

Ritual and Reform: Social Transformation through Ajheru' Aghung in Kayumas Coffee Plantation Community (2019–2023), Situbondo-Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research is a study of social history aimed at examining the transformation of the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual in Kayumas Village, Situbondo, East Java, Indonesia, from a sacred practice into a means of promoting cultural and economic values. Initially conducted in secrecy as a form of gratitude and request for abundant coffee harvests, since 2019, the village government has introduced this ritual openly as part of the promotion of Arabica coffee from Kayumas, now a local flagship commodity. The study employs historical methods, including heuristic stages, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, with an approach combining cultural sociology and structural functionalism theory. Data were gathered through literature studies, in-depth interviews with community leaders, and observations of ritual practices. This approach allows for tracing the transformation of ritual functions and their impact on the village's social structure. Findings indicate that the ritual transformation not only reinforces the community's cultural identity but also creates new opportunities for economic activities through culturally-based tourism. The Ajheru' Aghung Ritual has become a collective symbol of the community as a producer of quality coffee, demonstrating cultural adaptation to modernity while retaining its traditional significance.

Key words: Ajheru' Aghung ritual; social history; cultural transformation; arabica coffee.

1 INTRODUCTION

Ritual ceremonies have become an integral part of human life in various parts of the world (Koentjaraningrat, 2002; Bell, 1997). As manifestations of belief, tradition, and culture, rituals serve not only as means to express spirituality but also play a crucial role in profane aspects (Eliade, 1987; Alcaín, 2020), such as promoting a region within a country. In modern contexts, rituals are often revived or modified to attract tourists and strengthen the cultural identity of a region (Alamineh et al., 2023; Aldyan, 2020; Asholiha et al., 2023; Astina et al., 2021; Gorda et al., 2023). Through these activities, a region can enhance its profile nationally and internationally, leading to significant economic, social, and cultural impacts (Izzah et al., 2021; Gorda et al., 2023).

Rituals can be defined as a series of actions or ceremonies performed based on customs, beliefs, or specific religious teachings (Koentjaraningrat, 2002; Bell, 1997). In various societies, rituals often involve elements such as dance, music, offerings, prayers, and fasting (Geertz, 1975; Bell, 1997; Eliade, 1987; Izzah et al., 2022b). While many rituals are rooted in religious beliefs, some function in the profane realm, relating to everyday activities not directly associated with sacred or spiritual aspects. These profane rituals, often used for regional promotion, blend local cultural elements and

traditions with economic and tourism interests. In this regard, rituals not only symbolize cultural identity but also serve as effective tools in regional marketing strategies (Tillonen, 2021; Tsai, 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2021).

Across the globe, rituals have been utilized to introduce and promote specific regions. For instance, in Japan, the Gion Matsuri festival in Kyoto, originally a religious ritual, has now become a tourist attraction drawing thousands of visitors annually (Porcu, 2022; Teeuwen, 2021; Teeuwen, 2023; Tillonen, 2021; Edelheim & Tillonen, 2022). Similarly, in India, the Holi festival celebrating the arrival of spring serves not only as a religious celebration but also as an international tourist attraction showcasing Indian culture to the world (Gaikwad et al., 2020). In Bulgaria, religious tourism in Bulgarian monasteries, initially pilgrimage for physical and mental healing and closeness to God, has become more profane and less devoted to pure worship (Kostadinova, 2021). In Indonesia, similar examples can be seen in various cultural festivals across different regions, such as the Lake Toba Festival in North Sumatra (Nainggolan, Fitriyah, & Supratiwi, 2024), the commodification of the sacred *Tektekan Calonarang* dance in Puri Anyar Kerambitan, Bali, featuring the sacred *barong* and *rangda* for tourism (Sariada et al., 2019), and the *Ogoh-Ogoh* parade in Bali (Prianta et al., 2024). These events often blur the lines between sacred and profane status when presented to tourists.

This study explores the transformation of the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual in Kayumas Village from a sacred practice into a medium for cultural promotion. Although similar studies have been conducted in various parts of the world, most have yet to delve deeply into the cultural realities of the communities that perform such rituals. This research offers a novel perspective by highlighting the Madurese migrant community, which maintains a distinctive social structure rooted in hierarchical obedience to four key figures: *Buppa'* (father), *Babbu'* (mother), *Ghuru* (teacher), and *Rato* (government leader) (Izzah, 2015). The community's obedience to the village head as a representation of *Rato* explains their acceptance of the ritual's transformation into a public event in 2019.

