

# Maintaining the Originality of Ancestral Belief; Ethnographic Study of the Lom Belief System of the Mapur Bangka Tribe

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**Abstract**--The Lom people of the Mapur Bangka tribe are unique and hold on to ancestral beliefs. The originality of their customs is based on the principles and foundations of ancestral views, holding on to the taboo rituals, including the sacred and profane matters. However, they settled and interacted with religious communities, including Islam (the majority), Christians, and Confucians. This is an ethnographic study of the Lom customs with a religious anthropology approach. Data retrieval involved observation and in-depth interviews with key informants, including the Customary Chairperson, leaders, and Lom communities. Data collection was carried out in the Lom Mapur residential area such as Air Abik, Mapur, and Pejem in Bangka regency. The finding of the study indicated that Orang Lom maintains the ancestral belief system, which is primarily animism and identical to fetishism. They used an ambiguous strategy between ownership of formal citizenship and trust identities. The ambiguity of identity was formulated for the adherents of local religions in Indonesia. Although there was a change in way of life, they still maintained their traditional customs. In general, ancestral trust was a rule, norm, and guideline in understanding cosmology, including legends, and hereditary myths. According to the people, it is not necessary to adopt a formal religion. The happiness of life is not determined by the religion, but rather a clean heart.

**Key words**--Survival Ability, Lom People, Ambiguous Strategy, Ancestral Beliefs

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Lom people of the Bangka Mapur tribe are among the communities scattered in Bangka Belitung Province, especially on the island. They are the adherents of ancestral beliefs that tend to be animism and paganism. The originality of their beliefs can be observed in their daily activities. They are perceived as the principles and basis of ancestral beliefs, taboo and ban rituals, and sacred and profane ritual customs.

In the study of human history, from primitive to modern societies, ancestral customs are often included in religious studies. Customs are believed to have supernatural powers, for instance, God, gods, and spirits. Religion is based on a belief in something with supernatural powers [1-3]. This affects the way of life of individuals, communities, and society broadly, including in interpretation nature and the phenomenon. The manifestation of the beliefs and procedures for carrying out the rituals is different in communities.

In religious studies, several discussions about religion have been conducted with sociological, theological, anthropological, historical, and empirical studies [4, 5]. The history of major world religions, such as Islam, Judaism,

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Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, as well as the local religion of primitive communities in various regions have been examined [6-10]. The in-depth description of the religion can explain the substance of the beliefs and the trust of a particular society. Generally, beliefs form social and cultural systems of societies, which are depicted in ideas, customs, symbols, behavior, and institutions, even revealed in folklore, legends, myths, and magic.

Religion is a belief in something with supernatural powers [2, 11, 12]. Although several studies have been conducted, differences between theological and anthropological works occur. According to theologians, religion originated from God's creation, such as Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Essentially, Bustanuddin Agus stated that religion was not a product of culture [13]. However, anthropologists study involves beliefs that existed in certain religions, as well as animism, dynamism, and paganism. Koentjaraningrat viewed it as the sixth universals of cultural elements [14-17]. It became a cultural universal because of the norms and principles in people's beliefs. Additionally, it was considered a supernatural belief, something originating from the outside of individuals. It denoted what people believed, something with supernatural powers. To reconcile differences of opinion, official recognized and local religions with ancestral beliefs were classified.

Joachim Wach uses a theoretical study of religious theory to understand religion. Also, Joachim uses practices about religious manifestations and the sociological expression of religious experience [18]. Roberston in Joachim Wach stated that religion was different from belief systems or other isms. This is because the religious belief was a sacred concept distinguished from the worldly profane and supernatural aspect, which is the opposite of natural laws [18].

Lom or Mapur people are part of the Bangka community in the Malay region [19-21]. The Mapur Lom people were among the tribes, apart from the Malays and Chinese, who settled on Bangka Island. According to Koentjaraningrat, Orang Lom, and the Land Man - Belitong people were among the ethnic groups in the Malay Customary Law Environment of Bangka Belitung [22].

