

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON THE ROLES OF LUNDAYEH DANCE MUSIC IN TENOM, SABAH

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Abstract Dance music has long been a fundamental aspect of Lundayeh's identity; however, external factors—such as tourism-driven commercialisation promoting cultural visibility—are increasingly shaping its role and meaning within the community. This study explores the impacts of these external forces on Lundayeh dance music, focusing on how its role and authenticity within the community are being redefined. Fieldwork was conducted across three villages in Tenom, Sabah—Kampung Sugiang Baru, Kampung Baru Jumpa, and Kampung Kalibatang Baru—where data were collected using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations with community members and cultural practitioners. The findings reveal a complex interaction between traditional values and contemporary influences, showing the adaptive resilience of Lundayeh dance music and the potential risks of cultural erosion. This research provides insight into the broader implications of external factors on cultural expression, highlighting the ongoing challenge of balancing heritage preservation with the acceptance of change.

Keywords: Lundayeh community, cultural identity, dance music, tourism, commercialisation.

INTRODUCTION

Dance music is a form of art that contributes to a community's cultural identity. It refers to music created to accompany dance performances and typically aligns with the dance type (Kadir, 2007; Damiri & Mohd Kiram, 2021). In other words, dance music is composed and arranged to complement specific dances, as requested by the choreographer. Unlike the choreographer, who focuses primarily on creating dance movements, the composer is responsible for crafting appropriate tunes (Zbikowski, 2012). Therefore, communication and collaboration between the composer and choreographer are essential during the composition process to ensure that the music and dance are seamlessly integrated. Dance music's core is the

dance itself (Doğantan-Dack, 2020; Kadir, 2007). Although musical expression plays a significant role, it primarily accompanies the dance (Damiri & Mohd Kiram, 2021).

Dance music encompasses various genres (Kadir, 2007). For example, flamenco and folk music represent dance music genres led by the Andalusian community in Southern Spain. Other types of dance music, such as tango, bolero, cancan, salsa, and cha-cha-cha, are central to European and Latin American musical traditions. Dance-punk, or disco-punk, blends danceable rhythms from electronic music with punk rock aesthetics, emerging in the late 1970s. Dance music is often presented alongside other cultural performances, such as singing, drama, and ritual. When accompanied by music, dance can deliver a performance with a sense of "soul" (Kadir, 2007). Thus, beyond entertainment, dance music often plays an integral role in ritual ceremonies (Damiri & Mohd Kiram, 2021). Music composed for dance may only sometimes produce a compelling performance if paired with unsuitable choreography. Likewise, a dance may only be compelling if well-matched with the accompanying music.

Reviews of the literature show that cultural practices across various ethnic groups and communities are often reshaped by external pressures, reflecting broader social and cultural changes. Globalisation, commercialised tourism, and economic policy decisions frequently influence how traditional music is adapted, altering its function and meaning (Suadik et al., 2019). For instance, commercialisation may lead to changes aimed at attracting diverse audiences, sometimes distancing the music from its original cultural roots (Yusoff et al., 2009). Other studies suggest that shifts in societal structures and intercultural interactions introduce modern elements into traditional music, blending genres to appeal to global tastes (Zbikowski, 2012). Additionally, national cultural policies and tourism strategies can promote specific adaptations in traditional music, aligning them with larger identity projects or market interests (Santamaria, 2010).