The previously sacred ritual is now held openly and features performances such as the *Molong Kopi* Dance, aimed at attracting tourists to the village, whose residents are predominantly coffee farmers. This research was conducted in Kayumas Village, Arjasa Sub-district, Situbondo, encompassing eight hamlets from 2019 to 2023. The study focuses on two main questions: the village head's rationale for promoting the ritual and the social changes it has triggered within the community.

This study is situated within the field of social history, emphasizing the analysis of grassroots social dynamics (Kartodirdjo et al., 2013). In line with Lauer's (2003) perspective, social change can occur when driven by initiatives from local power structures. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution to understanding the interaction between local culture, power, and community-based social transformation.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopts a cultural sociology approach as proposed by Alexander (2008), which views culture as an active force in shaping social structures and dynamics. This approach is relevant for understanding the changing cultural meanings within the context of the *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual. To analyze its impact on social equilibrium, the theory of structural functionalism (Craib, 1986) is employed, which helps assess whether the transformation of the ritual from sacred to profane fosters harmony or generates dysfunction within the community of Kayumas Village.

As a historical study, this research uses the historical method (Schrag, 2021), which consists of four stages: heuristics (source collection), criticism (source validity assessment), interpretation (meaning analysis), and historiography (historical narrative construction). This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural changes that have occurred between 2019 and 2023.

2.1 Heuristics (the Collection of Historical Sources)

The initial step in this research was the heuristic phase, which involved collecting relevant sources following the formulation of the research problem. The sources examined include historical documents on the formation of Kayumas Village during the colonial period, as well as literature on the transformation of rituals from sacred to profane, both in Indonesia and in various other countries. In addition to written sources, this study also relies on oral sources through in-depth interviews with ritual practitioners and local tradition bearers who possess knowledge of the history and implementation of the *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual, including coffee farmer groups and community leaders.

Data were also obtained through participant observation, both during the ritual's execution and in the practice sessions of the *Molong Kopi* Dance, which has now been adopted as part of the village's cultural identity. The researcher was actively involved in various community activities, including farmer group meetings and school-based art programs, to capture the shifting meanings of the ritual and the younger generation's perceptions of the tradition.

To complement the data, the researcher also reviewed literature on social history, cultural anthropology, and ritual theory, along with scholarly works from reputable international journals discussing cultural transformation in global contexts. Various theoretical approaches, such as structural functionalism and cultural sociology, were used to interpret the data and reinforce this study's position within the framework of social history.

2.2 Source Critics

Following the heuristic phase, the next step in the historical method is source criticism, which involves evaluating the authenticity, validity, and relevance of the collected data (Sjamsuddin, 1996). This critical assessment is conducted simultaneously with source collection to ensure that only authentic and credible data are used in constructing the historical narrative. This evaluation is essential to ensure that the interpretation of historical events is based on reliable and scientifically accountable evidence.

2.3 Interpretation

The subsequent stage is interpretation, which entails analyzing and contextually understanding the critically assessed data. In this phase, the researcher connects historical facts both chronologically and contextually (Kuntowijoyo, 2013) to uncover the underlying meanings behind the transformation of the *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual. Interpretation is carried out by considering the village's social dynamics, cultural values, and structural changes that have influenced the community's reinterpretation of the ritual.

2.4 Historiography

The final stage is historiography. This stage is the construction of a historical narrative based on the results of the interpretation. At this stage, the analyzed facts are composed into a coherent, logical, and scientifically grounded account. This narrative not only records the historical transformation but also reflects the researcher's critical stance and analytical perspective on the phenomenon under study. In the context of this research, historiography systematically presents how the transformation of the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual into a cultural promotional instrument has contributed to social change within the coffee-farming community of Kayumas Village between 2019 and 2023.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Kayumas Village in 1900: A Case Study of Dutch Colonial Spatial Planning in Indonesia

During the Dutch Colonial Government era, specifically in 1883, Kayumas Village was a parcel of land called *Persil Kajoemaas*, located in the Sumberwaru District, Afdeling Panarukan, Besuki Residency. This parcel held a unique appeal, but only for those with a business interest, as its potential was not immediately visible to everyone (Izzah et al., 2022a). This was especially evident when the Dutch Colonial Government opened up the area extensively to investors for leasing land, whether controlled by the Dutch government or owned by local residents. The Dutch Colonial Government provided guarantees through the Agrarische Wet and Agrarische Besluit regulations, which were enacted in 1870, offering legal protection to investors leasing land in the Dutch East Indies (the name for Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period). This security attracted European investors to invest in Java, particularly in large plantation businesses such as coffee, sugarcane, tea, rubber, and tobacco. These tropical products were in high demand in Europe between 1870 and 1929.

