

## CONSTRUCTING AND PRESERVING ETHNIC IDENTITY THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICES AMONG THE REJANG COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL BENGKULU

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### ABSTRACT

Bengkulu Province is characterized by rich ethnic and cultural diversity, with the Rejang ethnic group as the majority population. Amid ongoing social change and modernization, the Rejang community continues to maintain its ethnic identity through various cultural practices. This study aims to analyze the processes through which ethnic identity is constructed and preserved within the Rejang community in Central Bengkulu. Using a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach, the study was conducted in Pondok Kelapa and Talang Empat sub-districts, areas with a strong presence of Rejang communities. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive data analysis model. The findings show that Rejang ethnic identity is constructed and sustained through key cultural symbols and practices, including the use of the Rejang language, a patrilineal kinship system, the Ka-Ga-Ma script, and traditional ceremonies such as Bekejai (marriage) and Ngamban Tanduk (birth and naming rituals). Although several cultural practices have adapted to religious influences and contemporary social conditions, their core values and meanings remain preserved. This preservation is supported by the active roles of families, customary institutions, and community leaders in transmitting cultural values across generations. This study demonstrates that ethnic identity is a dynamic social process shaped by continuous interaction and adaptation. The findings contribute to sociological discussions on ethnic identity and offer practical insights for stakeholders in supporting the sustainability of local cultures amid social change.

**Keywords:** local culture; central bengkulu; ethnic identity; customary practices; rejang

## IDENTITAS ETNIS DAN PRAKTIK BUDAYA MASYARAKAT REJANG DI BENGKULU TENGAH

### ABSTRAK

Provinsi Bengkulu merupakan wilayah yang memiliki keragaman etnis dan budaya yang kaya, dengan Suku Rejang sebagai kelompok etnis mayoritas. Di tengah dinamika perubahan sosial dan arus modernisasi, masyarakat Rejang tetap mempertahankan identitas etnisnya melalui berbagai praktik budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis proses konstruksi dan pelestarian identitas etnis masyarakat Rejang di Bengkulu Tengah. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi dan dilaksanakan di Kecamatan Pondok Kelapa dan Kecamatan Talang Empat, dua wilayah yang memiliki komunitas Rejang yang kuat. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model analisis interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa identitas etnis Rejang dikonstruksi dan dipertahankan melalui simbol dan praktik budaya utama, seperti penggunaan bahasa Rejang, sistem kekerabatan patrilineal, aksara Ka-Ga-Ma, serta praktik adat berupa upacara Bekejai (perkawinan) dan Ngamban Tanduk (kelahiran dan pemberian nama). Meskipun beberapa praktik budaya mengalami penyesuaian terhadap pengaruh agama dan kondisi sosial kontemporer, nilai dan makna inti budaya tersebut tetap terjaga. Proses pelestarian ini didukung oleh peran aktif keluarga, lembaga adat, dan tokoh masyarakat dalam mentransmisikan nilai-nilai budaya antar generasi. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa identitas etnis merupakan proses sosial yang dinamis, dibentuk melalui interaksi dan adaptasi yang berkelanjutan. Temuan penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian sosiologi budaya serta memberikan implikasi praktis bagi para pemangku kepentingan dalam mendukung keberlanjutan budaya lokal di tengah perubahan sosial.

**Kata kunci:** budaya lokal; bengkulu tengah; identitas etnis; praktik adat; rejang

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is internationally recognized as a country with extensive cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity (Agha, 2018; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). This diversity positions Indonesia as one of the largest multi-ethnic societies in the world (Amrizal & Hamdani, 2022). Such diversity also places

local ethnic communities in a continuous process of negotiating identity in the context of social change, modernization, and globalization (Bunce, 2021; Yakushina, 2016). Recent studies emphasize that ethnic identity should be understood not as a fixed inheritance, but as a dynamic social construction shaped through cultural practices, social interac-

tion, and collective processes of meaning construction (Hai et al., 2025; Jenkins, 2018).

