

# The Existence of *Akonipuk* and the Role of Christian Education in Educating the Hubula Community in Balim Valley Wamena Papua

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## Abstract

The Existence of *Akonipuk* and the Role of Christian Education in Educating the Hubula Community in Balim Valley Wamena Papua is a cultural study from the perspective of Christian Education. The effort is aimed at educating the community so they can make informed choices and attitudes regarding the cultural beliefs associated with *Akonipuk*. Indonesia, as one of the countries rich in culture and diversity, has brought its existence on the international stage as one of the largest multicultural countries in the world. This article highlights the presence of *Akonipuk* in the lives of the Hubala community in the Balim Valley of Wamena Papua and the perspective of Christian education regarding its existence in educating the community. It is hoped that through this study, the people in that area will have a correct understanding and be able to appropriately situate the cultural aspects related to *Akonipuk* within the culture of the Christian community. The research approach employed is descriptive qualitative.

*Email: Akonipuk, Christian Education, Hubula Community, Papua.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

Man and civilization, as well as culture, are inseparable; instead, they are bound together in the entity of human life and humanity. In their life as part of society, individuals are bound by prevailing traditions. A united community forms a nation with all its civilization. Indonesia is one part of world civilization, and Kusumohamidjojo (2000) states that Indonesia is a country consisting of a large number of ethnic groups, cultures, religions, and others, each of which is plural and at the same time diverse (heterogeny). The diversity of Indonesian society can be seen at least in two unique characteristics. The first one is horizontally, it is marked by the existence of social unity based on differences in ethnicity, religion, customs, as well as regional distinctions, and the second is vertically, it is characterized by noticeable vertical differences between the upper and lower layers of society (Nasikun, 2007).

The diversity of Indonesian society, as with societies worldwide in general, is an undeniable fact. Ihromi (2016), states that culture is a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs, as well as any capabilities and habits acquired by humans as a society. Certainly, such a condition is a richness in humanity but also poses a threat to unity. Someone needs to be aware of the existing diversity so that it can be managed in such a way as to become a strength in togetherness amid differences. This condition will be highly advantageous for everyone. On the contrary, if one fails to manage the existing differences, the path to division within a community

becomes evident. In essence, cultural diversity is a blessing in human life, and it must be well maintained.

The artistic and cultural expression of the Papua community are important because their existence is not only a characteristic of Papua's ethnic identity but fundamentally, cultural art is a part of the identity of the Papua community itself, and one of the cultural diversities worth knowing as part of Indonesian culture, especially in the Papua community, is *Akonipuk* (Rai S, 2021). The presence of *Akonipuk* in the traditions of the Papua community, especially the Hubula community in the Balim Valley of Wamena, Papua is deeply ingrained in the lives of these people, and it has been passed down through generations for a long time. In a simple understanding, *Akonipuk* refers to mummies, and in the Hubala language, mummies are called "*Akonipuk*," which means "dried human", and the existence of *Akonipuk* has attracted the attention of many parties to observe and study it (Kemendikbud, 2018).

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Mummies are found on almost every continent in the world, including America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and even the Pacific. While the more famous mummies come from Egypt, Indonesia itself also has mummies. As of now, known mummies are found in two regions Mumi Kaki More in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and the Suka Hubula Mummy in Papua (Kemendikbud, 2018). In addition, there are also mummies in Papua New Guinea (PNG), originating from the Angga tribe in Aseki, PNG (Kemendikbud, 2018). If mummies are generally understood as individuals who have passed away and are then embalmed, in Papua, mummies are not just limited to those who have already died. Instead, they refer to specific individuals considered to have a high social status, and when they pass away, their remains are preserved by drying. Mummies, known as *Akonipuk* in Papua society, are specifically associated with male war chiefs of the Dani tribe, and only they have the right to be preserved in the form of mummies (<https://tekno.tempoco>).