H.H. van Kol and his colleague J.C. Egter van Wissekerke, both Dutch nationals, took advantage of this opportunity by leasing vacant land in Persil Kajoemaas (Kayumas), Besuki Residency (Van Heekeren & Co., 1933). The leasehold (*erfpacht*) was granted to H.H. van Kol by a decree from the Governor-General on March 31, 1883, for a period of 75 years, formalized with deed No. 22 on April 19, 1883, before the Resident of Besuki. This 504-bau plot of land was used to establish a coffee plantation, which consisted of eight Afdelings: 1) Pondok; 2) Raja; 3) Sabrang; 4) Kidang; 5) Kidul; 6) Taman; 7) Kendeng; and 8) Sukmailang. On August 9, 1883, H.H. van Kol founded a coffee plantation company called NV “Cultuur Maatschappij Kajoemaas,” which was

formalized by notary A.I. Snouck Hurgronje in Surabaya with an initial capital of f 80,000, divided into four shares worth f 20,000 each.

Dutch investors chose the vacant land in Persil Kajoemaas (Kayumas) after careful calculations regarding the potential profits that could be obtained. Situated at an altitude of 760-1550 meters above sea level, Persil Kajoemaas (Kayumas) was highly suitable for the cultivation of Arabica coffee, which at that time was a premium commodity in Europe. The uninhabited land offered an advantage to investors, as it minimized the risk of conflicts that could arise if the land were owned by densely populated indigenous communities. Additionally, the geographical and climatic conditions of Persil Kajoemaas (Kayumas), located in a remote area far from the hustle and bustle, with narrow winding roads surrounded by ravines and towering rocky cliffs, provided a higher level of security for the plantation. This environment also offered a cool and comfortable atmosphere that was attractive to European investors.

The success of NV “Cultuur Maatschappij Kajoemaas” in the Persil Kajoemaas (Kayumas) area was evidenced by the growth of the coffee plantation there. Its coffee products became well-known in Europe under the name “Java Koffie-Land Kajoemaas.” To meet the large labor demand, the Dutch Colonial Government brought in workers from Madura through the Panarukan Port. The laborers worked on land preparation, coffee planting, crop maintenance, and coffee harvesting. Over time, around 1900, Kayumas Village was established, inhabited by migrant workers from Madura. Gradually, these migrant workers from Madura began cultivating coffee on the land they occupied. From there, a migrant culture developed, involving the cultivation of coffee plantations, marked by the performance of the *Ajheru'* Ritual, a ritual ceremony conducted in their coffee plantations. The *Ajheru'* Ritual signifies a thanksgiving ceremony performed by individuals before the harvest. The *Ajheru'* Ritual begins with a prayer in Arabic led by a kyai or elder of Kayumas Village. The prayer's essence is to ask God to protect the upcoming harvest from failure and to bless it with abundance and prosperity. This prayer became an integral part of their lives, as an expression of gratitude and a plea for protection so that all their efforts would be granted favor and blessings, ensuring that the harvest would not only meet daily needs but also bring goodness and welfare to their families. After the prayer led by the kyai or elder, the next event is a communal meal featuring tumpeng (a cone-shaped rice dish) accompanied by roast chicken (grilled and seasoned with spices), ketupat (rice cooked in woven palm leaves), lepet (a sticky rice cake mixed with grated young coconut and wrapped in palm leaves), and serabi. Usually, two chickens are prepared; one is eaten together, while the other is buried in their garden. This ritual has been preserved until 2023.

3.2 The Existence of Kayumas Village from 1900 to 2023

Kayumas Village has undergone rapid development from 1900 to 2023. The settlement in this village has become increasingly dense with houses occupied by their descendants, as well as the presence of a Junior High School and a Village Office. This density is due to the tradition of ancestors building homes for their descendants near their original homes. The most noticeable change is the paving of the road leading to the “Kayumas Coffee Processing Factory,” a legacy of H.H. van Kol, which is now under the management of PT. Perkebunan Nusantara XII (PTPN XII). Kayumas Village remains unique and exotic. The journey to this village offers an exotic view of teak trees. In July, during the dry season, the scenery along the paved road features teak trees shedding their leaves to survive the dry season. This view is very beautiful and captivating, reminiscent of the beauty of Persil Kayumas during the Dutch colonial era in 1900.

As you get closer to Kayumas Village, located at an altitude of 760 to 1,550 meters above sea level, the journey becomes more challenging and adrenaline-pumping. The winding, uphill, and narrow road, with deep ravines and towering rock cliffs around it, makes each step more thrilling. The view is often blocked by rock formations when rounding bends, so drivers frequently honk to alert oncoming vehicles.