One of the dominant ethnic groups in Bengkulu Province is the Rejang ethnic community, which constitutes the majority population in the region (Awalid & Susanti, 2023). Most members of the Rejang community are concentrated in Central Bengkulu Regency, particularly in Pondok Kelapa District and Talang Empat District. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Rejang population, which exceeds one million people, occupies strategic areas in Bengkulu Province based on historical, social, and cultural considerations (Peraturan Daerah Provinsi Bengkulu Nomor 8 Tahun 2019 Tentang Pelestarian Kebudayaan Daerah, 2019). This spatial and cultural concentration makes the Rejang community a significant case for examining ethnic identity formation in contemporary Indonesian society.

Similar to other ethnic communities in Indonesia, the Rejang people face challenges arising from globalization and modernization. These challenges include shifts in cultural values, the weakening of traditional practices, and increasing exposure to dominant national and global cultures (Fortunata et al., 2025). Several scholars argue that globalization often places indigenous communities in a dilemma between cultural preservation and cultural adaptation, which requires continuous negotiation between tradition and change (Endres, 2020). Although the Rejang community has historically been known for its strong and cohesive socio-cultural system, it is not immune to these pressures and must actively negotiate the sustainability of its ethnic identity (Lestari & Lubis, 2024).

In Central Bengkulu, Rejang ethnic identity is strongly expressed through language, kinship systems, and customary rituals that continue to be practiced and transmitted across generations (Astuti et al., 2023). Cultural practices such as the *bekejai* marriage ceremony, the *ngamban tanduk* birth ritual, and artistic expressions including *dol* music accompanying the *andun* dance reflect the local wisdom and symbolic values of Rejang culture (Awalid & Susanti, 2023; Mardika et al., 2018). Recent international studies highlight that cultural practices function not only as inherited traditions, but also as symbolic mechanisms through which ethnic identity is constructed, affirmed, and preserved in everyday social life (Hai et al., 2025). In this context, Rejang cultural practices serve as markers of ethnic existence amid social change and interaction with other ethnic groups in Central Bengkulu (Pratiwi, 2024).

Previous studies on the Rejang community have primarily focused on specific cultural elements. (Awalid & Susanti, 2023), for example, examined Rejang tribal philosophy as a guide for community life in Tembilang Village by emphasizing values and norms from a historical perspective. Other studies have concentrated on language preservation, such as (Astuti et al., 2023), who analyzed efforts to maintain the Rejang language in Tanjung Karet Village, (Anika et al., 2022), who explored language preservation as a form of community identity in Limbur Baru Village. While these studies provide valuable insights, they remain limited to partial aspects of culture and do not sufficiently examine ethnic identity as an integrated social process.

This condition indicates a clear research gap. There has been no in-depth study that comprehensively analyzes the construction and preservation of Rejang ethnic identity through cultural practices as a whole. Despite the growing body of research on ethnic identity and cultural preservation, there remains a limited number of studies that explicitly integrate symbolic, institutional, and everyday cultural practices into a unified analytical framework. Most existing studies tend to isolate specific elements such as language, rituals, or values, without adequately examining how these elements interact dynamically within broader social processes. As a result, ethnic identity is often treated as a fragmented phenomenon rather than a holistic and continuously negotiated social reality. In the context of the Rejang community, this limitation becomes particularly significant, given the complex interplay between tradition, religion, and modernization that shapes contemporary cultural expressions. Therefore, a more integrative and process-oriented analysis is necessary to capture how ethnic identity is constructed, maintained, and transformed through interconnected cultural practices in everyday life.

Based on this context, the main research problem addressed in this study concerns how ethnic identity is socially constructed and preserved through cultural practices within the Rejang community in Central Bengkulu. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the Rejang community in Central Bengkulu constructs, maintains, and negotiates its ethnic identity through everyday cultural practices amid ongoing social and cultural change. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of cultural sociology, particularly in discussions of ethnic identity and cultural practices. Practically, the findings are expected to provide recommendations for policymakers, cultural institutions,

and local communities to support the sustainability of ethnic identity in Bengkulu in the context of continuous social transformation.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to understand social meanings, cultural values, and identity construction directly from the perspectives of the community being studied. Qualitative ethnographic research emphasizes the collection of descriptive data in the form of words, narratives, and observed behaviors that are closely related to the research objectives (Ibrahim, 2020). This method is considered appropriate because the research seeks to explore the meanings of ethnic identity and cultural practices of the Rejang community, which can only be comprehensively understood through direct interaction with community members in their social and cultural context.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Pondok Kelapa District and Talang Empat District, Central Bengkulu Regency. These sites were purposively selected because they represent areas with a significant Rejang ethnic population where traditional cultural practices continue to be actively preserved. The fieldwork was undertaken over a period of approximately three months through repeated visits to the research locations. During this process, the researcher interacted directly with community members and observed various social and cultural activities while maintaining a reflective and analytical research position.

