

## Socio-Cultural Values of Traditional Communities: *A Case Study of the Dayak in Kalimantan*

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### Abstract

This article is intended to reveal the socio-cultural values of traditional remote area communities of the Dayak in Central Kalimantan based on two legends and the existence of these communities. By applying semantics of sign systems, the expressions in texts showed connotative meanings referring to river communities, and the denotative meaning of living in forests for forest communities. While, expressions of migration could be related to cultural of *manamulai* 'wander' tradition and way of life as shifting cultivation farmers. Recently, the existence of these communities has contradicted government rules due to the laws in opening forests illegally. However, based on the characteristics, these communities can live in harmony with the government and forests investors through the empowerment programs for remote communities and CSR of forests' companies (logging or palm oil).

**Keywords:** remote area community, values, legend texts, ethnosemantics

### 1. Introduction

Since 1999, the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has held an empowerment for traditional remote communities, known as *Komunitas Adat Terpencil* (hereafter, KAT), stated in the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia Number 111 Year 1999 (Depsos, 2003). Central Kalimantan (CK) is one of the 33 provinces that has many KAT areas which are laid mostly at the riverbanks within tropical forests. These communities have some socio-cultural values which are similar to those written in the texts of Dayak legends.

Historically, the native community of CK, the Dayaks, live along the river catchment areas. Therefore, this community consists of mostly farmers that practice shifting cultivation which is a farming method that works by clearing forest land. They use this land for farming as far as this land is fertile. When the land becomes unfertile, the people will move to another place by opening a new land. After 20 to 30 years, the previous land will become forest, and the people may return to this place. Practicing this farming method leads them inhabiting the deep forest, which in turn, exclude them from other communities. These communities become the origin/ basis of KAT as the members usually belong to an extended family of a sub-ethnic Dayakese.

Unfortunately, the Dayaks of CK have little evidence in written history, as most of their account are in the form of oral tradition. The Dayak legend is one of the oral languages which can be used to trace the socio-cultural history of the community that produced the legend texts. By applying Semiotics of sign system and Semantics (Eggins, 2004:188-190), this article adopts the concepts in the sense that the ethnic texts of legends were analyzed based on the expressions as a part of sign system to have their own meanings (ethnosemantics) from both connotative and denotative meanings. Connotative and denotative meanings introduced by Barthes in 1967 were the improvement of mental concept proposed by Saussure in 1857 which is well known as sign systems consisting of *signifier* or *expression* and *signified* or *content*. Denotative meaning is taken from the premier meaning of sign system or the *metalanguage*, while connotative is the meaning from secondary system that is the extension of *expression* with the *content* is still the same.

Many researches have also adopted this theory for finding out meanings from the expressions: Indrawati (2006) analyzed the denotative and connotative meaning for *Makian Bahasa Madura* 'Madurese Swearing', and Mulyawan (2008: 23-30) described the meanings and messages of an advertisement.

Therefore, this article used a meta-analysis method to compare the expressions found in texts of legends into their meanings (denotative and connotative) with the characteristics of the Dayakese who lived in traditional remote

regions in CK to have their socio-cultural values. Along with the socio-cultural values, two questions are proposed: (1) is there any disharmony between the existence of KAT and other institutions – government and investors?, and (2) are there any decreased values of socio-cultural of KAT?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

The ethnographical studies for empowerment of KATs in this article are qualitative research with a descriptive method for interpreting the data. Explorative methods were used in finding the data by using techniques of interviews, individually and by group through Focus Group Discussion. These studies were conducted in order to investigate whether the communities fulfilled the requirements of being empowered by the government through the Ministry of Social Affair of the Republic of Indonesia.

### 2.2 Data

The data of this article were taken from six reports of ethnographical studies for empowerment of KAT which were conducted from 2008 to 2014. The second data were taken from two texts of *Dayak* legends, written in *Dayak Ngaju* language with topics of original story name of places in CK.