In Malaysia, the diverse forms of dance music developed by various ethnic groups serve as valuable cultural assets with significant appeal in sectors like tourism (Zakaria & Hua, 2024). For the Lundayeh community, an ethnic group in Sabah, traditional dance music instruments play a central role in expressing and preserving their cultural identity. However, as identity is not static but instead consists of core characteristics that can be modified, replaced, and recreated (Baharuddin, 2004), recent shifts in the community's lifestyle—driven by external forces such as commercialisation from tourism and the development of the music industry—are influencing the purpose and perception of these traditional instruments. These external pressures reshape how dance music is performed and understood, reflecting broader changes in cultural identity (Simeon et al., 2017). This paper aims to examine how these forces are transforming the role of traditional dance music instruments within the Lundayeh community in Tenom, Sabah.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a combination of qualitative methodology and social constructivism. Qualitative methodology involves collecting data directly from the field, while social constructivism posits that individuals construct subjective meanings based on their experiences (Creswell, 1994). This approach enabled the researchers to interpret and understand the significance of the Lundayeh community's attachment to their traditional dance music and its evolving role. Rather than starting with a predetermined theory, this approach supports the inductive development of theories grounded in the perspectives of those directly involved

(Suadik, 2022; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Such an approach effectively understands social realities from the viewpoints of community members.

This study focused on three villages in the Tenom district: Kampung Sugiang Baru, Kampung Baru Jumpa (formerly known as Kampung Meluyan), and Kampung Kalibatang Baru. These villages were selected due to their predominantly Lundayeh population, who are actively engaged in preserving and transmitting various forms of traditional dance music to younger generations. Community members regularly perform dance music at celebrations and ceremonies within the villages. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions collected detailed, descriptive information. Additionally, unobtrusive and direct observations of dance music performances were conducted, with documentation via audio and video recordings. Observations ensured that the information gathered from interviews aligned with the community's actual practices. A total of 28 informants, recognised for their knowledge and experience of Lundayeh dance music, were interviewed during the fieldwork conducted in February 2012, with follow-up visits in October 2024.

THE ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND OF LUNDAYEH IN SABAH

The Lundayeh community is one of the minority groups in the state of Sabah. In the early 1970s, the Lundayeh population in Sabah was estimated to be around 2,000 (Tuie, 1995). By 2009, the population had increased to approximately 5,000 (Langub, 2006). The Lundayeh population in Sabah is primarily concentrated in the Sipitang, Tenom, and Keningau districts. According to Bala and Wong (2010), the settlement of the Lundayeh in Tenom resulted from migration from their initial settlements in Long Pasia, Long Mio, and other villages in Sipitang. Currently, there are nine Lundayeh villages in Tenom, including Kampung Baru Jumpa, Kampung Kalibatang Baru, Kampung Sugiang Baru, Kampung Baru Jumpa Seberang, Kampung Belumbung, Kampung Kelanan, Kampung Mengkelias, Kampung Mensulok, and Sapong.

The Lundayeh are Indigenous to Borneo, with the majority of their population located in North Kalimantan, Indonesia, as well as in Brunei Darussalam and the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Despite living in different nation-states, the shared history and culture of the Lundayeh people are fundamental aspects of their cultural identity (Karulus & Askandar, 2020). In the context of Malaysia, the establishment of national borders presents a challenge for the Lundayeh community in maintaining a collective cultural identity. These borders have increased mobility within the community, forming new settlements distant from the larger clusters and original settlements. Kampung Baru Jumpa, Kampung Kalibatang Baru, and Kampung Sugiang Baru are examples of such new Lundayeh villages in Sabah. Social changes in these new settlements have also altered some of the Lundayeh arts and cultural practices.

Before the label "Lundayeh" was widely used, the community was often referred to as Murut, as the Lundayeh are a sub-ethnic group under the broader Murut ethnic category. However, Bala and Wong (2010) noted that outsiders primarily used the term "Murut," while the Lundayeh preferred to identify themselves as "Lundayeh," particularly in official contexts. Today, the Lundayeh community in Malaysia no longer uses the Murut label and has adopted the term "Lundayeh" as their official ethnic identity. In 2007, some members of the Lundayeh community, particularly those living in urban areas, attempted to rebrand their identity to "Lun Bawang," as used by their relatives in Sarawak (Bala & Wong, 2010). However, this attempt was unsuccessful, as the majority of the community in Sabah accepted "Lundayeh" as their

official ethnic name. Nevertheless, the community continues to use names such as Lun Dayeh, Lun Lod, Lun Tana Luun, Lun Bawang, and Lun Nepura (Bala & Wong, 2010).

