

# Heritage and Risk: Rethinking Children's Participation in Dabuih Performances in Indonesia

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## Abstract

*Dabuih Anak-anak* in Nagari Taeh Bukik, West Sumatra, challenges the way we understand the relationship between cultural heritage, faith, and childhood. Unlike the usual *dabuih* performed by adult men, this variant places children aged 6–14 at the center of the performance. Based on ethnographic observation, interviews, and archival research, this study finds that for the local community, the performance is not merely a spectacle but a pathway to instill courage, humility, and religious values from an early age. Yet behind this pride lies a paradox: the very children celebrated as cultural heirs also bear physical risks and ethical dilemmas that spark ongoing debates. Some believe that the power of *zikr* and the guidance of the *khalifah* protect the children, while others argue that the practice is dangerous or inconsistent with Islamic teachings. These contesting perspectives reveal that tradition is not a fixed inheritance but a dynamic space of negotiation. The main contribution of this article is to demonstrate how intangible cultural heritage survives through children's participation, while simultaneously generating ethical debates in the global discourse on child rights and safety. The study underscores the importance of understanding heritage not only as a legacy of the past but as a living practice constantly negotiated between local pride and universal human ethics.

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## INTRODUCTION

Performance traditions continuously move in step with the dynamics of the societies that inherit them. They are never static, but live through processes of adaptation, negotiation, and reinterpretation across generations. In Indonesia, various ritual arts often intertwine spirituality, martial practice, and communal festivity, creating forms that are at once sacred and spectacular. One of the most prominent traditions is *dabuih*, a performance rooted in Islamic values and Minangkabau martial arts, characterized by acts of piercing the body with sharp objects while chanting *zikir*. For its practitioners, *dabuih* is not merely a spectacle, but an embodiment of faith, humility, and courage that springs from devotion.

The dynamic nature of performance traditions in the context of Indonesian ritual arts, particularly *dabuih*, reflects a rich interplay of spirituality, cultural identity, and communal involvement. *Dabuih* is not merely a performance; it engages deeply with Islamic values and embodies a unique martial heritage from the Minangkabau culture. This art form integrates spiritual practices, such as vocal invocations and physical manifestations of faith, thereby serving both as a spectacle and as a profound expression of belief and community ethos.

In recognizing that performance traditions are inherently fluid, Afriandi et al., (2023). emphasize the symbiotic relationship between cultural practices and societal dynamics, indicating that such traditions must continuously adapt to remain relevant within their social landscapes (Afriandi et al., 2023). This holds true for *dabuih*, where the execution of the art form involves acts of self-piercing, which symbolize not only physical endurance but also spiritual devotion. The *zikir* chants accompanying these performances reinforce the connection between the performers and their faith, illustrating how ritual acts imbue performers with courage and humility derived from their spiritual commitment (Afriandi et al., 2023).

The rituals associated with dabuih can be contextualized within broader Islamic practices, as outlined by Hashim, who noted a resurgence of Islamic traditions and their reinterpretations as a means to assert cultural identity amidst globalization (Hashim, 2009). This trend suggests that the performance of dabuih serves as both a means of cultural expression and a medium through which practitioners navigate their religious obligations amidst contemporary societal pressures.

Furthermore, the intersection of martial arts and spirituality in dabuih emphasizes the notion of performance as a site of negotiation between traditional values and modern interpretations. The ability of dabuih to incorporate elements of local customs while remaining anchored in Islamic teachings reflects an ongoing dialogue within Indonesian Islam, as further explored by Afriandi et al., 2023.

Dabuih practitioners view their art as an embodiment of their Islamic faith, which connects to the theme of Islamic management principles explored by Branine and Pollard. They argue that the principles guiding human actions and community engagement are deeply rooted in Islamic values, further marking the importance of cultural practices that align with faith (Branine & Pollard, 2010). In this sense, the performance of dabuih aligns not only with personal piety but also with broader community values that foster resilience and collective identity.