The fieldwork process was conducted in natural social settings, allowing the researcher to observe cultural practices as they occur in everyday life rather than in controlled or artificial conditions. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of how ethnic identity is embedded in routine interactions, social gatherings, and ritual activities. The researcher's continuous presence in the field also facilitated the development of trust with community members, which was essential for gaining access to more nuanced and context-specific information. As a result, the data collected reflect not only formal accounts of cultural practices but also lived experiences and implicit meanings that might not be easily captured through short-term observation.

To obtain comprehensive and in-depth research data, this study employed three main data collection techniques commonly used in qualitative research, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Waruwu, 2024).

Observation was conducted to examine behaviors related to customary norms and cultural practices within the Rejang community. The researcher observed everyday social interactions as well as specific cultural activities carried out during the research period, including traditional ceremonies and community gatherings. Observational data were recorded systematically in field notes.

In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines to allow flexibility in exploring informants' experiences and perspectives. Interviews involved traditional leaders, sub-district government officials, elders, and community members in Pondok Kelapa and Talang Empat Districts. The interviews focused on issues of ethnic identity, cultural values, cultural transmission, and strategies for maintaining Rejang traditions amid social change.

Documentation was used to complement observational and interview data. This technique involved collecting relevant documents, photographs, and local records related to Rejang ethnic identity and cultural practices, which served as supporting data for analysis.

Informants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling enables researchers to deliberately select individuals who possess particular characteristics and experiences that are considered relevant to the objectives and focus of the research (Qomaruddin, 2024). In this study, the criteria for selecting informants included individuals who were members of the Rejang ethnic community, had resided in the research location for more than five years, and possessed adequate understanding and knowledge regarding Rejang identity, social values, and cultural practices that continue to develop within the community.

Based on these criteria, this study involved a total of twenty informants. They consisted of four traditional leaders, with two leaders from each sub-district, four sub-district government officials, ten community members divided equally between the two districts, and two elders who possess deep knowledge of Rejang history and traditions. This composition was intended to capture diverse perspectives on cultural practices and ethnic identity from different social roles within the community. The number of informants was deemed sufficient as data saturation was achieved, indicated by recurring themes emerging from the interviews.

The diversity of informants in this study was deliberately designed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how ethnic identity is constructed and reproduced across different social contexts

within the Rejang community. By including traditional leaders, government officials, community members, and elders, the study captures both formal and informal perspectives on cultural practices and identity formation. This variation allows for a more nuanced analysis of how cultural meanings are interpreted, maintained, and negotiated across generational and institutional boundaries. Consequently, the selected informants not only provide descriptive accounts of cultural practices but also offer deeper insights into the underlying social processes that sustain Rejang ethnic identity in everyday life.

Furthermore, the data analysis process in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Alaslan, 2024). Data reduction was conducted by selecting, simplifying, and categorizing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation based on their relevance to the research objectives. At this stage, irrelevant data were filtered out, while relevant data were grouped into thematic categories related to ethnic identity and cultural practices.

Data display involved organizing the reduced data into narrative descriptions and thematic groupings to facilitate interpretation. The final stage, conclusion drawing, involved interpreting patterns and relationships within the data to produce comprehensive and empirically grounded findings regarding the construction and preservation of Rejang ethnic identity. These conclusions were continuously reviewed throughout the analysis process to ensure consistency with the collected data.

To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained through observations, interviews, and documentation, as well as across different categories of informants. Member checking was carried out by confirming key findings and interpretations with selected informants to ensure accuracy. In addition, prolonged engagement in the field enabled the researcher to build trust with participants and gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural context of the study.