There is a very close relationship between *Akonipuk* and Christian education because through it, the community can be enlightened for a better understanding. Eli Tanya (1999), in "Gereja dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen," states that: "Christian Religious Education is the process of guiding each individual in deciding to live as a Christian". Characterized as a directive procedure, Christian Religious Education is delineated as an instructional and learning undertaking grounded in the Bible, focused on Christ, and reliant on the influence of the Holy Spirit. This process directs each individual in their developmental journey, encompassing modern pedagogy aimed at comprehending and embracing God's design and intentions through Christ in all facets of life. Furthermore, it empowers individuals for impactful service, with Christ as the preeminent instructor, in accordance with the directive to cultivate mature disciples (Graendorf, 1988). Bear in mind that optimally, the incorporation of Christian Religious Education transcends the mere cultivation of intellectual acumen through the mastery of diverse sciences and technologies. Rather, it constitutes a discerning endeavor to mold individuals imbued with unwavering faith in Christ,

guiding their thoughts and actions in accordance with the tenets of the Christian faith (Jura, 2020).

### C. METHOD

The type of research in the study on the existence of Akonipuk and the role of Christian education in educating the Hubula community in the Balim Valley of Wamena, Papua, is qualitative, where researchers obtain descriptive data to examine the existing research topic. The researcher utilizes literature data and conducts interviews with respondents to obtain the intended research data. In conducting interviews, the author selects respondents who truly understand the values of the Hubula community in the Balim Valley, namely individuals with lineage ties to families, prominent figures in the Papua Balim community, and pastors from the first pioneering church in the Balim Valley. Additionally, to support this writing, literature materials such as books and journals are also used. The data obtained from these sources are then elaborated by the author.

### D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Man, with all his life activities, has an impact not only on himself but also on the people around him. This influence then builds traditions that are passed down through generations. Because these traditions are carried out over generations with various dynamic processes involved, they then become ingrained cultures. These cultures then become a part of human life. Interestingly, there are some cultures considered unique, attracting the attention of many people for a more in-depth study.

One unique culture can be found among the Hubula community. It involves mummies, known as *Akonipuk* in the Hubula language. Akonipuk Wim Mintok Mabel is located in the village of Yiwika, Kurulu District. The Hubula community in the Balim Valley of Wamena refers to themselves as Hubula people or Balim people, and in their native language, they are called "*akhuni Palim meke*" (Lieshout, 2009). The Hubula community lives in the Balim Valley of Wamena, which is now part of the Papua Mountains Province.

#### **The Existence of Akonipuk in the Life of the Hubala Papua Community**

The name "Papua" was given by Portuguese sailors who first saw the island in 1511. The island was named "ilhas dos papuas," meaning that it was inhabited by people with fine hair. Later, when Dutch sailors entered the island, they referred to it as New Guinea because of the dark skin of the Papuan people, reminding them of the people of Guinea in Africa (Rai S, 2021). Papua then changed its name to Irian Barat when it came under the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia, and later it was renamed Irian Jaya. During the administration of Abdulrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), the name Papua was reintroduced (Rai S, 2021). Certainly, the change of name provides a clear identity for the people in that region. So, the name Papua, at least, gives a more distinct identity to the residents of that area. Although, with the development, there

are several regional divisions (provinces), the name Papua remains an integral part of the lives of the Papuan people.

Baliem Valley is one of the regions that possesses interesting cultural richness to be observed. This article highlights cultural elements of the local community, namely mummies. It is worth noting that the Baliem Valley is located in the Jayawijaya Mountains, Papua, at an altitude of around 1600 meters above sea level, and the people inhabiting the Baliem Valley belong to the Hubula tribe. In this valley, there are numerous villages, and one city, namely Wamena (el Han, 2017). As mentioned above, one of the cultural practices in the region that has been preserved through generations is mummification. Among the Hubula people, this cultural practice is known as *Akonipuk*, as stated by Frans Lieshout in "Sejarah Katolik di Lembah Balim-Papua," affirming that: "One of the unique cultures that can be found in the Hubala community in Wamena, Papua, is the mummy known as *Akonipuk* in the Hubala language. *Akonipuk* Wim Mintok Mabel is located in the village of Yiwika, Kurulu." The Hubala community in the Balim Valley of Wamena, Papua, refers to themselves as Hubala people or Balim people. In their native language, they are called "Akhuni Palim Meke" (Lieshout, 2009).