In Nagari Taeh Bukik, this tradition underwent a significant transformation in the 1970s when children began to be involved as the main performers. The phenomenon, later known as *Dabuih Anak-anak*, placed children aged six to fourteen at the center of performances that had previously been reserved for adult men. Today, the performance forms part of wedding ceremonies, circumcision rituals, and village festivals. The participation of children is regarded as a sign of cultural vitality, the continuity of knowledge, and a source of collective pride for the community. Parents view this involvement as a way of instilling courage, discipline, and religious values from an early age.

However, the presence of children in practices that carry physical risks raises profound ethical questions. How should their participation be understood? Is a tradition still legitimate if its survival depends on those who are most vulnerable? For some in the community, children's involvement reflects divine protection and the wisdom of ritual leaders. For others, the practice is seen as dangerous, outdated, or even contrary to religious teachings. These contrasting perspectives reveal that *Dabuih Anak-anak* is not merely a performance but also a site of moral and cultural debate, where the meanings of faith, tradition, and modernity converge.

*Dabuih Anak-anak* thus presents a dilemma between cultural pride and ethical responsibility. This tradition endures not because it is free of contradictions but because it is continuously negotiated by the community. This study seeks to examine *Dabuih Anak-anak* as an intangible cultural heritage that is rich in meaning yet fraught with risk, while also uncovering how the community negotiates its continuity at the crossroads of local pride and universal ethical demands.

Understanding the cultural pride associated with *Dabuih Anak-anak* involves recognizing how performance traditions serve as vessels for community identity. Research suggests that cultural pride can enhance commitment to community heritage and, by extension, specific performance arts like Dabuih, although specific studies on Dabuih were not found to support this directly. The significance of cultural pride in preserving traditions amid globalization and changing ethical standards has been well-documented in various cultural studies.

Moreover, the examination of how communities negotiate the continuation of their cultural practices while addressing ethical dilemmas resonates with findings by Strydom, who investigates the dynamics between collective cultural values and individual ethical responsibilities in leadership contexts. This concept underscores how community leaders and members might navigate the ethical considerations involved in the practice of Dabuih and reconcile local customs with broader societal expectations (Strydom, 2021).

The implications of ethical leadership and community validation in cultural practices are further highlighted by Wang and Long's research on communication strategies of intangible cultural heritage which explores how narratives shape public perception and community engagement, vital for preserving traditions like Dabuih (Wang & Long, 2023). As communities adapt their heritage within new contexts, the ethical aspects of such negotiations become increasingly relevant, promoting a dialogue on the values inherent in these rituals.

Additionally, Wasino et al. emphasize the ongoing transmission of cultural heritage through user-centered design, which contributes to making cultural discourse more accessible to diverse audiences and managing the communication of ethical values tied to heritage practices (Wasino et al., 2023). Thus, the community's engagement with Dabuih not only fosters local pride but also serves to educate and navigate the ethical complexities inherent in their practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on intangible cultural heritage emphasizes that living traditions are not preserved in static form but instead thrive through continuous negotiation and adaptation by the communities that sustain them. Performance traditions, in particular, play a central role in embodying cultural identity and communal pride, evolving as they respond to historical, social, and ethical contexts. While some studies, such as Wilastrina & Rianingrum (2022), focus on cultural expression in other domains, they underline the importance of balancing tradition with modern values—a balance equally relevant in the study of performance practices like dabuih.

Children's participation adds a critical dimension to this discourse. They are increasingly recognized not merely as passive inheritors but as active agents who shape cultural practices with personal meaning. Moore et al., (2017) highlight the importance of informed consent in research with children, framing their agency alongside their vulnerability. This perspective resonates with the role of children in performance traditions, where their involvement simultaneously ensures continuity and raises ethical questions about protection and responsibility within the community.