There are six KATs taken as the data. (1) KAT in the area of *Tumbang Tuwe*, the District *Rungan Hulu*, the Regency of *Gunung Mas* belongs to *Dayak Ngaju* sub-ethnic (Luardini et al., 2008). It was formed by those who participated in traditional gold mining, known as illegal gold mining, along the *Rungan* River, a branch of the *Kahayan* River. Besides working in traditional mining, the community also performed shifting cultivation. *Tumbang Tuwe* was declared as an administrative region on June 22, 2006. (2) KAT in the area of *Tumbang Saluang*, the District of *Bukit Santuai*, the Regency of East *Kotawaringin* (Luardini et al., 2009) was formerly laid in a creek of *Saluang*, part of *Mantobar* River, a branch of the *Mentaya* River. In the previous area, this community was plagued by diarrhea and community members decided to move on the nearest place, in *Tumbang Huwa* which was laid in the intersection of *Mantobar* River and *Huwa*. This community has occupied *Tumbang Saluang* riverbank since Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, as farmers of shifting cultivation. (3) KAT in *Tumbang Apat* region belongs to the District of *Sungai Babuat*, the Regency of *Murung Raya* (Luardini et al., 2010). This community is purely a picture of shifting cultivation in CK where the community pushes themselves to the middle of jungle. This community occupied *tompongs* ‘very simple wood houses’ and spread throughout the hilly area up until 2010. (4) KAT in *Tumbang Teronoi*, sub-district of *Tumbang Jojang*, the District of *Seribu Riam*, the Regency *Murung Raya* is occupied by the *Dayak of Punan Kareho* (Luardini et al., 2011). This community formerly lived in caves in order to avoid enemies and wild animals. As the community population increased, the people moved to the bank of *Teronoi* River. In 1992, this community was attacked by cholera and only 60% survived. The survivors moved again to the other side of the intersection of *Teronoi* River and *Jojang* River. They continue to live there to the present day. (5) KAT of *Mampai* in sub-district of *Taja Urup*, the District of *Tewah*, the Regency of *Gunung Mas* originally occupied the riverside of *Mampai* River, branch of *Sirat* River, belonging to the *Kapuas* River (Luardini et al., 2013). In the 1970s when the logging company *Bumi Indah* operated in this area, the community moved to a place near the company as the river had become shallow, limiting their mobility. However, this community became a remote area as the company closed in the 2000s leaving the community without access to the outside world. (6) KAT of *Sei Hanyo* in sub-district of *Tumbang Hamputung*, the District of *Kahayan Hulu Utara*, the Regency of *Gunung Mas* is occupied by the *Dayak of Ot Damun* ‘living at the upstream’. The people lived along the riverside of *Hanyo* River, the branch of *Hamputung* River, belonging to *Kahayan* River (Luardini et al., 2014). This KAT was originally formed as a big family living in one long house of *betang* ‘traditional house of the *Dayak*’. All the family members participated in traditional shifting cultivation. In 2014 the population has increased up to 58 families or 192 people who lived separately along the *Hanyo* riverside. The only way to reach this community is by a small traditional boat which becomes more difficult in dry season as there some parts covered by stones/ cascades.

Therefore, the two legends of *Dayak* community used for comparing the socio-cultural values of KAT in CK were the legend of *Tambi Uban and Bawin Pampahilep* (TUBP) ‘a grandma and a lady of *Pampahilep*’ and *Tampara Tatum* (TT) ‘beginning of the descent’ (Nahan and Rampai, 2010; Luardini, 2008). The two legends have the same setting of a river. The legend of TUBP talks about a big family led by a Grandmother from *Tagining* River in CK. When the Grandmother and her two grandchildren were fishing, they were attacked by many poisonous insects and they tried to protect themselves by using *sauk* ‘fishing tool’. Unfortunately, as it began to rain, they were hit by thunder and they were transmitted into big stones with shapes like *sauk*. The grandmother’s family considered that it was a curse so they decided to move to a new location, *Palabangan* River, with the help of a Lady *Pampahilep* ‘a manifestation of *Sangiang*’ or ‘a Goddess of *Hindu Kaharingan*’. While,