In addition, this study acknowledges the importance of researcher reflexivity in qualitative inquiry. The researcher's positionality, including prior knowledge, cultural background, and interaction with participants, inevitably influenced the data collection and interpretation processes. To minimize potential bias, reflexive practices were continuously applied throughout the research process, in-

cluding maintaining field notes, critically reflecting on interactions with informants, and revisiting interpretations during data analysis. This reflexive approach enhances the transparency and credibility of the findings, ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in the participants' perspectives while maintaining analytical rigor.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *a. Main Symbols of Rejang Ethnic Identity in Central Bengkulu*

#### *Empirical Findings : Key Symbols of Rejang Ethnic Identity*

The findings indicate that Rejang ethnic identity in Central Bengkulu is primarily represented through three interrelated cultural symbols, namely the Rejang language, the patrilineal kinship system, and the Ka-Ga-Ma script. These symbols are not merely cultural attributes, but are actively embedded in everyday social interactions and transmitted across generations, particularly through family socialization and community-based customary activities.

First, the Rejang language functions as a central marker of ethnic belonging. The use of Rejang language is consistently encouraged in domestic settings and communal gatherings, especially by traditional leaders and local authorities. Families play a crucial role in introducing the language to children from an early age, ensuring its continued use in daily communication despite increasing exposure to national and global languages through education and digital media.

Second, the patrilineal kinship system remains a dominant organizing principle within Rejang social life. Decision-making processes within families and communities are largely centered on male authority, particularly fathers and customary leaders. This system is reproduced through everyday practices such as family deliberations and customary meetings, which implicitly teach younger generations about gendered roles and authority structures.

Third, the Ka-Ga-Ma script, although no longer used in routine communication, continues to function as a symbolic marker of Rejang ethnic civilization. The script is preserved through cultural training, customary events, and writing competitions organized by community leaders and local institutions. These efforts ensure that the Ka-Ga-Ma script remains recognized as a historical and cul-

tural heritage that distinguishes the Rejang community from other ethnic groups in Bengkulu.

Taken together, these three cultural symbols operate not in isolation, but as an interconnected system that collectively sustains and reinforces Rejang ethnic identity in everyday life. The use of language facilitates daily communication and cultural expression, the kinship system structures social relations and authority, while the Ka-Ga-Ma script serves as a symbolic link to historical continuity and cultural heritage. Their simultaneous presence across different domains of social life indicates that ethnic identity is maintained through multiple, overlapping layers of meaning rather than a single defining element. This integration demonstrates that the strength of Rejang ethnic identity lies in the continuous interaction between practical usage, social organization, and symbolic representation within the community.

#### *Analytical Discussion: Social Construction of Ethnic Identity*

These findings can be analytically interpreted through Peter L. Berger's theory of the social construction of reality, particularly the dialectical processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Berger & Luckmann, 2023).

The externalization process is evident in the active efforts of Rejang community members to express ethnic values through everyday cultural practices. Speaking the Rejang language at home, prioritizing male leadership in family decisions, and organizing Ka-Ga-Ma script activities represent conscious actions through which cultural meanings are projected into social life. These practices demonstrate how ethnic identity is continuously produced through routine social interaction rather than existing as a static inheritance.

Through repeated practice and collective recognition, these externalized meanings undergo objectivation, becoming perceived as natural and legitimate social realities. The patrilineal kinship system, for instance, is widely accepted as a normative social order, shaping expectations regarding authority and responsibility within families and communities. Similarly, although the Ka-Ga-Ma script is no longer functionally used, its institutionalization through cultural events reinforces its status as an objective symbol of Rejang ethnic identity. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing that cultural symbols gain durability when embedded in social institutions and collective memory (Dreher, 2023; Romdani, 2021).

The internalization process occurs when these objectified meanings are absorbed into individual consciousness, particularly among younger generations. Children learn to associate the use of the Rejang language, respect for male authority, and recognition of Ka-Ga-Ma script with a sense of ethnic belonging. This internalization indicates that Rejang ethnic identity is reproduced not only through explicit instruction, but also through habitual participation in social and cultural practices. As Berger argues, such internalization ensures the continuity of social reality across generations (Berger & Luckmann, 2023)

#### *Implications for Ethnic Identity Reproduction*

The persistence of these symbols demonstrates that Rejang ethnic identity is not merely preserved through resistance to change, but through adaptive strategies that allow cultural meanings to remain relevant in contemporary contexts. While the functional use of certain symbols, such as the Ka-Ga-Ma script, has declined, their symbolic significance continues to be reinforced through selective cultural reproduction. This pattern suggests that ethnic identity among the Rejang community is maintained through a dynamic process of negotiation between tradition and social change, rather than through rigid cultural conservation.