The study of Lom people is interesting because they are from a unique community. They are still very bound by mystical, magical, and ancestral beliefs, which are characteristic of primitive societies. In the theory of evolution, Tylor showed that the beliefs of primitive people evolve from polytheism to monotheism. However, Orang Lom still maintained ancestral beliefs as their way of life, though some changes were inevitable. The changes of beliefs involved more adjustments in the formal identity of followers of official religions. This change was influenced by their interaction with technology and information, as well as direct contact with followers of formal religion, especially Islam. However, interactions with religious adherents did not eliminate the identity of ancestral beliefs. The authenticity of adherents of ancestral customary beliefs is shown by a strong attachment to adat as a source of norms in daily life, the use of native language Mapur, patrilineal system, and revitalization of customs as protection for changing beliefs. Primarily, adat was considered to be parallel to religion. They even considered that adat was as a religion, or something higher than that. Before there was a religion, adat existed. Human life first emerged from the appearance of religion, and therefore adat was a source of data for organizing human life.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted on the Lom people from the Bangka Mapur tribe, where they are scattered in the Air Abik hamlet of Gunung Muda and Pejem hamlet of Gunung Pelawan villages. Geographically, the Pejem sub-village is located on the edge of the coast spreading from Pesaren to Tuing beach. Apart from the seashore, the Lom Pejem also settled in the hills of Benak, bordering the Air Abik. Although the Air Abik hamlet is a land area, it is approximately 26 km from the coast. It is perceived as the most extreme Orang Lom community, holding the Karal Lintang custom.

Air Abik and Pejem were selected as research locations since the Lom people in the area were original inhabitants and trustworthy. Other areas, for example, Mapur, Puntik, Melintang or Karal Lintang geographical unity, have embraced formal religion. The majority choice was Islam, followed by Christianity and Confucianism.

The Mapur Lom people are among the residents of Bangka Island, where there is mutual respect between the ethnic groups. In terms of ethnicity, Bangka Island consists of (1) ethnic Malays as the dominant with 78%, (2) Chinese 18%, (3) Javanese 2%, and (4) mixed ethnic consisting of Bugis, Madurese, Batak, and Lom, around 2%. Based on religious affiliation, 80% were Muslim while the rest include Christians, Confucians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Lom adherents.

This work included ethnographic studies, focusing on field research with a religious-anthropological approach. The ethnographic description related to the Lom belief and structure, the symbol, ritual, meaning, and value systems, and Orang Lom ceremony, and social and cultural structure of the society "[23].

To get a comprehensive description, seven religious theories called Daniel L. Pals as seven theories were used [24]. Additionally, the theory of structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons (1955) was also used. It helped analyze the influence of Islamic contact on the system and structure of belief and social culture of the Lom people. The function was defined as all activities directed to meet the needs and requirements of a system. Four absolute requirements should exist for a community to denote the function of AGIL, including adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency-pattern maintenance [25]. The adaptation process involves the interaction between people and the natural world or the process of adjustment. Achieving goal attainments involve adjusting resources to meet the desired objectives. Integration was centered on alignment in the entire social system. Latency includes interactions with the society and the inner metaphysical environment and centers on stabilizing the main communal values into patterns of social values. Latency tends to maintain existing patterns.

## III. RESULTS

### Lom People Concept

According to Toha, Sukri, and Ahen, the term Orang Lom is common among different editors. Other common terms include Urang Lum, Mapur, Mapur or Mapur / Urang Mapur, and Indigenous People. Also, the word person or urang was often used by Bangka people. Orang Lom has been written in two versions, including the people and urang (Bangkanee dialect), meaning (1) a person not yet a religion, (2) a person without religion, and (3)

means a person yet to convert to Islam. The intended religions are then formally recognized by the government.

Lom term appeared since 18050an, the time colonial official Bogaart visited Bangka. According to Bogaart, the inhabitants of Bangka Island consisted of four groups, including Chinese, Malays, hill people, and sea dwellers. Generally, the Bangka documents with this information related to the history of tin mining [26]. However, the terms of the Lom tribe were also written by J.A. Van Der Chijs in the work entitled "De Orang Lom of Belom of Het Eiland Banka" [27]. Apart from relying on documents, various individuals carried out studies. Although a preliminary study was conducted, the concept of Lom Tribe needed a comprehensive study. Zelle did the first research relating to the Lom tribe in Mapor with term Mapor from March 13 to 31, 1891 [19]. Social anthropology study was conducted by Olaf. H Smedal and concluded that the Lom people still adhered to animism [19]. Decky studied early Islamization on the island of Bangka in the Korpus Mapur Karel Lintang region and also used the terms Lom and Lom tribe [28].