the legend of TT tells about the ancestors of *Tambun Bungai* who decided to move to a safe place after attacked by the enemy from *Mahakam* River area (East Kalimantan). Before moving, they held a ceremony of *Manajah Antang* ‘a ceremony using a mediator of *antang* bird’ to ask God which place they had to go. As the bird indicated *Rungan* River was the best place, the people moved to the areas along that river. Each family occupied an area along the river by using a big traditional boat for all people and those areas became villages, acknowledged as the ancestor of *Tambun Bungai*.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by analyzing the prominent expressions in the texts of Dayak legends which have connotative and denotative meanings similar to those of social and cultural values of KAT real life. The prominent expressions in Dayak legends were analyzed based on the theory of Semiotics of sign systems. However, Semantics was also applied to connotative and denotative meanings from the two data: texts of Dayak legends and from the socio-cultural life of KAT. Therefore, a meta-analysis method was used to compare the expressions found in texts of Dayak legends with the characteristics of KAT in five ethnography studies so that the socio-cultural values of KAT can be revealed.

## 3. Results

From the expressions on two legends, the values of social and cultural aspects of KATs in CK can be described as the following.

### 3.1 Social Values

Several social characteristics of KAT have similar features to the expressions within texts of two legends (from text TT of sentence number 67-68 and text TUBP sentence number 7: written as TT – S.67, 68 and TUBP – S.7).The expressions pointed out parts of a river and the locations of KAT perform some values for these communities as river and forest community.

#### 3.1.1 River Community

The community described in the texts and the communities in five areas of KATs have similarities in which the community life cannot be separated from a river.

- (1) *Metuh te baya tisa ije kalurga ih ije melai intu **lanting**, iete Rakou ewen hanak.Rakou manjadi tatum ie pangkasula ka melai intu **sungey Kahayan** ije paling **ngawa**, iete inyewut lewu **Tumbang Rungan**.Limbah te, tatum ije paling **ngaju** iete melai **Tumbang Miri**.* (TT – S.67, 68).  
‘At that time only one family left by boat, that was Rakou and his family. *Rakou* became the first ancestor who occupied the top headwater of the Kahayan River called by *Tumbang Rungan*. Therefore, the ancestors at the end of downstream were called *Tumbang Miri*’.
- (2) *Intu bentuk lewu **Tumbang Pajangey** tuh atun ije batu hai ije bagare Batu Bulan* (TUBP– S.07).  
‘In the middle of *Tumbang Pajangai* there is a big stone called *Batu Bulan*’

The prominent expressions from two texts can be explained as the following.

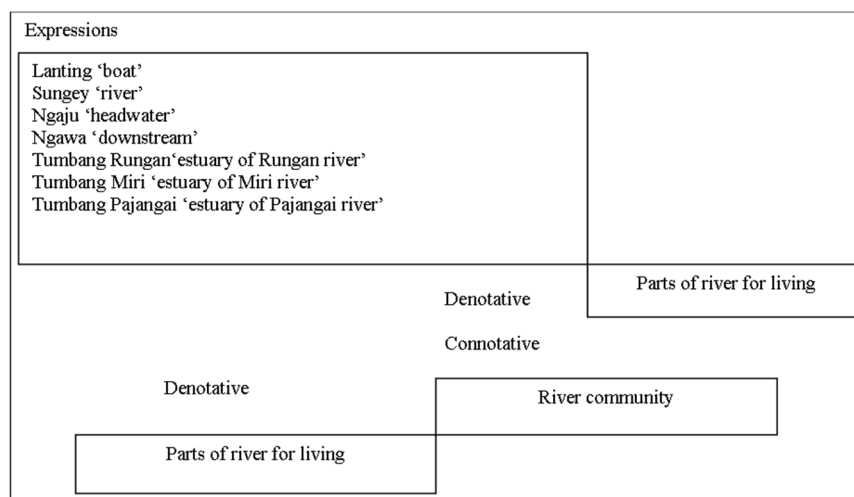


Figure 1. Connotative Meaning of the River Community

The connotative meaning of river community matches the characteristics of the six KATs in CK as stated in their names: *Tumbang Tuwe*, *Tumbang Saluang*, *Tumbang Apat*, *Tumbang Teronoi*, *Mampai at Tumbang Mampai* and *Tumbang Hamputung*. It can be said that the river provides a value for the Dayak community life, so that the native community in CK is well known as a river community.

