories utilized as the foundation for this research were theories about development and form. Additionally, data were collected through observation. Baker (2006) stated that observation is the structured activity of observing and recording phenomena visible in the research subject. The observation approach as a data collection instrument serves a dual purpose, offering convenience and the ability to be conducted without significant costs. The researchers carried out observations in the *Asaban* Regency of *Tanjung Balai* City, North Sumatra, encompassing subjects, locations, events, and aspects of the *Asaban* tradition, ranging from magical practices to artistic performances. Apart from observation, this research also employed interviews with residents as sources of information. However, the interview was not restricted to pre-arranged structured formats or guidelines. This approach was chosen because a more open-ended interview allows for natural and flexible conversations and enables in-depth exploration of issues, both with artists and the Malay community of *Tanjung Balai*. However, the researchers steered conversations toward topics relevant to the research objectives, ensuring that the obtained data remained consistent with the research context about the *Asaban* Tradition. Through the research, the interview approach was further

reinforced with the use of documentation as a data source. This documentation approach involved the written materials collection, such as books or textual documents (including interview results), photos depicting the *Asaban* Tradition taken by the researcher, interview videos, and videos of the *Asaban* Tradition. These documents served as concrete evidence supporting the research subject. In practice, the researcher employed tools like pencils and notebooks to record interview outcomes and a mobile phone as a camera to record videos and capture images to document the *Asaban* Tradition and the interviews conducted by the researcher.

Data analysis

In this research, researchers conducted supervision and observation of the changes in the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition within the community, transitioning from magical ritualistic practices to expressions of performing arts. The research method involved interviews with informants knowledgeable about the *Asaban* Tradition as well as gathering information about the evolution and manifestations of the *Asaban* Tradition. This approach is crucial to ensuring the collected data accurately constitutes the main elements in addressing the research questions. The results and information successfully gathered during this investigation were presented through detailed descriptions.

The researchers commenced with general findings, the geographical context of the research area, and the transformation of the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition within the community, encompassing aspects from magical practices to its role as part of performing arts and its connection to livelihoods, population numbers, education levels, and religious backgrounds. Subsequently, an in-depth description of the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition in the *Asaban* Regency and the *Tanjung Balai* City, North Sumatra, was provided. It included changes in form and development, supported by visual documentation such as photos and videos. The analysis was carried out using a supportive theoretical framework. The data reduction process was implemented to detail, categorize, direct, eliminate irrelevant data segments, and organize the data for ease of concluding. The subsequent step involved data presentation – arranging information into a format conducive to drawing conclusions or guiding further actions. The researchers attended the data presentation and identified situations and subsequent steps to be taken, whether to continue analysis or initiate actions for deeper exploration of the findings. Finally, conclusions were drawn, and the obtained results were verified.

Results and Discussion

Tanjung Balai City was previously included in the territory of *Asaban* Regency. However, in 1956, Emergency Law No. 9 was issued by changing the name of *Haminte Tanjung Balai* to the small town of *Tanjung Balai*, and the position of Mayor was separate from the Regent of *Asaban* based on a letter from the Minister of Home Affairs dated September 18, 1956. The population was approximately 40,000 people with a population density of approximately 20,000 people per Km², with an area of only 199 Ha (2 Km²) to 66 60 Km². The population was dense, and it made this city a growing place supported by the port existence. Finally, the city was expanded to 60 km² with the issuance of Indonesian government regulation No. 20

of 1987 concerning changes in the boundaries of *Tanjung Balai* City and *Asaban* Regency. Finally, based on Gubsu Decree No. 146.1/3372/SK/1993 dated October 28, 1993, existing villages and sub-districts were expanded, and all villages changed their status to *Kelurahan* (district), based on Regional Regulation No. 23 of 2001.

This research was conducted in *Asaban* Regency, *Tanjung Balai* City. Based on folklore and local beliefs, explanations about the *Tanjung Balai* community also talk about the *Asaban* community. The *Asaban* area was once inhabited by "Hulu people" under the leadership of a Princess King named Raja Simargolang. This *Asaban* Kingdom was in *Huta Bayu* or *Pulu Raja* (now *Pulau Rakyat*). During the reign of Sultan Abdul Jalil, the center of government was moved from *Sei Asaban* to *Tanjung Balai*, which resulted in the movement of residents from *Hulu Sei Asaban* to *Tanjung Balai* as the capital of the Sultanate based on Law Number 6 of 1960 concerning Census and Law Number 7 of 1960 concerning Statistics. As a replacement for these two laws, Law Number 16 of 1997 concerning Statistics was established. Based on this law, which was followed by laws and regulations, the name of the Central Bureau of Statistics changed to the Central Statistics Agency. Lefri Alamsyahi, Head of the Culture and Cultural Personnel Section of the *Tanjung Balai* City Education office (interview June 23, 2023), stated that in the tradition *Asaban* has been brought outside of *Tanjung Balai*, which is to various performing arts venues in North Sumatra and outside North Sumatra.