Despite the challenging road conditions, the writer remained eager to reach Kayumas Village. Upon arrival, the exotic beauty of Kayumas Village becomes more apparent, especially with the presence of the “Kayumas Coffee Processing Factory,” a legacy of H.H. van Kol, now under the management of PT. Perkebunan Nusantara XII (PTPN XII), which remains solid and unchanged in its structure. The researcher’s visit in 2019 coincided with the Arabica Coffee harvest season, adding to the beauty of the scenery. The Kayumas Plantation, managed by PTPN XII, also provides inspiration and education to the people of Kayumas Village to be more active in planting Arabica Coffee, which commands a higher price than other types of coffee.

Kayumas Village, located in Arjasa Sub-district, Situbondo Regency (see Figure 1), is the largest and highest-altitude village in the sub-district, situated between 760 and 1,550 meters above sea level. The village lies approximately 26 kilometers from the sub-district center and 41 kilometers from the Situbondo Regency capital. Its administrative area comprises 8 hamlets, 12 neighborhood units (RW), and 39 community units (RT), sharing borders with several villages in the Jangkar and Asembagus sub-districts, as well as Bondowoso Regency (BPS Situbondo, 2018). The primary livelihood of the residents is the cultivation of Arabica coffee, a practice largely passed down through generations. Since the Reform

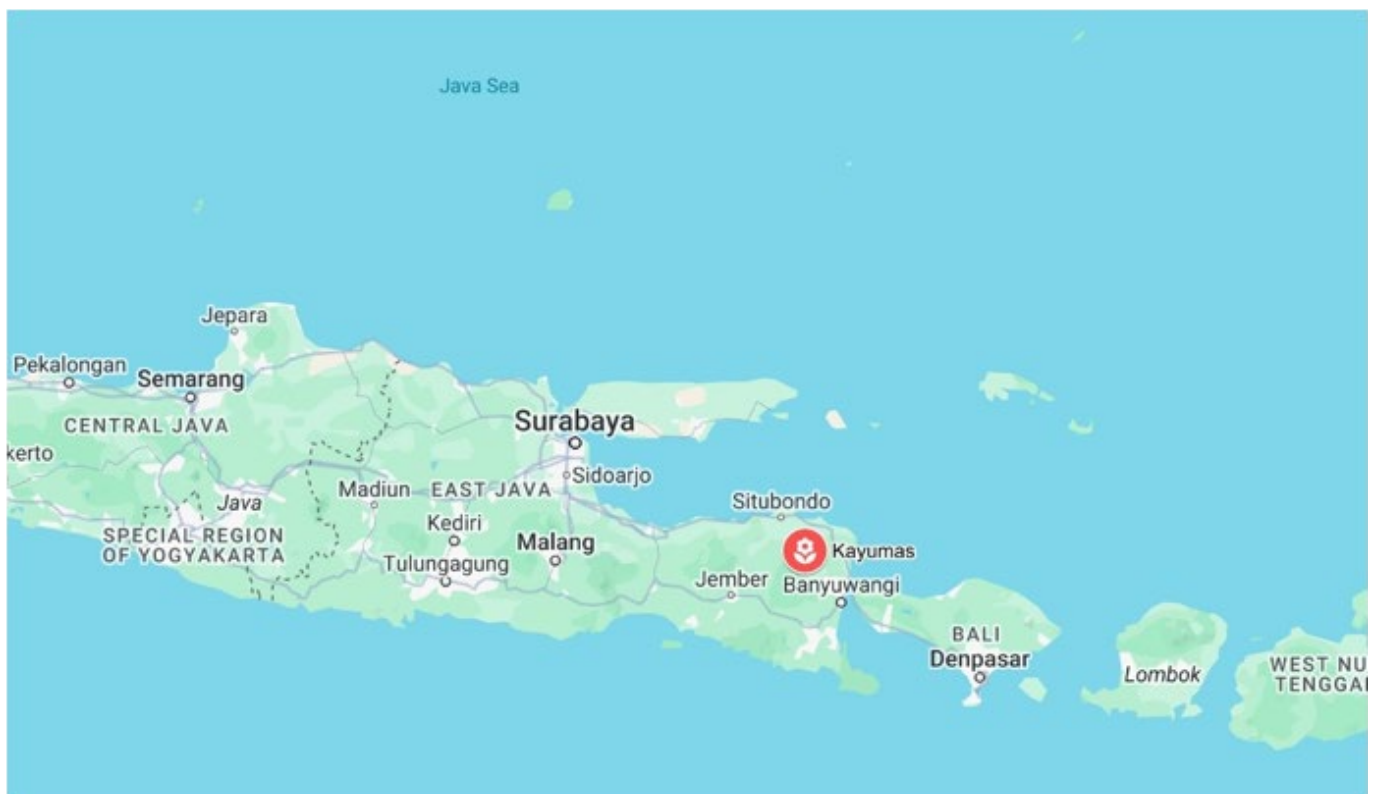


Figure 1: Kayumas Village, Arjasa District, Situbondo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, obtained from Google Maps. The location sets nearby the region of Situbondo, Jember, and Banyuwangi