### 3.1.2 Forest Community

There is an expression within the text of TT legend – sentence 9:

- (3) *Ewen balalu kalahi melai himba te. Pire-pire nyelu limbah te tege kabar oloh Mahakam akan dumah mangayau akan lewu Rangan Marau handak mambaleh (TT – S.09).*

‘They fight in the jungle. After years there is news that people from Mahakam will come to Rangan Marau for head-hunting for revenge’

The expression of *melai himba* ‘in jungle’ has the denotative meaning of forest and the meta-language for the situation in six KATs where the societies are mostly farmers of shifting cultivation which can only be conducted in the forest.

### 3.2 Cultural Values

Besides the social features, some expressions in the legend texts might be compared to cultural characteristics that can be described as cultural values as the following.

#### 3.2.1 Tradition of *Manamuai*

Some expressions in legend texts show that there is a similarity in real life of KAT.

- (4) *Limbah kajadian te, hanak manantun Tambi Uwan maanggap eka ewen te jadi basial. Kare kawan manantun Tambi Uwan tuh handak manungkap arep ewen pindah akan Sungey Palabangan iete dia kejau bara eka ewen je helu (TUBP – S.14, 15).*

‘After that evidence, the children of Grandmother Uwan consider their place to be cursed. All family members of Grandma Uwan want to move to Palabangan River which is not far from the previous place.’

- (5) *Manyeneh kabar jete, oloh lewu Rangan Marau mamakat uka pindah bara lewu akan lewu beken ije aman bara oloh Mahakam(TT – S.10).*

‘Hearing that news, the people of Rangan Marau decided to move from the village to another place, which is safe from the Mahakam people’.

The prominent expressions from two texts can be described as the following.

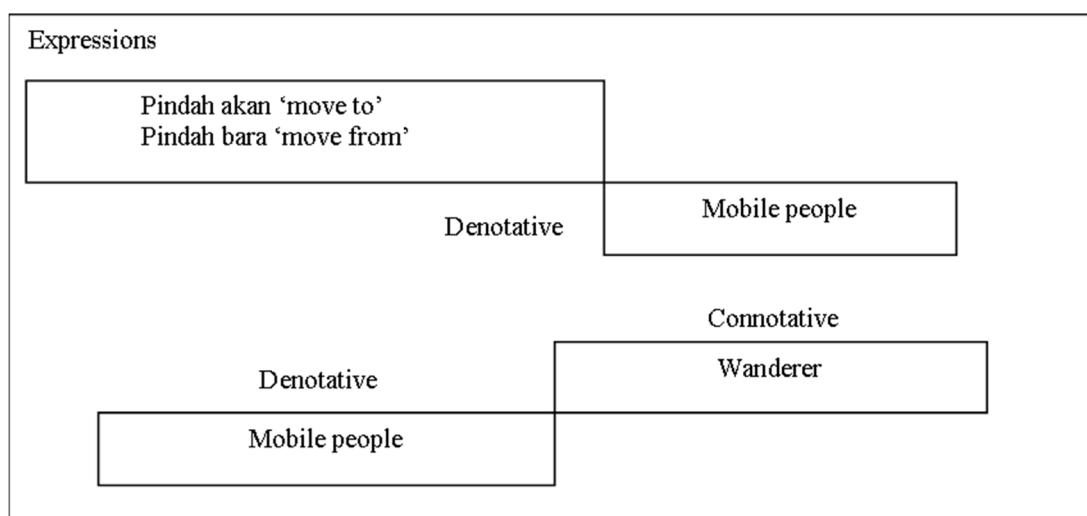


Figure 2. Connotative Meaning of Wanderer

#### 3.2.2 Religion and Tradition

Some cultural identity attached to religion worship can be found in the legend texts.

- (6) *Sahindai malalus kapakat te salabih helu ewen **Manajah Antang**, iete balaku petunjuk bara Hatalla pahayak burung antang ka kueh eka ewen pindah* (TT –S.11).  
‘Before making a decision they performed *Manajah Antang*, asking for guidance from God using an eagle to find which place they should move to’
- (7) *Ewen tuh mampunduk **sahur parapah**, balaku uka ewen ingalindung bara kare amuk asang te* (TUBP –S.17).  
‘They make *sahur parapah* (worship place) to ask for protection from all crimes’

The prominent expressions on the two data can be analyzed as the following.