*Akonipuk* that exists in the midst of the Hubula community is named Wim Mintok Mabel. It is important to note that "Wim" means chief, "Mintok" means standing in front/war, and "Mabel" is his original name during his lifetime. According to history, Wim Mintok Mabel was the tribal chief and war commander of the Hubula tribe, who commanded considerable respect during his life. Before his death, he instructed his family to preserve his body with the goal that his children and grandchildren would receive prosperity, fertility, and a livelihood from generation to generation throughout the ages (Yanuaris Mabel, 2023). Epistemologically, "*akonipuk*" originates from various local languages. Some refer to it as "*akhoni werelogo*," and others as "*akonipuk*". "*Akoni*" means human/person, while "*puk*" means dry. Therefore, "*akonipuk*" can be interpreted as a human/person who is dried. In the diversity of languages used, "*akonipuk*" literally represents a form of respect for ancestors (Yanuaris Mabel, 2023). *Wim Mintok Mabel* was a war commander or a skilled warrior known as "*ap kain*" in the local language. Another term for "*ap kain*" is "*ap kok*," which means a big (singular) man, and another term is "*ap kaintek*," which means big men (plural). These two synonymous terms apply at every level of social-political community (Alua, 2005). An individual or a group with greater and wider influence at the sub-confederation and confederation levels of war is called "*ap metek meke*" or "*ap kain metek meke*," which literally means a person who usually stands, implying a war commander. Similarly, "*ap kok metek meke*" literally means a big man who usually stands, implying a big man war commander. At the level of each war alliance, they are referred to as "*ap kain etaga pogot*" (meaning men whose names reach the sky) or "*ap kaintek inetaga pogot*" (meaning big men whose names reach the sky) or "*ap koktek inetaga pogot*" (big men whose names reach the sky). These "*ap kaintek inetaga pogot*" are always understood as political leaders or war commanders at the confederation and war alliance levels (Yanuaris Mabel, 2023). The Hubula

community dries and preserves *akonipuk* using traditional techniques without the assistance of chemical substances. After Wim Mintok Mabel passed away, his body was positioned in a sitting posture and wrapped with banana leaves. The *akonipuk* is stored in a *Pilamo* (men's house and a place for storing *kaneke*, traditional heirloom objects of the clan) (Salipu, 2020). To preserve the *akonipuk*, a fire is lit inside the men's house (*Pilamo*). This serves the purpose of preventing the *akonipuk* from becoming damp and damaged while also providing warmth for the men residing in the *pilamo* (Echon Daby, 2023). The Hubula community preserves the existence of *Akonipuk* Wim Mintok Mabel as a form of respect for their ancestors and to safeguard the authenticity of their culture, which will have a lasting impact from generation to generation. This, of course, is inseparable from the theological considerations embedded within it.

### **Christian Education Perspective on the Existence of *Akonipuk* in Educating the Hubula Papua Community**

Christianity entered the land of Papua in 1888 with the arrival of Protestant missionaries Carl Ottow and John Geissler on Mansinam Island, near Manokwari. From this location, they then extended their efforts to the Northern Papua region (Drooglever, 2010). Papua is inhabited by more than 250 tribes residing in mountainous areas, valleys, and along the coast. Each tribe has different customs, languages, and other unique aspects according to their respective cultures. Generally, they live in groups and are scattered in mountainous regions, valleys, and along the coast. However, the cultural (customary) regions of Papua can be divided into seven (7), namely: the Mamta (Mambramo Tabi), Seireri, La Pago, Me Pago, and Anim Ha customary regions. These five customary regions are located in the Papua Province, while the other two customary regions are Domberei and Memberei, situated in the West Papua Province (Rai S, 2021).

The relationship between the Papua community and Christianity has been tightly woven, and this connection has even made Christianity an integral part of the daily life of the Papua community. Simeon Itlay and Benny Hilapok state that, "The personality of the Balim people, as seen in the life of their ethnic group, is a complex whole that includes characteristic spiritual traits that are immanent, pragmatic intelligence, simple skills, an inner nature, and a mentality that is integrated with their environment (the universe, cosmic, and spiritual realms), with symbolic behavior based on the beliefs and principles of their ethnic group" (Itlay & Hilapok, 1994). To prevent deviation from the noble cultural values, the Hubula community in Papua requires enlightenment regarding the presence of *Akunipuk* among them. Besides preserving the purity of Christian faith, the existence of *Akunipuk* in the midst of the Hubula community needs to be explained through proper and responsible Christian education.