The Lom people existed in northern Bangka, specifically in Air Abik and Pejem, and their authenticity is still evident in these two places. Also, Mapur, Melintang, and other Karel Lintang regions have experienced a change of belief. Although changes in belief have taken place, they still hold fast to ancestral culture.

### **The concept of the beliefs of Lom people**

The Lom belief system and cosmology are based on the cultural system. According to Geertz, a symbol system functioned to strengthen the feelings and motivations in a strong, comprehensive, and long-lasting way by formulating conceptions of law. A symbol system was generally accepted with respect to a particular feeling that reflected reality, and therefore, the feelings and motivations seem to be unique because there is God [24]. Moreover, the interpretation of the Lom belief system and cosmology was strengthened through other theories. For instance, Tylor and Frazer's theories are used for animism and magic, Freud's Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, and AGIL (Parson) theories were used to explain religion and personality, the sacredness of the society, Mircea Eliade, the nature of the sacred, and the touch of Islam with the Lom people, respectively [29].

The religious system of Lom people is described in the concepts of (1) Almighty (Allah Taala), (2) angels, prophets, and quase people, (3) Vengeance and Heaven, (4) paragraph, and (5) Bubung Tujuh.

The concept of God was rarely expressed in everyday language and speech. The term was almost unheard of whenever the people spoke. They used several words that have the same meaning, including Maha Kuase, Penguase Jagat Raye, and Allah Taala, which implies Almighty and Ruler of the Universe. Almighty or Allah the Exalted is the ruler of the universe with the ability to turn on and kills humans, provide fortune and heal illnesses. Besides, the Almighty is believed to have supernatural powers that cannot be matched by humans. The power that humans have, including Orang Kuase, comes from Almighty. This trust has significant meaning in the daily life of Lom.

According to Lom people's beliefs, the customs must be obeyed, carried out, and crystallized in the heart. Confidence was showed that Almighty has unlimited power and could decide on the things that happened. Everything that occurred was based on the will of Allah Taala. His ability is expressed when the Lom people lament,

read Petunjuk Jalen, and provide a stubble for treatment and self-protection from the interference of Orang Halus, including spirits, such as pedare, ghosts, and evil-blies. The expression of wailing arose during a disaster, or when they have the desire to do something other than as an expression of gratitude to Allah the Exalted.

The concepts of angels, prophets, scales, verses, hell surges, and vengeance were understood in the text of the petunjuk Jalen which was read on the grave at the Nambek kubur. The text was considered to be a paragraph concept and the event was considered one of the most important ritual parts of the Lom people. It was carried out on the tomb (grave) in the second year after the person died. The ritual reading of the petunjuk Jalen was conducted by the Chief Adat and witnessed by Lom's family, community, and all the interested people. Furthermore, the people believe in the seven lids and the carrying out of the seven straw rituals. Bubung Tujuh me are homes to ancestors perceived as grandparents. The Seven Beams are full of mystery, myth, and mysticism. Bubung Tujuh in the past should not be said as this was included taboo custom. Even if it was disclosed, it cannot be loudly expressed with a signal. Specifically, it was described with several images as mystery villages, places of mist, real as myths, and time considerations.

The concepts of angels, prophets, scales, verses, heaven as well as hell, and vengeance are understood in the petunjuk Jalen as read on the grave at the Nambek kubur. The text of the guide is considered to be a paragraph concept. This event was considered one of the most important rituals of the Lom people and was carried out on the tomb in the second year after the person dies. The text was read by the Chief Adat and witnessed by Lom's family and the community.

The people also believe in the Bubung Tujuh and the carrying out of the seven straw rituals. Bubung Tujuh indicated seven houses, which are home to ancestors perceived as grandparents. They are full of mystery, myth, and mysticism. Bubung Tujuh in the past should not be said, as this amounts to a taboo. Even if it is disclosed, it cannot be loudly expressed with a signal. Specifically, it is described with several images as mystery villages, places of mist, real as myths, and time considerations.