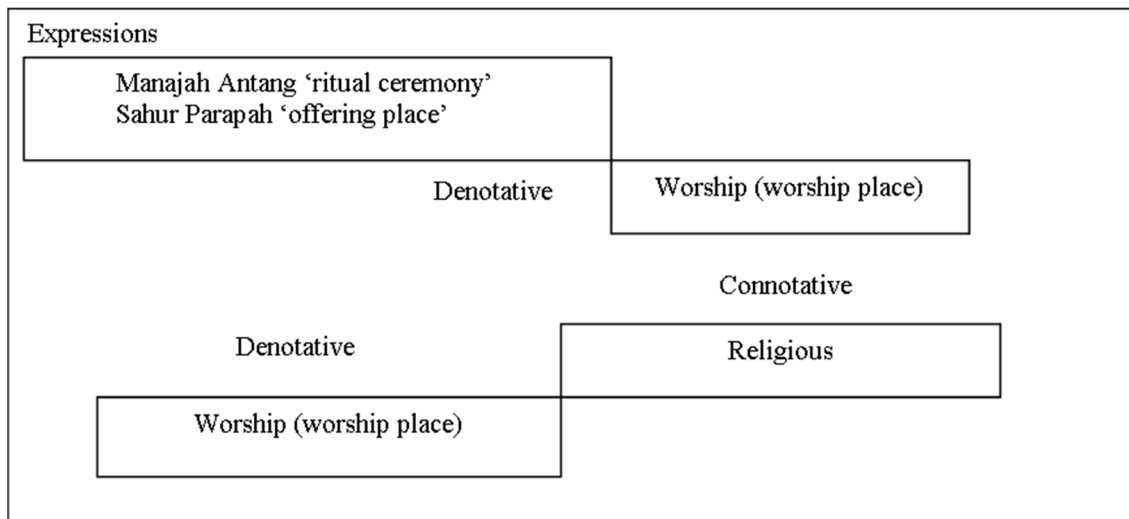


Figure 3. Connotative Meaning of Religious Community

*Manajah Antang* ‘a ritual ceremony’ is conducted by the *Hindu Kaharingan* in order to know the right direction to go or the right people to be chosen for a leader, while *Saur Parapah* ‘an offering place’ is usually built for a nuclear family, for extended family, or even for a village.

#### 4. Discussion

Discussing about the socio-cultural values of KAT in CK, it is important to know the characteristics of KAT based on the constitution made by government (the Ministry of Social Affair of Republic of Indonesia). There are two prominent concepts related to the socio-cultural community: social systems and cultural system.

##### a. Social system of traditional remote community

Based on Presidential Decree Number 111 of 1999, Article 1 (Depsos, 2003; Haryono, 2009), KAT is a social-cultural community, parochial in nature and periodically spread over a closed area. The community has minimal, or is not yet intensively engaged in social, economic or political networks or services. A KAT has at least seven characteristics: (1) a small, closed, and homogenous community, (2) kinship relations, (3) remote geographical and relatively difficult to reach, (4) generally having a sub-systemic economic sustenance system, (5) simple technology equipment, (6) high dependency on local environment and natural resources, and (7) limited access to social, economic, and political services. For these conditions, the government has created social welfare programs for all KATs in Indonesia.

##### b. Cultural system of KAT

Relating to social systems and their characteristics, the cultural systems of KAT can be traced from the community knowledge and how they considered their own way of life, beliefs, and language. Characteristics of high dependency on local environment and natural sources, and using simple technology equipment, which causes a practice of sub-systemic economic sustenance (for own needs), make KATs unable to develop a better standard of life for themselves. Moreover, as a KAT is a small, closed, and homogenous community, the language and beliefs are usually the same.