Education is believed to bring enlightenment to the lives of the community and is considered capable of building a better civilization in developing humanity (Jura, 2020). Education is the act or process of acquiring knowledge, and Christian education

is based on the Bible as the Word of God, with Jesus Christ as the exemplary figure within it (Greene, 1998). Through Christian education, it is hoped that learners will be enlightened and even come to an understanding of Christ (Jura, 2020). Christian education, in general aspects, at first glance, is not significantly different from other general education because it involves similar elements: processes, individuals, and clear objectives (Jura, 2020). For believers, the Bible is the foundational source for Christian teachings and is authoritative for all truths and instruction (2 Timothy 3:16). While the Bible may not provide comprehensive factual knowledge on every subject taught in schools, the framework of Christian education is derived from this book (Graham, 2003). While general education follows universal principles because of its universal processes, individuals, and objectives, there is a significant difference in Christian Religious Education where matters of faith play a crucial role. Hence, the focal point lies in placing importance on faith in Jesus Christ, the Church, and the Bible, and ethical aspects related to Christianity covers the core teachings within Christian education (Jura, 2020).

Church teaching for every congregation member is crucial. So far, educational activities have mostly been focused on Sunday School, yet every church member has the right to receive faith guidance related to the life issues they face. In the context of Hubula, teaching Christian faith needs to be delivered in connection with the existence of *Akonipuk*. The Hubula community has its own characteristics and uniqueness, requiring a specific approach through church services. The presence of *Akonipuk* in the midst of the Hubula community, on the one hand, is a local cultural richness, but on the other hand, it could pose a serious threat to Christian faith. Numberi states: "The essence of the existence of Hubala men and women in daily life is to form a communal life. Togetherness is a cultural value organized within various patterns of life within the Hubula tribe. This value represents the depth of the ancestral way of life passed down through generations via systems of knowledge, perspectives on life, and various mythologies (naruekul myths)" (Numberi, 2018). If *Akunipuk* becomes part of the belief of the Hubula community, then what the church needs to do is to educate them so that it is not turned into an idol or associated with occultism. Singgih, in *Reformasi dan Transformasi Pelayanan Gereja Menyongsong Abad ke-21*, emphasizes that: "There are three tasks and responsibilities of the church, namely: Koinonia (institutional), Marturia (ritual), and Diakonia (ethical). These aspects constitute a continuous balance that must be maintained because if the church only emphasizes institutional and ritual aspects, the church exists only for itself. If service is considered only a ritual or a tool to assist the church organization, then the service will never become a social service reaching the wider community" (Singgih, 1997). The problem is, in a study it is mentioned that some church members feel that their needs are not met in the guidance (Harton, 1986). Christian education in the field of church education can actively play a role in teaching church members in relation to the existence of *Akunipuk* in the Hubula community Papua. The core of the teaching is to educate Christian congregations in Hubula Papua, to accept *Akunipuk* as a cultural wealth with positive

values. Thus, the existence of *Akunipuk* in this community will persist without compromising the absolute values of Christian faith.

## E. CONCLUSION

*Akonipuk* is someone who has passed away, and due to their position and influence in the community, their body is preserved through a specific technique to commemorate them. *Akonipuk* is another term for mummies in the Hubula community in the Baliem Valley, Wamena, Papua. The existence of *Akunipuk*, on one hand, is a cultural richness for the Hubula community. However, if not carefully considered, it can pose a threat to Christianity in the region. The church should actively engage through Christian education to explain *Akunipuk* so that the Hubula community does not fall into occultic elements associated with them. Through Christian education, the church needs to explain to the Hubula community that the existence of *Akunipuk* is something good from a cultural perspective, where cultural values can be applied to the community. However, caution is needed in understanding and practicing the existence of *Akunipuk* in the midst of the Hubula community in Papua.

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