Era in 1998, the community has gained access to manage forest land through an intercropping system in collaboration with Perhutani, with profit-sharing of 70% for farmers and 30% for Perhutani (State Forestry Public Company). This system has significantly contributed to improving the farmers' welfare (Izzah et al., 2023b).

The population and number of households in Kayumas Village have experienced fluctuations over the past six years (see Figure 2). In general, there has been no significant surge in growth, but there is a dynamic that reflects population stability on a local scale. Changes in population can be attributed to various factors, such as seasonal labor migration, birth and death rates, and patterns of urbanization commonly found in rural areas. Meanwhile, the trend in the number of households, which generally aligns with population dynamics, indicates that household structures in Kayumas Village tend to be stable, with residential patterns still dominated by nuclear families. This phenomenon is important to understand within the community's social and economic context.

The stability in the number of households may reflect consistency in patterns of land ownership, including smallholder coffee farming, which is the village's leading commodity. It also influences the community's participatory capacity in cultural and economic activities, including the implementation and promotion of the *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual. Therefore, this demographic data supports the argument that Kayumas Village has a relatively strong social foundation to support cultural transformation as a tool for village promotion. The stability of the population and households provides a solid basis for the sustainability of community-based programs,

including efforts to preserve traditions and strengthen local identity through social history studies.

3.3 *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual as a Spiritual Expression: Individual and Group Perspectives from 1900 to 2023

According to Koentjaraningrat (2002), a ritual is a form of action performed in a specific manner, following the procedures established within a particular society, and typically serves a specific purpose related to beliefs and cultural values. In Koentjaraningrat's view, rituals are an essential part of cultural systems that convey meaning and maintain the continuity of norms and traditions within a community. In Kayumas Village, traditions and beliefs are still deeply ingrained in daily life. One of the traditions that has been maintained and preserved is the *Ajheru' Ritual*, which is usually performed before the coffee harvest or the harvest of other crops (such as ginger, corn, etc.). This ritual not only serves to preserve culture but also reflects the deep-seated belief of the Kayumas community in maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator. This tradition, which began during the Dutch Colonial period around 1900, has continued to be upheld until 2023.

Ajheru' Ritual refers to the ritual conducted individually by coffee farmers since 1900, while *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual refers to rituals performed by farmer groups or coalitions of farmer groups, which began in 2010 after the formation of these groups. This ritual is a time-honored practice where coffee farmers sanctify their fields by performing the ritual.