Referring to connotative and denotative meanings within the texts of Dayak legends, the socio-cultural values of KAT can be compared to the above characteristics. All KATs in CK occupied the riversides that the name of river is used for community identity: KAT *Tumbang Tuwe* for the community in *Tuwe* riverside and KAT *Tumbang Saluang* for the community in *Saluang* riverside. While, in texts of Dayak legends, the participants also lived in the riversides of *Kahayan* and *Pajangey*. For this reason, the community is well-known as a river community.

Moreover, the expressions in TT legend (data 3) that people come to the jungle for hunting can be compared to most KATs in CK which practiced shifting cultivation that could only be done in the forest area. As it has explained that this method of farming is by clearing land forest and they use this land as far as this land is fertile and leave it when it becomes unfertile. After 20 to 30 years, when previous land will become forest, the people might return to this place. However, some people find other places by taking shelter in the deep forest. This farming is the reason people take themselves to the deep forest, and; therefore, they become a forest community.

Relating to the forest community, with the way of life, a unique characteristic of the KAT is that the community members are majority male.

Table 1. The Population of Five KATs

No.	Name of KAT	Population of KAT		
		Male	Female	Total
	<i>Tumbang Tuwe</i>	121	110	231
	<i>Tumbang Saluang</i>	117	116	233
	<i>Tumbang Apat</i>	122	122	244
	<i>Tumbang Teronoi</i>	114	84	208
	<i>Mampai</i>	102	88	190
	<i>Tumbang Hamputung</i>	106	86	192

Comparing to Indonesian population in 2010 with a total number of 259,940,857, the number of males is more than that of females – 132,240,055 males and 127,700,802 females (national.kompas.com). The condition where there are more males than females could be indicative that living in KATs requires strength. Two of the areas of KAT were attacked by diarrhea and cholera, so that more men could survive than the females.

Although shifting cultivation practices are now stated against the government rules, as it is classified as illegal logging, it cannot be denied that KAT has been living in the forest far before the government laws and rules of exploring forests were born.

However, the connotative meaning of wanderer, or nomad, in the texts was conducted by all members of families and village. It can be related to the characteristics of KAT where the five villages practiced the shifting cultivation. The Dayak call this migration by *manamui* ‘warder’ tradition. This tradition has two purposes: for a better life and for avoiding bad experiences.

- a. Mobile people in the texts can be compared to the practices of shifting cultivation conducted by KAT. The migration is aimed at making a better way of life.
  - b. It can also be assumed that mobile people in the texts avoid bad experiences.
- Data 4 : *eka te jadi basial* ‘this place has been cursed’
  - Data 3 : ...*akan dumah mangayau* ‘...will come head-hunting’

*A curse and head-hunting* are the expressions of bad evidences.

Historically, the Dayak in CK had four kinds of violence; they were *hakayau* (*kayau* ‘slaughter’ – *hakayau* ‘reciprocal slaughter’), *hasang* (*asang* ‘attack’ – *hasang* ‘reciprocal attack’, *habunu* (*bunu* ‘kill’ – *habunu* ‘reciprocal kill’), and *hajipen* (*jipen* ‘slavery’ – *hajipen* ‘being enslaved reciprocally’). Those four kinds of violence were interrelated: head-hunting was in order to have a head for offering to the ancestor spirits and for the more magical; therefore attacking other people would exist. Attacking others resulted in killing other people.

Then, helpless people became slaves. However, after the Peace Agreement of *Tumbang Anoi* in 1894, all violence came to an end (Report of First Peace Conference of Palangka Raya 2001, in Asi and Luardini, 2010).

Regardless the history of violence, the real condition of the two regions of KAT, *Tumbang Saluang* and *Tumbang Teronoi* villages, moved to other places as they were attacked by cholera and diarrhea. These two kinds of sicknesses were spread easily to all the community members as they lived along the river side and they used the river as the center of all activities, included for water drinking and consumption. One value from the *manamui* tradition is the community tends to avoid these kinds of conflict or bad experiences.

Beside the *manamui* tradition, the cultural value of KAT can be described from the community beliefs because sometimes, a belief or a religion cannot be separated from the culture where it is practiced. The name of the Dayak religion, *Hindu Kaharingan*, was considered as a kind of culture up to 1972.