The Nujuh Jerami are yet other rituals cherished by the community. It denotes seven, and straw means rice stalk planted or harvested. The Nujuh Jerami ritual was, in Geertz's theory, considered a communal feast of the Lom people. It contained two important meanings, including (1) the annual thanksgiving of the community after the rice harvest was finished. They were grateful to Maha Kuase for receiving a fortune in the form of the rice harvest, and (2) feeding Mese (spirits) because they do not disturb them and the rice. The ritual is often performed at a certain time according to the Chinese calendar calculations. In Air Abik, it was held on the 13th and 17th of the third month of the Chinese calendar calculation.

Other traditional rituals are also carried out, including the relationship with childbirth, marriage, divorce, infidelity, and the process of arranging a corpse. All are carried out by the community and are under the responsibility of the customary/traditional leader.

### **The concept of the ability to survive Lom people**

As adherents of the traditional customs, the Lom people still maintained the ancestral belief system. This attitude is evident in the concepts of belief, and its related practices, as well as the rituals, practiced. The people did not feel inferior amid formal religious societies, such as Islam, Christianity, and Confucianism, expressly calling themselves Indigenous.

Sociologically, the society was constantly changing at all levels of its internal complexity. At the micro-level, there were changes in the economy, politics, and culture. At the mezo level, group changes, interactions, and individual behaviors occurred due to time processing. But anthropologically, time describes some changes in culture, beliefs, and customs, even if they are evolutionary. According to Shils in Piötr Sztompka, tradition, for example, means everything channeled or passed down from the past to the present [30]. For this reason, adat in the beliefs of Lom was identical to the tradition of the ancestors and was inherited from the past. In the beliefs of the Lom people, apart from daily customs that are non-sacred, some beliefs are sacred. The sacred elements in adat are the basic principles or spirit of the Lom people surviving.

The concept of survival in Orang Lom is primarily based on tradition. According to James tradition is something close to static and unchanging. It is a pivotal marker distinguishing these cultures as they were before colonial discovery. However, one has to question this notion and examine more closely its implication in the context of cultural survival [30].

The concept of tradition tends to be static since it is used for survival in cultural traditions. James Dirx mentions that the survival of a culture may be threatened by the imposition of other cultural forms that significantly alter existing ones, along with belief systems. Religious conversion is an example readily found in threatened cultural survival. Loss of language poses a further threat to a culture's survival, given the unique ways in which it is expressed and transmitted. Further, the inability to pursue one's livelihood may have a detrimental effect on cultural survival [31].

According to James Dirx, the forms of culture are based on human life. The Lom people had fundamental culture connected their belief. Therefore, the survival of their culture was based on the prevailing belief system. The structure of the belief system of the Lom people, and the customs containing supernatural meanings include the spirit, Orang Kuase, magical, and Maha Kuase. This forms the basis of a permanent belief system. Therefore, Lom People still do the following: 1) Stay true to traditional ancestral belief systems and myths; 2) The forms of culture are outlined in customary practices and rituals; 3) Maintain language use even in a local context; 4) Hold customs and traditions as everyday moral frameworks; 5) Form an indigenous community.

Lom people have a strategy for maintaining their ancestral beliefs, which has been passed down for generations. The strategy constructed a system of trust protection from encounters, and contiguity in the AGIL theory. The touch of Islam with the Lom people leads to the process of acculturation, integration, adaptation, and interaction not only on belief structure but also on the entire cultural system.

The survival strategy was to be ambivalent in Freud's theory and Parsons's structural-functional theory. Ambivalence showed the psychological difference between rejecting and accepting. As an effort to survive from the big cultural clash, the Lom people chose ambivalence. They accepted the influence of the great culture to show the political identity of citizenship and act firmly as indigenous people, adherents of ancestral beliefs.

To continue surviving, the people were divided into two identities, citizenship and belief. To reinforce political identity, the theories of amoeba, splitting or multiple personalities are formulated as a formal identity choice for citizenship politics. Multiple personalities were one of the basic survival strategies. With multiple personalities, identity as a citizen and ancestral belief can be maintained. The Lom People's reality was conceptualized by self, ethnicity, citizenship, and self-identity concepts.