From a broader sociological perspective, these findings highlight that the reproduction of ethnic identity should be understood as an ongoing and context-dependent process rather than a fixed cultural outcome. The Rejang case illustrates that the sustainability of ethnic identity relies on the community's capacity to reinterpret and recontextualize cultural symbols in response to changing social environments. This suggests that cultural resilience is not achieved through the preservation of form alone, but through the continuity of meaning embedded within social practices. Therefore, the study contributes to a growing body of literature emphasizing that ethnic identity persists not despite change, but precisely through the ability to adapt and negotiate within evolving social realities.

#### ***b. Various Forms of Cultural Practices that Have Successfully Survived and Been Preserved***

##### *Empirical Findings: Enduring Cultural Practices of the Rejang Community*

The findings show that two major cultural practices, namely Bekejai (the marriage ceremony) and

Ngamban Tanduk (the birth and child-naming ceremony), continue to play a significant role in the reproduction of Rejang ethnic identity in Central Bengkulu. Although both traditions have undergone certain modifications in response to socioeconomic conditions and religious influences, their core symbolic meanings remain preserved and socially recognized.

These findings further indicate that the sustainability of cultural practices within the Rejang community is closely linked to their ability to adapt without losing their core symbolic meanings. Rather than being preserved in rigid and unchanging forms, these practices continue to evolve through selective modification, allowing them to remain relevant in contemporary social contexts. This adaptability is supported by strong community involvement, particularly from families and customary institutions, which play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of cultural values. As a result, the persistence of Bekejai and Ngamban Tanduk reflects not only cultural endurance, but also the community's capacity to negotiate between tradition and change in a way that sustains ethnic identity over time.

#### *Bekejai (Marriage Ceremony)*

Bekejai is the traditional marriage ceremony of the Rejang community and remains a key cultural institution that unites families while reaffirming ethnic identity. Empirical findings indicate that several core ritual elements, such as *ngantat jujuran* (delivery of dowry), *nyorong* (pre-marital negotiation), and *baso sesahe* (collective prayer for blessings), are consistently maintained across generations. These practices function not only as ceremonial activities but also as social mechanisms that reinforce kinship ties and collective values within the Rejang community.

Although adjustments have been made, particularly in simplifying ceremonial stages to reduce economic burdens, such changes do not alter the substantive cultural meaning of Bekejai. Instead, they reflect adaptive strategies that allow the tradition to remain relevant in contemporary contexts. The integration of Islamic elements, such as religious recitations before and after the ceremony, further illustrates how Bekejai has evolved through selective adaptation without losing its ethnic significance.

Community elders and customary leaders continue to play a central role in safeguarding the legitimacy and sacredness of the Bekejai ceremony. Their involvement ensures that ritual sequences re-

main aligned with ancestral values, thereby reinforcing Bekejai as an authoritative cultural framework recognized by the community. Even Rejang youth who reside outside Central Bengkulu tend to return to their hometowns to perform Bekejai ceremonies, indicating that the tradition retains strong symbolic power as a marker of ethnic belonging.

Beyond its ceremonial function, Bekejai also serves as an important social space for the reaffirmation of collective identity and intergenerational cultural transmission. The active involvement of extended family members, neighbors, and customary figures during the ceremony creates opportunities for reinforcing shared values, social norms, and a sense of belonging to the Rejang ethnic group. Through participation in these rituals, younger generations are not only introduced to procedural aspects of tradition but also to the underlying meanings associated with respect, solidarity, and social responsibility. This indicates that Bekejai operates not merely as a ritual event, but as a living cultural arena in which ethnic identity is continuously enacted, experienced, and strengthened within the social fabric of the community.