"Lundayeh" is derived from two words: *lun*, meaning "people," and *dayeh*, meaning "upper." Therefore, Lundayeh refers to the people of the interior or upriver (Crain & Pearson-Rounds, 1999; Bala & Wong, 2010; Langub, 2006). The name Lundayeh reflects the location of their original settlements, which were concentrated along river valleys (Bala & Wong, 2010). The term is also known as Lun Bawang in Sarawak, Lun Bawang Murut in Brunei Darussalam, and Dayak Lundayeh in Indonesia (Ganang et al., 2018). These different ethnic labels are tied to the geographical regions where the Lundayeh live but do not reflect significant differences in race or culture (Karulus, 2024).

Although the Lundayeh community uses different ethnic labels depending on location, their customs and language remain broadly similar (Karulus, 2024). This similarity supports the belief in a shared origin and common ancestors. The Lundayeh community traces its ancestry to Rang Dungo (male) and Terur Eco (female) (Tuie, 1995). The shared legend of common origin is critical in strengthening the fraternal ties among the Lundayeh populations in Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia. It is also a fundamental element in preserving the Lundayeh cultural identity, passed down from generation to generation.

THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL FORCES ON THE ROLES OF DANCE MUSIC INSTRUMENTS IN THE LUNDAYEH COMMUNITY

Dance music instruments are fundamental to the Lundayeh community's cultural identity. However, external forces have significantly altered their role and function (Suadik et al., 2019). These changes have profoundly impacted the community's traditional way of life, which has evolved in response to social, political, and economic shifts. The transformation of the Lundayeh community is shaped by various external factors, including religious conversion (Karulus, 2024), technological advancements (Bala & Saat, 2010), and expanding market dynamics (Bala & Saat, 2010). These forces are part of broader national development, affecting the community's economic well-being and influencing cultural practices.

As the community adapts to these external pressures, its cultural identity—closely tied to traditions such as dance music—has undergone redefinition. Once central to local ceremonies and celebrations, dance music instruments are now shaped by the demands of state policies and commercialisation. These dynamic forces compel the Lundayeh to balance the preservation of their heritage with the need to navigate modern societal expectations. This section will examine how commercialisation from tourism and state policies have influenced the use of traditional dance music instruments among the Lundayeh community in Tenom. The analysis will explore how these external forces have reshaped cultural expressions and, consequently, the community's sense of identity in the face of contemporary challenges.

Tourism Commercialisation and Changes in Cultural Practices

Dance music instruments have always been integral to Lundayeh culture, particularly in the past when they were one of the few sources of entertainment. The Lundayeh community, which is geographically isolated, was previously limited in access to external entertainment. Life was focused on agricultural activities and daily survival, leaving little room for leisure. As a result, dance music instruments like the *ruding*, *gong*, and *sekafi* played a crucial role in providing entertainment and relief from the stress of everyday life. These instruments served as a form

of amusement and helped reinforce social bonds within the community, particularly during ceremonial events. Over time, these traditional performances have been passed down through generations, contributing to the preservation of cultural identity.

In recent years, the role of these dance music instruments has expanded. They are no longer just a means of entertainment for the local community but have become an essential element in the tourism industry (Suadik et al., 2019). Local dance performances are often showcased to tourists, sometimes for a fee, turning traditional cultural practices into commercial products. This shift reflects broader globalisation trends, where cultural traditions are increasingly commodified. The formation of organisations like the Sabah Lundayeh Cultural Association (PKLS) underscores efforts to maintain and promote Lundayeh cultural heritage while also introducing it to a broader audience.