In real life of the KAT, all regions lack public facilities: education, health, communication lines, and electric power. The education facilities were mostly primary schools with two or three classes called *SD Rintisian* 'initial primary school', and two of KAT regions that did not have any. For health facilities, all regions only have traditional medical persons who use medicinal plants taken from the forest. They were also not supported by electrical power that influences communication systems. However, the five areas have shown the identity of *Hindu Kaharingan* where *sapundu* 'wooden sculpture' and *sandung* 'house miniature for storing bones of the ancestors' can be found. *Sapundu* means ladder, as well as a guard for the soul of the dead body. Therefore, it can be used as a pole to fasten an animal offering (cow or buffalo). Usually, one family or one village has two *sapundu* which is placed at left and right side of the *sandung*. The cultural identities and ritual ceremonies found in the expressions of legend texts and the real life of KAT indicate that the Dayak community can be classified as obedient people to their God.

Based on the discussion above, the perceptive questions can be explained. For the first perceptive question of this article whether the existence of KAT has disharmony to those of other institutions can be answered by looking at the characteristics of KAT. It is stated that KAT is a small, closed community so that the government can easily manage the community and whether they are supported by social welfare program *in-situ* 'a program conducting in the KAT location' or *ex-situ* 'the people were moved to nearby previous location'. The government might also ask the forest investors, who are usually owned by national and international company, to take KAT into development program, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or hiring the community to work for nearby companies. In this case, KAT can live in harmony along with government rules or the investor program.

Therefore, the fact shows that some KATs have not been empowered by the nearby company. The KAT in *Tumbang Hamputung* District, *Gunung Mas* Regency (Luardini et. al., 2014) and in *Rantau Suang* District of East *Kotawaringin* Regency (Luardini et. al., 2013) are located near big logging companies but these two KATs were not embraced by the companies. This condition might be explained based on two assumptions: (1) the CSR of the two companies have contributed to other locations or districts, and (2) the socio-culture of the Dayakese has special characteristics so that some community members cannot adjust to the atmosphere of company work situation. A research of socio-cultural mapping conducted in Kapuas Regency reported that in a big palm oil estate, almost every day there were a conflict between the managerial team and the native employee because of misunderstanding in giving instruction or direction is regarded as insulting (Luardini et. al., 2012: 26).

Indeed, the Data-based of KAT (the Ministry of Social Affair, 2009) shows that CK still has many KATs locations which should be empowered. From the eleven (11) regencies, only five of them are declared as 'exit' from KAT: those are West *Kotawaringin*, *Kapuas*, *Lamandau*, South *Barito* and North *Barito*. While, the Regencies of *Gunung Mas* and *Murung Raya* have the most numerous areas of KAT due to the topographical and geographical conditions that the two regencies are highlands with some virgin tropical forest.

Furthermore, the second question of whether the cultural values have got degradation recently can be answered by the *manamui* tradition conducted by KAT, which is not as dangerous as illegal logging performed by other parties (McCarthy, 2001) as one of the KAT characteristics is using simple technology equipment. This tradition value has now decreased in the sense that the community has already been empowered by government by applying intensive farming systems. However, cultural values and beliefs, such as religious community, are still maintained. The Dayak cultural identity and religion of *Hindu Kaharingan* have grown and supported each other through generations.

## 5. Conclusion

Historical evidence can be traced from oral speech, ritual speech or folktale and legend. It is true that every language used has its own purposes, so that it always conveys meanings. From the expressions of legend texts,

meta-language of denotative and connotative meanings, the socio-cultural values of KAT can be revealed. The way the KAT life has a close relationship as what are stated in the two legend texts: (1) social values as river community are shown by the connotative meanings of expressions related to parts of the river and the value of being a forest community is shown by the meta-language of living near a forest, (2) cultural values as wanderer/nomad community which is expressed by migration because of a curse and avoiding conflict can be related to *manamui* tradition which was done for two reasons: avoiding endemic and shifting cultivation. The religious community to the Almighty God of KAT life is shown by the expression of ritual ceremony and cultural identity related to religious purposes.

The existence of KATs which need to be empowered by other institutions can be aligned with the government and investors' programs. The programs might also help KAT to maintain and develop their socio-cultural values.

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