The ethical dilemmas inherent in involving children in risky cultural practices have also been examined in broader contexts. Naidoo (2012) stresses the centrality of consent for minors in research, a principle that parallels the need for ethical frameworks in traditional performances such as dabuih. This aligns with discussions in cultural heritage preservation about the moral responsibility of communities to safeguard younger members while sustaining inherited practices.

At the same time, cultural heritage has educational value, fostering identity and pride among participants. Adhikari & Mohapatra (2022) note that traditions embedded in education strengthen community ties and instill cultural pride, a point that illustrates the dual role of heritage as both an instrument of identity formation and a site of ethical negotiation.

The transformative nature of rituals further situates performance traditions like Dabuih Anak-anak at the intersection of identity, faith, and ethics. Yu (2023) demonstrates how intangible cultural heritage persists by adapting to contemporary contexts, while also acknowledging tensions between local sovereignty and global ethical standards, especially when children are involved. These tensions demand dialogue and negotiation as communities balance the preservation of identity with adherence to broader norms.

Children as cultural agents have also been explored in the work of Dodig et al., (2019), who argue for educational approaches that encourage children's exploration and interpretation, thereby deepening their engagement with cultural practices. Similarly, Liu et al., (2023) calls for critical attention to the vulnerabilities that accompany children's participation, advocating for safeguarding strategies that protect both cultural continuity and child well-being.

Finally, Wang & Long (2023) underscore the need for communication strategies in intangible cultural heritage that respect children's rights while honoring local customs. Their research highlights how adapting traditions within ethical frameworks ensures that cultural continuity does not compromise fundamental protections.

In sum, the literature suggests that Dabuih Anak-anak embodies the complex interplay between cultural transmission, children's agency, and ethical responsibility. It highlights how communities negotiate between local pride and global expectations, making it an important case for understanding how intangible cultural heritage can both survive and adapt in modern contexts.

## METHODS

The study employing a qualitative approach with an ethnographic orientation, particularly concerning cultural

performances like *Dabuih Anak-anak*, demonstrates the necessity of immersive research methodologies to grasp the intricate dynamics of embodied rituals and communal practices. Ethnography, characterized by its qualitative depth and reliance on participant observation, allows researchers to engage directly with communities, reflecting the complex interplay of social drama that is often missed in traditional observational studies (O'Connor & Baker, 2017; Winter & Lavis, 2019). Immersion within the cultural setting enables the researcher to attentively observe not only the performances but also the symbolic and emotional contexts that structure these practices (Winter & Lavis, 2019; Seim, 2021).

Fieldwork conducted over an extended period in Nagari Taeh Bukik, Lima Pulu Kota Regency, highlights the importance of participant observation, interviews, and document analysis as fundamental strategies in ethnographic research. Extended engagement in the community provides deeper insights into the practices and perspectives of the performers and the audience, fostering rapport and trust essential for ethical fieldwork (Murphy et al., 2014). This close engagement allows for collecting rich data that encapsulates the lived experiences of individuals as they interact with cultural rituals, aligning with the findings that ethnographic methods can significantly enhance our understanding of social phenomena (Rashid et al., 2015).

The comprehensive nature of ethnographic methodologies, including the recording of field notes that blend descriptive detail with reflexive insights, acknowledges the dual role of the researcher as both observer and participant. This reflexivity is crucial in understanding how the researcher's presence and experiences influence data collection and interpretation, reinforcing the notion that ethnography is not merely about observation but also consists of meaningful participation in the social environments being studied (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Mears, 2013). By documenting the nuances of events like weddings and communal circumcisions, the research captures the dynamic interplay of cultural expressions and the emotional responses they invoke, framing them within broader social contexts (Rashid et al., 2015; Mannay & Morgan, 2014).