According to the explanation of the interview, the Head of the Cultural and Cultural Personnel Section [the head] of the *Tanjung Balai* City education office (interview June 23, 2023), the existence of the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition as a human expression will expand communication into deep racial contact by conveying subjective experiences to other subjects. Until now, the tradition has changed its development and form, where there is no longer belief in the wind as a ritual but to be performed only at certain events such as performing arts in *Tanjung Balai* city. The tradition of *Asaban Tanjung Balai* regency has a mission to highlight the traditional culture existing in *Tanjung Balai* North Sumatra. The Head of the Culture and Cultural Personnel Section of the *Tanjung Balai* City Education Office explained (Interview June 22, 2023):

"This *Senandung Asaban* tradition only exists in *Tanjung Balai* City, precisely in the *Asaban* Regency. It comes from this city. *Senandung* in Malay society is a traditional song that is commonly used in the life of the Malay community. However, the humming that has been better known is the art of humming in the *Asaban* Malay community known as *Senandung Asaban*. Researchers observed that the *Senandung Asaban* tradition *only exists in Tanjung Balai City, precisely in the Asaban Regency*. Many hummers have disappeared, and several are old. Meanwhile, young artists are reluctant to engage in the art of *Senandung Asaban*, and it is not impossible."

The way that is done by artists or culturalists of *Tanjung Balai* City is if there is a demand for weddings and other events. The people are not difficult to collect because they are very enthusiastic about the traditional event of *Senandung Asaban*.

Figure 1. *Speaker: Abdurrahman Saragib* (Playing violin as an accompaniment to the *Senandung Asaran* of Tanjung Balai)



Based on a research interview with the Head of the Cultural and Cultural Personnel Section of the *Tanjung Balai* City Education Office (June 23, 2023), the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition has factors that influence developmental changes, namely sociological factors, philosophical factors, aesthetic factors, and identity factors.

Sociological factors, social values are closely related to the culture and society around them. A culture will not be separated from the relationship of social class interaction. Of course, social interaction very often occurs among humans. All of this has been arranged as the function of community social institutions as interaction and communication oral and written expressions expressed in symbols.

Philosophical factors, philosophical is the science of truth. The truth of an implied meaning implemented by a person. The philosophical concept is the science of seeking truth itself. Philosophical is aptly referred to as the knowledge of truth. The object of theoretical knowledge is truth.

Figure 2. Masjid Raya Sultan Ahmadsyah Kota Tanjung Balai



Aesthetic factors, based on the interview with a Culturalist of Tanjung Balai City (interview, June 23, 2023),

"*Senandung Asaban* in Tanjung Balai has similarities with the performance of *Senandung Gubang*, which is a welcoming dance from North Sumatra performed by an organization, such as the similarity of clothes, makeup, and other makeup. That's because the organization comes from North Sumatra."

Identity factor, the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition has a different identity. However, several identities in common have also been expressed by artists in Tanjung Balai City. This *Senandung Asaban* has become the identity of the Tanjung Balai City people.

According to a researcher's interview with the Head of the Cultural and Cultural Personnel Section of the Tanjung Balai City Education Office (April 23, 2023), the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition already exists from Islam entering Indonesia in the 8th century, which is a routine activity of fishermen before going fishing, which is singing or chanting verses and rhymes to worship the wind to get a large catch of fish. Fishermen in the community, Tanjung Balai Regency, used to be very enthusiastic about expecting the wind to perform magical rituals before leaving. In the middle of 2015, the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition is no longer carried out by the government there because it is considered a shirk. Since in *Asaban Tanjung Balai* Regency, some are Muslims now, the verses and rhymes used at that time were packaged as attractively as possible by the community or studio to become a complete performance art that is pleasant to see and listen to some verses and rhymes in the arrangement.