#### *Analytical Discussion: Bekejai as a Process of Social Construction*

Using Peter L. Berger's theory of the social construction of reality, Bekejai can be understood as a social reality continuously produced through the dialectical processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Anwar et al., 2022; Karman, 2015; Sabriani et al., 2023).

The externalization process is evident in the community's active expression of cultural values through ritual practices such as dowry exchange, negotiation, and collective prayer (Gustafsson, 2020). These practices serve as symbolic expressions of social solidarity and ethnic continuity, projecting Rejang cultural meanings into everyday social life.

Through repetition and collective recognition, Bekejai becomes objectified as a legitimate and taken-for-granted social institution. The fact that younger generations continue to perform Bekejai, even when exposed to modern urban lifestyles, demonstrates that the tradition has been institutionalized as a normative cultural expectation. Similar processes of ritual objectivation have been observed in other ethnic communities where marriage ceremonies function as key sites of identity reproduction (Dreher, 2023; Gaist, 2018).

The internalization process occurs when individuals adopt the values embedded in Bekejai as

part of their self-identity. Participation in the ceremony fosters a sense of ethnic pride and belonging, making adherence to Bekejai a personal commitment rather than a mere social obligation. The incorporation of Islamic elements further indicates that the social construction of Bekejai is dynamic, allowing new values to be integrated while preserving core ethnic meanings (Romdani, 2021).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the social construction of Bekejai is not merely a linear reproduction of tradition, but a dynamic and reflexive process shaped by continuous negotiation between inherited cultural values and contemporary social realities. Rather than being passively maintained, Bekejai is actively reinterpreted by community members in response to changing socio-economic conditions and religious influences. This indicates that ethnic identity, as embedded in ritual practices, is sustained through a balance between continuity and transformation. In this sense, Bekejai illustrates how local traditions can remain resilient by adapting their forms while preserving their symbolic core, thereby reinforcing the argument that cultural practices function as flexible yet enduring foundations of ethnic identity in modern contexts.

#### *Ngamban Tanduk (Birth and Child-Naming Ceremony)*

Ngamban Tanduk is a life-cycle ritual conducted on the seventh day after a child's birth and represents an important moment of social recognition within the Rejang community. Empirical findings reveal that this ceremony symbolizes gratitude for childbirth, the formal naming of the child, and the child's acceptance into the social structure of the community. Ritual elements such as naming, hair cutting, and communal prayer signify both physical and social transitions from birth into communal life.

In recent years, Ngamban Tanduk has undergone adaptation through integration with Islamic practices, particularly *aqiqah*. This integration reflects functional similarities between the two rituals, especially in terms of timing and symbolic meaning. As a result, many families combine traditional and religious elements, creating a hybrid practice that aligns with both cultural heritage and religious belief systems.

Although the complete traditional sequence is not always performed, the symbolic essence of Ngamban Tanduk remains intact. Simplified forms of the ceremony, such as collective prayers and family announcements of the child's name, con-

tinue to affirm the child's social inclusion and reinforce collective values within the Rejang community.

Beyond its ritual significance, Ngamban Tanduk also functions as a crucial mechanism for early social integration and identity formation within the Rejang community. The ceremony marks the child's formal entry into a network of social relations, where recognition is collectively granted by family members, community elders, and the broader social environment. This collective acknowledgment not only affirms the child's existence but also symbolically assigns a social position and cultural identity from the very beginning of life. Through this process, Ngamban Tanduk reinforces the idea that ethnic identity is not acquired individually, but is socially conferred and continuously reproduced through communal participation. Thus, the ritual plays a foundational role in embedding cultural values and social belonging within the life course of individuals.

#### *Analytical Discussion: Ngamban Tanduk and Cultural Adaptation*

Within Berger's framework, Ngamban Tanduk represents a socially constructed reality shaped by continuous interaction between tradition and change (Dharma, 2018; Dreher, 2023).

The externalization stage is reflected in communal expressions of gratitude and recognition through ritual acts. These practices articulate shared cultural and religious values regarding birth and social belonging.

Through repeated enactment, these symbolic actions undergo objectivation, becoming socially accepted norms that define appropriate responses to childbirth. Even when adapted through religious integration, Ngamban Tanduk remains recognized as an essential cultural reference point.