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore *Dabuih Anak-anak* as both cultural practice and contested tradition. Several methods were combined to obtain comprehensive data: interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

### 1. Interviews

- a. Conducted with diverse informants, including children who performed *dabuih*, their parents, ritual leaders (*khalifah*), chant leaders (*tukang dikie*), and local community figures.
- b. Conversations with children revealed their emotions of pride, fear, and responsibility in performing actions that outsiders might consider dangerous.
- c. Parents shared motivations for encouraging their children's participation, often framing it as moral education and the transmission of family traditions.
- d. The *khalifah* explained the spiritual rationale for preparing ritual weapons and guiding children during performances.
- e. Reformist community members expressed critiques rooted in religious orthodoxy.
- f. These varied perspectives provided a multi-layered understanding of the practice.

### 2. Document Analysis

- a. Examination of local manuscripts, academic theses, cultural reports, and audiovisual recordings of *dabuih* performances.
- b. These materials offered historical context regarding the emergence of *Dabuih Anak-anak* in the 1970s and positioned it within broader trajectories of Minangkabau performance traditions.
- c. Video documentation enabled revisiting performance details such as gestures, rhythms, and audience interaction that might have been overlooked during live observation.

### 3. Data Analysis

- a. Thematic analysis was applied using an interpretive approach.
- b. Codes and themes emerged inductively from field notes and interview transcripts.
- c. Particular attention was given to recurring patterns such as ritual preparation, children's experiences, community pride, divergent critiques, and institutional recognition.

- d. These themes were interpreted using theoretical frameworks from performance studies, anthropology of ritual, heritage studies, and child rights discourse.
- e. The analysis aimed to balance emic (insider) perspectives of the community with etic (scholarly) perspectives from global academic debates.

#### 4. Ethical Considerations

- a. Informed consent was obtained from parents and guardians before involving children in interviews or documentation.
- b. During performances, the researcher refrained from actions that could endanger children or interfere with rituals.
- c. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process, recognizing that the researcher's outsider status might shape participants' responses or the framing of performances.
- d. These steps ensured that the study respected both the integrity of the tradition and the dignity of its practitioners.

## RESULTS

Fieldwork in Nagari Taeh Bukik revealed that *Dabuih Anak-anak* is not only an artistic performance but also a ritualized practice that occupies a central place in community life. The data collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis shed light on how the performance is prepared, enacted, and understood by those involved.

The origins of *Dabuih Anak-anak* can be traced back to the 1970s, when local leaders worried that the traditional *dabuih*, usually performed by adult men, was losing its appeal. The solution they found was to involve children. Boys between the ages of six and fourteen began performing the ritual, guided closely by *khalifah* (ritual leaders) and supported by their families. This adaptation transformed *dabuih* from a practice of adult endurance into a space where children became both performers and cultural heirs. The novelty of young bodies engaging in acts of piercing captured community interest, ensuring the continuity of the tradition.

The structure of the performance begins long before the children step into the public eye. Preparation is led by the *khalifah*, who consecrates the *anak debu* (sharp iron rods) using *tawa nan ompek*, a mixture of four kinds of leaves soaked in water. The rods are immersed, fumigated with incense, and blessed through prayer, a process believed to render them spiritually "asleep" and therefore safe. Children and ritual leaders then gather in a circle, reciting *zikr* together while the *rebana* sets the rhythm. The chanting is not background music but the very foundation of the performance: it ensures that performers remain humble and protected.

The children's movements are drawn from Minangkabau silat traditions. They step in patterns of *langkah tigo*, strike poses such as *maamuak*, and bow in gestures of *sambah*. These stylized sequences build anticipation until the climactic moment when the rods are pressed into the abdomen. Costumes are deliberately simple: black trousers, white shirts left open at the front, and a headscarf (*destar*). The openness of the clothing makes the act transparent, assuring audiences that there is no trickery.

The involvement of children is both the most celebrated and the most contested aspect of the performance. For many parents, encouraging their sons to participate is a way of cultivating courage, discipline, and religious devotion. Several parents explained that *dabuih* teaches humility: if the child becomes arrogant, the iron will hurt him; if he remembers God, he will be safe. The children themselves often expressed pride and excitement. One eleven-year-old performer remarked that he enjoyed showing his bravery in front of the village, while also admitting that he sometimes felt nervous before the piercing.