The spread of global dance music trends, primarily through mass media, has also influenced the exposure of Lundayeh culture to the outside world. Although younger generations are exposed to these modern influences, there remains a strong attachment to traditional Lundayeh music. Many still consider their traditional music an essential part of their cultural identity, and older generations continue to pass on these traditions through active participation in performances.

Historically, the ownership of dance music instruments was a marker of social status in the Lundayeh community. Families that could afford instruments were regarded as being of higher social standing. This stratification was particularly evident during ceremonies, where the presence of dance musical instruments symbolised wealth and prestige (Suadik et al., 2019). This social hierarchy, which once divided the Lundayeh into categories like the *lun ngimet bawang* (elite leaders) and the *demulun* (lower class), has been somewhat blurred, particularly after the community's conversion to Christianity, which emphasised equality. However, economic factors still play a role in determining who can access dance music instruments.

With the rise of tourism, these traditional cultural practices have become increasingly commercialised. What was once a sacred tradition is now often embraced as a source of livelihood. While dance music performances are still part of religious and community events, they are now also staged for tourists. In some cases, these performances are adjusted to meet visitors' expectations, potentially altering the original meanings of the rituals. Tourism has also changed the way traditional ceremonies are performed. The Ulung Buayeh ceremony, once a ritual associated with headhunting and ancestral beliefs, has become a significant attraction for tourists. This ceremony, which involves creating a replica of a crocodile from soil to commemorate a successful headhunt, is now performed to educate visitors about Lundayeh traditions. In this context, the original spiritual significance of the ceremony has been overshadowed by its role as a tourist attraction.

The Impact of State Policies and Modernisation on Traditional Practices

For most Lundayeh communities in Sabah, economic activities such as farming and hunting have traditionally been essential to their survival and self-sufficiency. The reliance on natural resources like rivers, forests, and mountains has shaped not only their daily lives but also their social structures and cultural practices. Communication among the Lundayeh, especially in remote areas, was historically facilitated through various tools, such as the *gong*, which served as a vital medium for coordinating activities like farming and hunting. The *gong*'s role in signalling the end of a day's work or communicating news to the community was a key component of their interaction.

Cultural policy in Sabah is shaped by Malaysia's National Cultural Policy, which often reinterprets traditional cultural practices for broader socio-political and economic objectives. Modernisation and globalisation have further transformed these practices as they become adapted to fit contemporary contexts. Initiatives like the Sabah Cultural Festival and the efforts of organisations such as the PKLS have shifted the role of Lundayeh dance music instruments from practical means of communication to symbolic and ceremonial elements. These efforts have led to the increased visibility of cultural artefacts in public events, redefining traditional music, such as the *telingut*, as a representation of cultural heritage rather than an everyday expression of emotion.

Modern technologies have also contributed to the reconfiguration of the cultural landscape. For example, the introduction of mobile phones has rendered the *gong* less essential for communication. This shift stems from the practical benefits of technology and reflects broader development policies that encourage the integration of modernity into traditional practices. While efforts to preserve culture through tourism are commendable, they have unintentionally commodified traditional dance music. These performances are often organised for tourists or as part of tourism-driven events, which alters their original purpose.

Additionally, the increasing emphasis on economic value through culture has influenced traditional taboos surrounding the use of dance musical instruments. By reframing these instruments as part of modern cultural expression, this focus often reshapes or diminishes the customary restrictions on their use. Historically, it was forbidden for the Lundayeh to play musical instruments, such as the *gong*, around newborns, as these sounds were believed to carry symbolic meanings related to life and death. However, traditional practices have increasingly clashed with efforts to standardise and modernise cultural expressions. The push to professionalise and commercialise cultural performances has altered the original meanings of these instruments. The traditional taboo against playing music near infants has sometimes been overlooked or reinterpreted to fit modernised cultural agendas.