The internalization process occurs as younger generations come to understand Ngamban Tanduk as an integral part of Rejang ethnic identity. Despite modifications in practice, the tradition continues to function as a marker of cultural continuity and collective meaning, demonstrating that ethnic identity is maintained through adaptive rather than static processes (Romdani, 2021).

Taken together, these findings indicate that Ngamban Tanduk exemplifies a form of cultural adaptation that does not weaken ethnic identity, but instead reinforces its relevance in changing social contexts. The integration of traditional and religious elements demonstrates the community's capacity to negotiate meaning without abandoning

core cultural values. In this sense, adaptation should not be understood as a loss of authenticity, but as a strategy for sustaining cultural continuity across generations. Ngamban Tanduk thus illustrates that ethnic identity is maintained through flexible and context-sensitive practices, where stability lies not in rigid forms, but in the preservation of shared meanings and collective recognition within the community.

### *Comparative Implications for Ethnic Identity Reproduction*

Comparatively, Bekejai and Ngamban Tanduk reveal similar patterns of cultural reproduction. Both traditions demonstrate that Rejang ethnic identity is sustained through selective adaptation, institutional support, and intergenerational transmission. While Bekejai emphasizes social alliance and kinship continuity, Ngamban Tanduk highlights social inclusion and life-cycle transition. Together, these practices illustrate how ethnic identity is reproduced through everyday rituals that balance cultural preservation with responsiveness to social change.

From a broader analytical perspective, the relationship between Bekejai and Ngamban Tanduk also reflects a life-course dimension of ethnic identity reproduction, where cultural meanings are introduced, reinforced, and reaffirmed at different stages of social life. Ngamban Tanduk functions as an entry point, embedding cultural identity from birth through processes of recognition and inclusion, while Bekejai serves to reaffirm and publicly legitimize that identity within the context of adulthood and social responsibility. This complementary relationship indicates that ethnic identity is not constructed in a single moment, but is continuously shaped across the life cycle through interconnected ritual practices. Therefore, the sustainability of Rejang ethnic identity can be understood as the result of an integrated cultural system in which multiple traditions collectively contribute to maintaining social cohesion and cultural continuity over time.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the ethnic identity of the Rejang community in Central Bengkulu is not a static cultural inheritance, but a dynamic social reality continuously constructed and reproduced through everyday cultural practices. The findings reveal that key cultural symbols, including the Rejang language, the patrilineal kinship system, and the Ka-Ga-Ma script, function as social mech-

anisms through which ethnic identity is expressed, institutionalized, and internalized across generations.

Furthermore, the analysis of Bekejai and Ngamban Tanduk illustrates how cultural practices serve as crucial sites for the reproduction of Rejang ethnic identity within different stages of the life cycle. Although both traditions have undergone adaptation in response to socio-economic conditions and religious influences, their core symbolic meanings remain preserved. These adaptations indicate that cultural continuity is maintained not through rigid preservation, but through selective negotiation between tradition and change.

Through the application of Peter L. Berger's theory of the social construction of reality, this study shows that processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization emerge empirically from the lived experiences of the Rejang community. Cultural practices are externalized through ritual actions, objectified through collective recognition and institutional support, and internalized as part of individual and collective self-understanding. This dialectical process ensures the sustainability of ethnic identity amid ongoing social transformation.

Theoretically, this research contributes to cultural sociology by providing an empirical illustration of how ethnic identity is socially constructed and reproduced through cultural practices in a contemporary rural context. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of community-based cultural transmission and adaptive strategies in sustaining ethnic identity, offering insights for policymakers, cultural institutions, and local communities concerned with cultural continuity in the face of modernization and globalization.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of viewing ethnic identity as a continuously evolving process shaped by everyday cultural practices and social interactions. The findings suggest that future research could further explore how similar adaptive mechanisms operate in other ethnic communities facing different socio-cultural pressures, particularly in urban or highly globalized contexts. In addition, comparative studies across regions would provide deeper insights into the varying patterns of cultural resilience and identity negotiation. By situating the Rejang experience within a broader sociological framework, this study reaffirms that the sustainability of ethnic identity depends not on resisting change, but on the capacity to meaningfully adapt while preserving shared cultural values.

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