Community responses vary widely. For some, *Dabuih Anak-anak* is a source of identity and pride, performed during weddings, communal circumcisions, and festivals. It strengthens bonds within the village and serves as a living reminder of the community's cultural distinctiveness. For others, however, it is problematic. Reformist Muslims criticize the use of mantras and the idea of consecrated objects, arguing that such practices verge on superstition or even *shirk*. Some villagers simply worry about the physical safety of the children. These differing views highlight the contested nature of the tradition.

Institutional support has also shaped the practice. Local government and cultural agencies have featured *Dabuih Anak-anak* in festivals such as the Festival Botuang Payakumbuh and Alek Gadang. Through these events, the performance has moved from village ritual to regional cultural showcase. This recognition affirms its value but also shifts its meaning: staged for broader audiences, the performance sometimes emphasizes spectacle over ritual depth.

In sum, the findings reveal a practice that is deeply embedded in the fabric of community life, rich in symbolism and emotion, but also fraught with tension. *Dabuih Anak-anak* is both cherished and contested, celebrated as heritage yet questioned for its risks, embraced as cultural continuity yet debated for its religious legitimacy.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from Nagari Taeh Bukik highlight a practice that is both celebrated and contested, deeply meaningful to the community yet troubling from external perspectives. *Dabuih Anak-anak* is not only a performance but also a cultural arena where issues of heritage, faith, vulnerability, and ethics converge. In this section, I discuss the broader implications of the practice, drawing on theories of performance, ritual, and heritage while situating the case within global conversations about children's rights and cultural preservation.

### Performance as Restored Behavior

Richard Schechner's concept of performance as "restored behavior" provides a useful lens for understanding how *dabuih* evolved into *Dabuih Anak-anak*. Traditions, Schechner argues, do not survive by remaining unchanged; they persist through selective repetition, re-creation, and adaptation. By involving children, the people of Nagari Taeh Bukik ensured that *dabuih* remained relevant and captivating. The essence of the performance—its reliance on faith, humility, and ritual preparation—remains intact, but the form has shifted to secure continuity.

This restoration through adaptation reflects a conscious choice by community leaders. Rather than letting *dabuih* fade as younger generations turned away, they repositioned it as a practice of childhood, a way of training and transmitting values. In doing so, they reaffirmed the idea that performance is never merely art but also pedagogy, socialization, and identity work.

### Ritual, *Communitas*, and Collective Faith

Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*—the intense sense of togetherness that arises during rituals—is also evident in *Dabuih Anak-anak*. The chanting of *zikr*, the rhythmic beating of the *rebana*, and the dramatic climax of piercing create a collective emotional intensity. For participants and audiences alike, the performance is not simply a show but a shared affirmation of faith.

The role of the *khalifah* is central here. His authority ensures that rituals are correctly performed, that the *anak debu* is spiritually safe, and that children are shielded from harm. Audiences often describe the event as proof of divine power, reinforcing the belief that faith is stronger than sharp iron. Even those who come primarily for entertainment cannot easily dismiss the spiritual atmosphere, as the repetition of *la ilaha illallah* merges performance with worship.

Yet *communitas* is not without tension. Reformist critiques reveal that not everyone experiences the performance in the same way. For some, the chanting and piercing affirm unity; for others, they signify superstition. Turner reminds us that rituals can both unite and divide, depending on how their meanings are interpreted. In Taeh Bukik, *Dabuih Anak-anak* embodies both potentials: a binding force for some, a point of contestation for others.

### Children, Vulnerability, and Agency

Perhaps the most striking aspect of *Dabuih Anak-anak* is the central role of children. From a global perspective, their participation immediately raises questions of vulnerability and risk. The United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) stresses that children should be protected from practices that may endanger their health or development. By this measure, the sight of boys pressing sharp rods into their bodies appears alarming.