Furthermore, new forms of cultural expression and performance have emerged, often competing with or overshadowing traditional practices. The growing influence of market forces, driven by globalisation and capitalist ideologies, has diminished the traditional roles that dance music instruments once held in social settings. For example, modern musical instruments like keyboards, electric guitars, and other commercial goods have increasingly replaced ceremonial items such as the *gong* during important events like weddings. Similarly, in Indonesia, traditional performing arts, once deeply rooted in live communal experiences, have been significantly impacted by globalisation, mainly through the rise of electronic media (Sutiyono, 2019). As these arts have been commodified and transformed by industrialisation, traditional performances are now often condensed into media formats like Video Compact Disc (VCD) and Digital Versatile Disc (DVD), which people can watch at home rather than experience in person (Sutiyono, 2019). This shift reflects a broader trend where globalisation and market forces have altered how cultural practices are performed and perceived, often diminishing their cultural depth and communal significance.

While efforts to preserve and promote Lundayeh culture on a broader scale have had positive effects, they have also transformed the ways in which cultural identity is expressed. Traditional forms of emotional expression through music, such as the sorrowful tone of the *telingut* to convey grief, are gradually becoming less prominent as these practices are adapted for modern audiences. Once a profoundly personal and communal instrument of mourning, the

telingut has been reinterpreted for public performances aimed at contemporary audiences, altering its original symbolic meaning. Similarly, the growing influence of market forces, driven by globalisation and capitalist ideologies, has led to the adaptation of cultural expressions to suit commercial interests. As these practices are modified for modern settings, many traditional roles are redefined or performed in a staged manner, resulting in shifts in their original significance and roles within the community.

CONCLUSION

Development efforts in Malaysia have encouraged the expansion of market opportunities and introduced new technologies to rural areas in Sabah. These changes, combined with the influence of capitalist ideologies and state-led development initiatives, have significantly impacted the cultural identity of the Lundayeh community. The community, also under pressure from the strains of daily life and survival activities (Simeon et al., 2017), has had to adapt to these transformations. Although traditional elements like their dance music instruments persist, their roles and meanings have shifted, mainly due to the commercialisation of culture through tourism and government-backed cultural programmes.

With its demand for authentic cultural experiences, the tourism industry has placed traditional Lundayeh practices at the centre of commercialisation. While tourism has brought recognition and opportunities for cultural preservation, it has also shifted the original purposes of many cultural expressions. Lundayeh dance music instruments, once integral to daily life and used for communication, emotional expression, and community activities, have increasingly been repurposed for performances to satisfy tourist expectations. This shift has altered the instruments' significance, moving them away from traditional roles to fit a more marketable, commodified form.

Simultaneously, state cultural policies have contributed to the reconfiguration of Lundayeh's cultural identity. Although these policies aim to preserve traditional practices, they have also facilitated the commodification of Lundayeh culture, often prioritising its presentation in a way that aligns with national tourism goals. The focus on cultural heritage as a performance for tourists has led to a loss of the emotional and social roles that once connected the Lundayeh people to their traditions. The state's initiatives, while preserving certain cultural elements, have altered the way these elements are experienced and understood by the community.

Ultimately, the interplay between tourism commercialisation and state development policies has reshaped the Lundayeh cultural landscape. Traditional practices are now caught in a tension between cultural preservation and market-driven demands. The challenge for the Lundayeh community is how to maintain their cultural identity in a rapidly changing environment. While efforts by local organisations, such as the PKLS, continue to support cultural preservation, the ongoing influence of tourism and other state policies will determine the future of Lundayeh cultural practices in the face of globalisation and modernisation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Each member makes a unique contribution to the project, bringing their expertise and perspective to the research. These are the contributions each member brings to the project:

- Maine takes the lead in drafting and reviewing all sections, ensuring clarity and coherence throughout the work.
- Yusten focuses on the methodology and data analysis, providing a solid foundation for our findings.
- Ricky enriches our understanding by adding depth to the data on the Lundayeh community.
- Bayre explores the intersection of policy and commercialisation, adding a critical perspective on how these areas are intertwined.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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