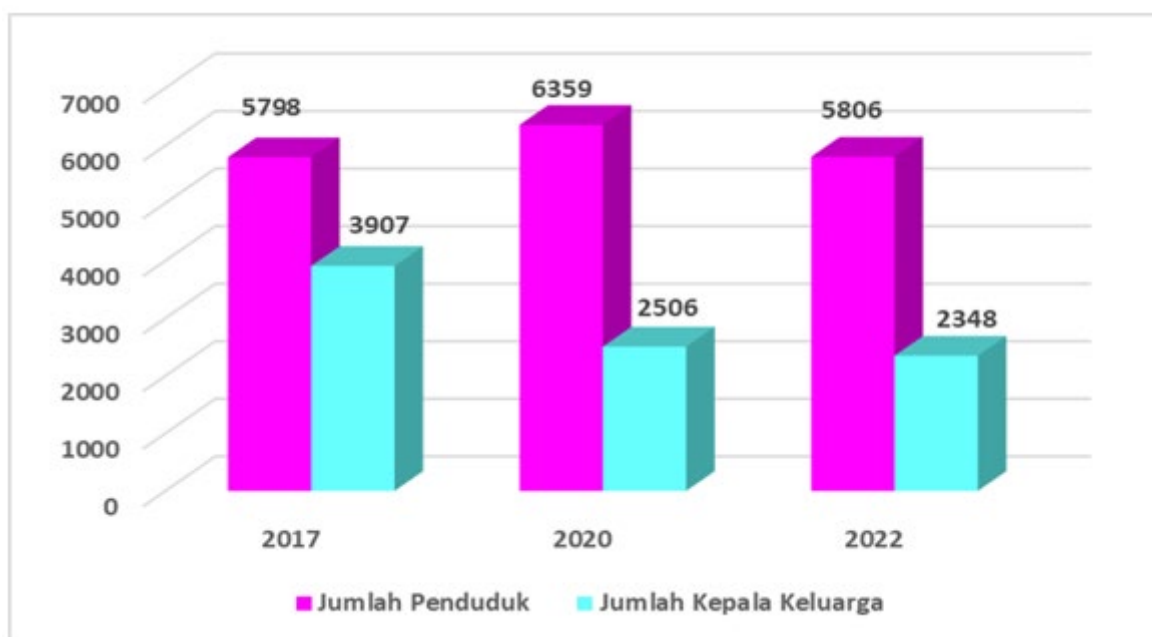


Figure 2: Comparison of Population and Number of Households in Kayumas Village, 2017-2022.

Source: Data Processed from the Department of Population and Civil Registration Situbondo Regency, 2018-2023.

They believe that conducting the ritual, either individually or in groups, will lead to a bountiful coffee harvest that benefits the farmers. They take the ritual seriously, as neglecting it might adversely affect the harvest. The *Ajheru'* Ritual is typically held in May or June before the coffee or other crop harvests, and is performed by praying in the farmer's field or at the home of the villagers if done in groups.

Ajheru' Ritual or individual ritual is conducted by inviting a *kyai* or village elder to perform the ritual in the farmer's field (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). Participants usually wear sarongs and traditional shirts or modest clothing and bring food consisting of a *tumpeng* (a cone-shaped mound of rice) with roasted chicken, along with *ketupat*, *lepet*, and *serabi*, and coffee drinks, or even just an offering in the form of colorful porridge, seven types of flowers (*kembang tujuh rupa*) and cigarette (see Figure 3) The ritual begins with prayers led by the *kyai*, including (see Figures 4, 5, and 6): 1) reciting Al-Fatihah dedicated to Prophet Muhammad PBUH, his companions, and his family; 2) reciting Al-Fatihah for the ancestors who first established Kayumas Village; 3) reciting Al-Fatihah for deceased elders; 4) reciting Al-Fatihah for the living to be granted health and protection by Allah the Almighty, followed by an Arabic prayer read by the *kyai*. In this prayer, the *kyai* or village elder asks for blessings and protection from the Almighty, hoping for a plentiful and profitable harvest. The prayer also reflects gratitude for the natural blessings provided by God, and a wish for the continued harmonious relationship with nature. The next part of the ritual involves burying one roasted chicken in their field (such as in a coffee plantation, cornfield, or ginger plot), followed by a communal meal with the *kyai* and the landowner.



Figure 3: Colorful porridge, seven types of flowers, cigarettes, as offerings in the *Ajheru'* Ritual performed individually, 2019. (Researcher's Document).



Figure 4: *Kyai* or village elder leading the *Ajheru'* Ritual at one of the coffee plantations owned by a Kayumas Village farmer, 2019. (Researcher's Document).



Figure 5: *Kyai* or village elder leading the *Ajheru'* Ritual at one of the coffee plantations owned by a Kayumas Village farmer, while reciting prayers in Arabic, 2019. (Researcher's Document).



Figure 6: A Kyai or village elder leading the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual at one of the coffee plantations owned by a Kayumas Village farmer, 2019. (Researcher's Document).

Ajheru' Aghung Ritual refers to rituals performed in groups or in large numbers. This ritual is not held in the field but at the home of one of the group members (see Figures 7 and 8). The food offerings for the ritual are the same as those for the individual ritual, funded by contributions from group members. The attire for the ritual is also the same: sarongs, traditional shirts, and songkoks. The ritual is also led by a kyai or village elder with the same sequence of prayers as those performed individually, with the addition of reading *sholawatan* (praises for Prophet Muhammad PBUH) and *Tahlil* (reciting Quranic verses and dhikr for deceased individuals) and concluding with a prayer in Arabic. In this prayer, the kyai or village elder requests blessings and protection from the Almighty, hoping for a bountiful and profitable harvest. The prayer also reflects gratitude for the natural blessings given by God, and a wish for continued harmony with nature. The next activity is a communal meal consisting of *tumpeng* with roasted chicken, along with *ketupat*, *lepet*, and *serabi*, and coffee drinks (see Figures 7 and 8).