However, ethnographic encounters complicate this picture. The children themselves do not describe their involvement as victimization. Instead, they speak of pride, courage, and joy. Performing *dabuih* is, for them, both a test and an honor. One child explained that he felt nervous before the piercing, but the chanting of *zikr* calmed him, making him feel strong. Such testimonies show that children are not passive subjects but active agents who interpret and give meaning to their participation.

This duality—children as both vulnerable and agentive—illustrates the complexity of cultural practices involving youth. It cautions against simplistic judgments that either romanticize or condemn their involvement. A more nuanced approach acknowledges both their agency and their need for protection, recognizing that children live within cultural frameworks that shape how they understand risk, safety, and honor.

### **Heritage and Risk in Global Perspective**

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasizes the importance of intergenerational transmission. From this perspective, *Dabuih Anak-anak* represents a successful safeguarding strategy: children are directly involved, ensuring continuity of knowledge and practice. At the same time, globalization brings new pressures. Performances staged at regional festivals highlight the tradition as a symbol of West Sumatran identity, but they also risk commodifying it, turning ritual into spectacle.

Moreover, global ethical discourses complicate how *Dabuih Anak-anak* is perceived. International audiences may admire its uniqueness yet question its legitimacy when children are exposed to physical danger. The practice thus sits at the intersection of cultural sovereignty and universal human rights, embodying the broader dilemma of how to safeguard heritage while respecting global standards of safety and dignity.

This tension is not unique to Taeh Bukik. Across the world, communities struggle with how to adapt traditions that involve children—whether in dance, initiation rites, or labor—so that they remain meaningful without contravening ethical norms. *Dabuih Anak-anak* adds a distinctive voice to this conversation, showing how local pride and global scrutiny interact in shaping the future of heritage.

### **Faith, Rationality, and the Negotiation of Modernity**

Another dimension of the discussion concerns the interplay between faith and rationality. For believers, the absence of injury proves the efficacy of faith and the protective power of *zikr*. For skeptics, the act is irrational, even reckless. This divergence reflects the broader negotiation between tradition and modernity in contemporary Indonesia.

The debates surrounding *Dabuih Anak-anak* illustrate Turner's idea of social drama: moments when cultural practices become arenas for contesting values. In these debates, the meaning of childhood, the boundaries of religious orthodoxy, and the legitimacy of cultural practices are all at stake. Far from being a marginal performance, *Dabuih Anak-anak* becomes a focal point for larger questions about who has authority to define culture and faith in a modernizing society.

### **Institutionalization and Cultural Politics**

The institutional recognition of *Dabuih Anak-anak* by local governments and cultural agencies has both strengthened and transformed the practice. On the one hand, it affirms its value as a cultural asset, providing resources for training and opportunities for public recognition. On the other hand, it shifts the performance into the realm of cultural politics. When performed at festivals, *dabuih* is reframed as heritage for external audiences, often emphasizing spectacle over ritual.

This process of institutionalization mirrors global debates about authenticity and commodification. Heritage, once deeply rooted in community life, becomes a cultural product marketed for regional identity and

tourism. The children who perform thus embody not only tradition but also the politics of representation. They are simultaneously heirs of culture and ambassadors of heritage, carrying the burden of both pride and vulnerability.

### **Synthesis: Negotiating Heritage and Human Rights**

The discussion points to an unavoidable paradox. *Dabuih Anak-anak* is cherished as intangible cultural heritage, rich in meaning and pride, yet it exposes children to risk and invites ethical critique. It ensures cultural continuity but collides with global frameworks of child protection. It affirms faith for some while provoking skepticism in others.

Rather than resolving these contradictions, the case suggests that living traditions survive precisely because they negotiate them. Heritage is not static; it is dialogical. *Dabuih Anak-anak* endures because it mediates between past and present, local identity and global scrutiny, communal pride and universal ethics. Its persistence shows that the question is not whether traditions should change, but how they can adapt while remaining meaningful.