The Lom community in Mapur Bangka is unique and still upholds the ancestral belief system. Ancestral beliefs, according to the theory of the origin of Tylor's religion, are categorized as animist belief systems, which involve an initial form of trust in primitive societies. The ancestral belief was passed down through oral traditions to subsequent generations. The belief of the community has evolved as a result of the contact of the people with formal religions recognized by the State, especially Islam. However, they stated that the ancestral belief was still functional. This is not a primitive society as in the description of Tylor's theory of evolution. The changes in their beliefs were caused by external elements such as marriage.

The term of Lom people emerged when the Dutch colonial master conducted a survey of the inhabitants of Bangka Island in the early 19th century. It was a stereotypical justification of outsiders as the community had not embraced formal religion while the people around had embraced Islam. In subsequent developments, the Lom people called themselves indigenous people, holding fast to ancestral beliefs or customs. They conceptualized the ancestral belief system through the following, (1) the concept of the Almighty as a god, (2) Angels and Prophets, (3) Hell and Heaven, (4) verse, (5) Bubung Tujuh; (6) Nujuh Jerami ritual, (7) Nambek grave ritual, (8) Maras mount as a spiritual cosmic center; (9) ancestral heritage objects deemed important in their beliefs, such as Aki Anta's former palm, Aki Anta's drum, Pari Aki Anta, Cenanom, and reed yearns.

The people conducted cosmology in the position of the body in the tomb facing the Maras hill. In case the chief of customary read the petunjuk jalen text in Nambek grave ritual, the soul in the tomb was instructed to walk on Maras hill. This is because heaven's direction was in Maras hill according to the locals.

According to Geertz's theory, the belief in a society could be understood through a symbol system that binds to the mechanism of meaning and value systems in the culture. The belief system adopted has an essential influence on shaping behaviors. The inherited trust was critical in managing the customs and behavior of adherents. Adat (custom) was the basis for the rules of behavior for individuals, as well as in arranging nature. As a basic principle of belief, adat is older than religion.

The implementation of Lom people's beliefs has an impact on oral tradition culture. Understanding is facilitated through the symbols used. Essentially, symbols can be both abstract and concrete, physical or non-physical, primary or secondary, sacred or profane, and have direct or indirect meaning. They form their identity

characteristic not owned by other people or tribes. They were depicted in daily rituals and ceremonies. The ones manifested in daily life were considered as customary practices with significance in adat structures. Customary symbols relate to things considered sacred and unsacred.

The symbols considered sacred can be traced during birth, marriage, death (grave nambek), vows, restriction and bans, myths, and the cosmological system. They were in the form of petunjuk jalen, pedare, types of demons and ghosts and nujuh jerami, Nambek grave. Also, they can be understood when communicated to Lom people and other communities. The unsacred symbols relate to birth, marriage, death, and prohibitions.

In the development of time, people's awareness to emphasize the identity of their beliefs faced dynamics. One of the important things they realized was being called Lom people. In developments, they cannot avoid the influence of other cultural values and religious teachings. The people lived together in one area, and therefore cultural values and religious teachings provide room for change in their belief systems. Islam was considered one of the religious teachings that influenced the process of cultural contact. The elements of adaptation, goals achieved, integration, and latency, the AGIL Parsons concept were included in the belief system and structure. The syncretism of the beliefs of the people occurred and was much influenced by Islam through religious education in schools, homes, recitation Quran, kindergarten/landfill, marriage, and information media.

Based on the results of this study, Tylor's theory of religion and the origin of primitive religious communities is accepted. The evolution of animistic beliefs experienced a change towards monotheism. However, ancestral customary beliefs indicated that belief systems still functioned. This means the evolution of religion does not necessarily lead to monotheism. The Lom people are not perceived as a primitive society as argued by Tylor, Frazer, and Pritchard.

The Lom people have been surviving and holding fast to the beliefs of their ancestral heritage, even though their identities were being eroded by the structural evolution of socio-cultural change. As citizens, they lived under state law and continued with ancestral beliefs as adherents of adat. However, there was a contradiction between the formal identity of citizenship politics and the substantive identity of belief. The ambivalence of formal identity became an important strategy for the survival of trust. Therefore, the originality of identity as Lom people was still maintained and preserved.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The Lom is one of the unique tribe that has maintained adherence to ancestral beliefs across generations. To pass their belief, oral instructing was pivotal. Adat became the vital elements that helped the community maintain their way of life. However, Lom people permitted their children to study Islamic religion while they were still young. However, they prevented them once they entered adolescence.



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