This ritual is not merely a ceremonial event but also an important moment for the Kayumas community to strengthen togetherness and solidarity among them. Through *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual, farmers reaffirm their commitment to working hard and supporting each other, believing that collective effort

will yield better results. This tradition demonstrates the strong connection between culture and the lives of the Kayumas community. *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual is not only a symbol of hope and prayer but also a representation of values such as togetherness, hard work, and gratitude that have been integral to the local way of life for years. By preserving this ritual, the people of Kayumas Village not only maintain their ancestral heritage but also ensure that these values continue to live on and inspire future generations.



Figure 7: The Implementation of the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual at the "Delima" Farmers Group in Kayumas Village, 2019. (Researcher's Document).



Figure 8: The Implementation of Ajheru' Aghung Ritual at the "Sumber Kayuputih II" Farmers Group in Kayumas Village, 2020. (Researcher's Document).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Strategic Governance for Global Tourism: Indonesia's Policy Innovations from 2019 to 2023

The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) is committed to making Indonesia a world-class tourism destination, based on Article 4 of Presidential Regulation Number 96 of 2019 rolled out in 2019 (BPK

RI, 2019). This policy must be followed up by all local governments, including Situbondo Regency. As one of the regencies with abundant tourism potential, Situbondo has a significant responsibility to support this national vision by developing tourist destinations capable of competing on the international stage. The “Wonderful Indonesia” logo is used to promote Indonesia’s tourism destinations internationally (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: “Wonderful Indonesia” Logo, 2018.

Source: Official Website of The Ministry of Tourism of the Republic Indonesia.

Situbondo Regency Government is expected to adopt the policies of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) with concrete strategic steps. Developing world-class tourist destinations is not just about enhancing the aesthetic appeal of tourist sites but also about ensuring environmental sustainability, improving service quality, and strengthening the capacity of the local tourism industry. The Situbondo Regency Government needs to take the initiative in identifying and developing tourist destinations that have unique and global appeal, ensuring that this development is carried out sustainably.

Additionally, the Situbondo Regency Government also has a responsibility to promote the creative economy sector as an integral part of tourism development. The synergy between creative industry players and the tourism sector must be enhanced so that local innovation and creativity can become an added value that attracts international tourists. The local government must play an active role in facilitating cooperation between local inventors and investors, creating a conducive environment for the development of creative products that can become attractions for tourists. The Situbondo Regency Government’s commitment to tourism development is evident with the issuance of Situbondo Regency Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2019 concerning the Master Plan for Situbondo Regency Tourism Development for 2019-2034 (Situbondo Regency Regional Gazette of 2019 Number 5, Additional Situbondo Regency Regional Gazette Number 5) (Situbondo Regency Government, 2019). This was followed in 2021 by the

issuance of Situbondo Regent Regulation Number 39 of 2021 concerning Guidelines for the Establishment and Management of Tourism Villages (BPK RI, 2021). The support and concrete actions of the Situbondo Regency Government are crucial to ensuring that the tourism and creative economy potential in this region can develop optimally, bringing significant benefits to the local community and strengthening Indonesia’s position on the world stage. What the Situbondo Regency Government has done to advance its region, as stated by Lauer (2003) that the government can function as a driver of social change, is evident in Situbondo Regency through the policies issued by the Regent of Situbondo to promote tourism in the region.

4.2 From Sacred to Profane: The Commodification of Ajheru’ Aghung Ritual in the Context of Village Tourism Promotion from 2019 to 2023

Situbondo Regency Government demonstrated its commitment to tourism development by enacting Situbondo Regency Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2019 regarding the Master Plan for Situbondo Regency Tourism Development for 2019-2034 (Situbondo Regency Regional Gazette of 2019 Number 5, Additional Situbondo Regency Regional Gazette Number 5). This regulation must be implemented by all village heads in Situbondo Regency. The Head of Kayumas Village, Abdul Jalil, followed up on the Situbondo Regent’s instructions by leveraging his village’s local culture as a tourist attraction through the *Ajheru’* Ritual, which has been practiced for years as a means of promoting Kayumas Village. Abdul Jalil repackaged the *Ajheru’* Ritual, which was typically performed by individuals or farming groups, into a large event called the *Ajheru’ Aghung* Ritual. This event was attended by the people of Kayumas Village, Situbondo Regency Government officials, and tourists from Jember, Situbondo, and Bondowoso, turning it into a grand ritual or major communal feast. The people of Kayumas Village followed the Village Head’s wishes to present the *Ajheru’ Aghung* Ritual before a large audience, as the Village Head is regarded as a *Rato*, who must be respected and obeyed according to the culture of the Madurese ethnic group.