In this light, *Dabuih Anak-anak* contributes to broader global debates about heritage and human rights. It reminds us that safeguarding culture requires more than preservation; it requires dialogue—between generations, between communities and states, and between local traditions and international norms. The challenge is not to eliminate risk entirely but to recognize and address it in ways that honor both cultural sovereignty and the dignity of children.

Beyond its descriptive findings, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. **Theoretically**, it advances performance and heritage studies by demonstrating that children are not merely passive recipients of tradition but active cultural agents whose participation reshapes the meaning of ritual practices. By analyzing *Dabuih Anak-anak*, the study contributes to the anthropology of childhood, showing how agency and vulnerability intersect in embodied performances. It also enriches debates on intangible cultural heritage by foregrounding the ethical dimensions of transmission—an area often underexplored in UNESCO’s safeguarding framework.

**Practically**, the research provides insight for cultural policymakers, educators, and community leaders who seek to safeguard traditions while ensuring child protection. It shows that heritage cannot be preserved solely by documentation or institutionalization but must be sustained through dialogue with those who practice it, including children. The findings suggest the need for safeguarding strategies that balance respect for local cultural sovereignty with adherence to global human rights standards. In doing so, the study opens pathways for designing heritage policies that are both culturally grounded and ethically responsible.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study of *Dabuih Anak-anak* in Nagari Taeh Bukik demonstrates that cultural heritage is neither static nor uncontested. It lives through adaptation, and in this case, through the involvement of children in a ritual that blends faith, discipline, and physical risk. From an emic perspective, the practice is valued as a way of transmitting courage and religious devotion. From an etic perspective, however, it raises serious concerns about child safety, religious legitimacy, and ethical boundaries.

The key contribution of this study is its demonstration that children’s participation in risky performances like *dabuih* is not merely an anecdotal curiosity but a lens into the broader paradox of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the modern world. It shows how communities negotiate between continuity and critique, between safeguarding tradition and protecting the vulnerable.

Ultimately, *Dabuih Anak-anak* exemplifies the global dilemma of how to preserve cultural traditions in ways that remain meaningful to local communities while aligning with international norms of dignity and human rights. By documenting and analyzing this paradox, the article contributes to both performance studies and heritage debates, emphasizing that the survival of living traditions depends not on avoiding contradictions but on engaging with them openly.



These tensions make *Dabuih Anak-anak* a powerful case study for global debates on intangible cultural heritage and human rights. UNESCO's framework emphasizes the importance of intergenerational transmission, and in this sense the practice exemplifies successful safeguarding. At the same time, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for the protection of minors from harmful practices, casting doubt on the legitimacy of children's participation. The performance thus stands at the crossroads of two global imperatives: the preservation of culture and the protection of children.

Rather than seeking a definitive resolution, this article suggests that *Dabuih Anak-anak* should be understood as a living negotiation. It survives not because it eliminates contradictions but because it engages with them. It is precisely through this dialogue—between past and present, faith and critique, local sovereignty and global ethics—that the tradition remains meaningful. The challenge for communities, policymakers, and scholars is not to decide once and for all whether such practices should continue, but to foster conditions in which they can be carried forward responsibly, with respect both for cultural identity and for human dignity.

Ultimately, the case of *Dabuih Anak-anak* reminds us that safeguarding culture requires more than preservation. It requires care. It requires attention to the voices of children who perform, the concerns of parents and critics, and the ethical standards of a global community. Heritage is not only about objects or rituals; it is about people—their pride, their risks, their hopes. To honor this, we must approach traditions like *Dabuih Anak-anak* not with simplistic judgments but with openness, empathy, and critical dialogue. Only then can we ensure that cultural heritage continues to live, not as a relic of the past but as a meaningful practice for the present and future.

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