In the research results discussions, several conclusions were related to the development and meaning of the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition, found in Tanjung Balai City. According to

Geertz (1971), and associated with a particular finding, the development of the existing tradition of *Senandung Asaban* in *Tanjung Balai* City. The *Senandung Asaban* tradition has been passed down from ancient ancestors. It is an old culture from ancient ancestors, only in *Asaban* Regency, *Tanjung Balai* City, North Sumatra, *Asaban* or *Senandong Asoban* Tradition is one of the cultures in *Asaban* Regency. This tradition comes from the Malay tribe. The *Senandung Asaban* tradition in *Asaban* Regency, *Tanjung Balai* City. This tradition is one of the traditions that is still alive and surviving today in *Asaban* Regency, *Tanjung Balai* City. In the past, this tradition was very well known by the *Asaban* people because it was always performed in every magical event, where fishermen wanted to go to the sea to find fish by worshiping the wind as a ritual to get a lot of fish. Now, the tradition of *Senandung Asaban* aims to worship the wind as a symbol of people's beliefs so that it can be launched to get abundant sustenance, which is to get a lot of fish that are rarely seen anymore because of the times.

Equations

The *Senandung Asaban* tradition for the *Tanjung Balai* City people is to make the people there always eager to see and attend weddings and establish friendships with other communities. Not only that, but the people also are always enthusiastic to include *Senandung Asaban* because it is considered to remember the past even though this time it uses musical instruments, and there are no more magical rituals. The musical instruments used range from traditional to modern and are packed with verses reminiscent of the past.

Figure 3. Photo with artists from *Tanjung Balai* arts council after *Senbungung Asaban* performance in 2019



Senandung Asaban tradition is one of the cultures in the *Asaban* Regency. This tradition comes from the Malay tribe. The *Senandung Asaban* Tradition is found in *Asaban* Regency, *Tanjung Balai* City. This tradition is one of the traditions that is still alive and surviving today in *Asaban* Regency, *Tanjung Balai* City. In the past, this tradition was very well known by the *Asaban* people because it was always performed in every magical event, where fishermen

wanted to go to the sea to find fish by worshiping the wind as a ritual to get a lot of fish. Now, the *Senandung Asaban* tradition aims to worship the wind as a symbol of people's beliefs so that it can be launched to get abundant sustenance, which is to get a lot of fish that are rarely seen anymore because of the times. Nor are such things believed anymore. Making and implementing the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition from its history has always been hereditary, especially during the wedding ceremony. People are all waiting for the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition. Therefore, the Head of the Cultural and Cultural Personnel Section of the *Tanjung Balai* City Education Office carried out coaching on this *Senandung Asaban* Tradition.

Conclusions

The development of the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition has transformed from a magical ritual form into a performing art. Initially, this tradition was an integral part of magical ceremonies performed by the *Asaban* people. This tradition has been passed down through generations, especially in magical events such as fishing trips to the sea, where the wind is revered to yield abundant catches. However, at present, the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition has shifted its meaning from wind worship to a performing art held in *Tanjung Balai* City. Two paramount aspects of the development of the *Senandung Asaban* are history and religion. First, this tradition has deep historical roots in *Asaban* society, where its magical aspects have become a part of their lives. It was once a focal point in various magical events, particularly in the efforts of fishermen to obtain bountiful catches. Today, this tradition has transformed into a performing art as part of *Tanjung Balai*'s culture. In terms of religion, the majority of *Tanjung Balai*'s population consists of Malay Muslim communities. Meanwhile, there are also Christian residents. The influence of Islam is more dominant in the practice of the tradition, both in its magical context and as a performing art.

The *Senandung Asaban* Tradition is positively regarded by the local community and used as entertainment at various events, such as weddings and art performances in *Tanjung Balai*. The *Senandung Asaban* Tradition also exerts influence on social and cultural aspects of the community's life. It helps maintain social bonds among residents, especially during significant occasions like weddings. This tradition involves participation from all segments of society, from children to adults, in celebrating the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition. However, it is regrettable that this tradition has not been widely incorporated into formal education curricula, thus lacking attention to learning. Significant developments in the *Senandung Asaban* Tradition have occurred due to various factors, such as sociological, philosophical, aesthetic, and identity-related factors. These factors have influenced the transformation of the tradition from magical to performing art. Sociologically, the tradition serves as entertainment for the *Tanjung Balai* community and contributes to maintaining social bonds among residents. Philosophically, despite changes, the values of this tradition remain connected to local beliefs, particularly those of the Muslim majority in the city. The aesthetic aspect of the tradition is also reflected in its clothing and visual presentation. Last, identity factors play a significant role. The *Senandung Asaban* Tradition has become a distinctive feature of *Tanjung Balai*'s community and is considered an integral part of their identity. However, it is unfortunate that this tradition has not been fully integrated into formal education. Despite changing, this tradition still holds meaning from its magical form to performing art, representing the

historical journey and cultural shifts in *Asahan* Regency, especially in *Tanjung Balai*, North Sumatra.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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