In the course of history and the development of a community, traditional rituals often undergo changes in meaning and function over time. In Kayumas Village, Situbondo, *Ajheru’ Aghung* Ritual is an interesting example of this process. Initially considered a sacred ritual with profound meaning, *Ajheru’ Aghung* has now begun to transform into an important element in the village’s tourism promotion (Trung, Tu, & Quang, 2025), shifting from the sacred to the profane (Eliade, 1987; Alcain, 2020).

Ajheru’ Aghung Ritual is performed before the harvest of coffee or other crops. It is a sacred moment filled with prayers and supplications to God for a bountiful harvest. The people of

Kayumas Village gather to pray together, expressing gratitude and hoping that the upcoming harvest will bring abundant blessings. This ceremony reflects the deep spirituality and connection between humans, nature, and divine power.

However, with the growth of the tourism industry and the village's efforts to increase its appeal, *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual has now undergone a functional shift. What was once a sacred and private ritual is now publicized and promoted as part of the village's tourism attractions. This transformation is not uncommon in the global cultural context, where traditional practices are often commodified to meet the needs and interests of the tourism market.

In the context of promoting Kayumas Village, *Ajheru' Aghung* becomes an attractive draw for tourists. The village utilizes the ritual to provide visitors with an authentic and profound cultural experience. Tourists are not only presented with beautiful natural scenery but are also invited to understand and experience the uniqueness of local culture through this traditional ceremony. This process involves presenting aspects of the ritual that have been contextualized for a broader audience while still respecting its original meaning.

This shift from the sacred to the profane presents its own challenges. It is important to ensure that the commodification of *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual is carried out with full respect for the existing traditions and values. The village community must ensure that this transformation does not undermine the original meaning of the ritual but rather educates and inspires visitors about their rich culture. In this way, *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, offering the people of Kayumas Village the opportunity to leverage tourism potential without sacrificing their cultural identity. As part of the promotional strategy, this ritual demonstrates how local culture can be creatively developed to attract tourist interest while preserving its deep-rooted essence and values.

The procession was held on August 29, 2019, in the open hall meeting place of Kayumas Village. The event was titled “*Ajheru Aghung* and Kayumas Coffee Festival 2019.” The effort of the Kayumas Village Head to attract tourists to Kayumas Village and simultaneously introduce Kayumas Village's coffee products to a wider audience. The event was attended by the people of Kayumas Village, community and religious leaders, Kayumas Village officials, the Kayumas Village Head, Head of the Tourism Office H. Sofyan Hadi, Head of DPMD H. Suradi, Head of PUPR Ir. Gatot, Head of Kominfo Office, H. Moh. Hasan, Arjasa Subdistrict Muspika, Manager of PT. PB XI Kayumas Aksan, as well as domestic tourists who enthusiastically participated in the *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual procession.

Ajheru' Aghung Ritual procession began with a parade by representatives of the people of Kayumas Village from the eight existing hamlets, wearing sarongs and white shirts, and donning songkok while carrying various ritual items such as

nasi tumpeng, grilled chicken, *urap-urap*, *ketupat*, *lepet*, and *serabi* placed on trays adorned with colorful decorations (see Figure 10). These items were then carried by the villagers to the Kayumas Village Meeting Hall. Some villagers also carried large tumpeng made of yellow-colored nasi lemak, reaching heights of up to 2 meters and 1.5 meters, which were paraded with the accompaniment of *sholawatan* and *hadrah* (see Figures 11 and 12). The height of the tumpeng, reaching up to 1.5 meters and 2 meters, is unusual, but it was done in an effort to attract tourists who might return for similar events in the future. Upon reaching the hall, the villagers and invited guests were invited to participate in a communal prayer led by a kyai (See Figure 13). The order of prayers recited was: 1) recitation of Surat Al-Fatihah dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, his companions, and his family; 2) recitation of Surat Al-Fatihah for the ancestors who first founded Kayumas Village; 3) recitation of Surat Al-Fatihah for the elders who have passed away; 4) recitation of Surat Al-Fatihah for those still alive, asking for health and protection from Allah; 5) recitation of *sholawatan* accompanied by *hadrah* music, followed by the recitation of Tahlil (a series of Quranic verses and dhikr recitations with the intention of dedicating the rewards to the deceased); 6) and finally, the closing prayer, followed by the cutting of the tumpeng by the official representing the Situbondo Regent. The next activity was a communal meal with all those present at the event (see Figures 14 and 15). The next event was the performance of *Molong Kopi* Dance. However, the promotion of *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual was temporarily halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic that struck the entire world in 2020 and 2021. Promotional activities for Kayumas Village resumed in 2022 and continued through 2023.



Figure 10: A group of residents parading a tumpeng during *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual tradition in Kayumas Village, Thursday (August 29, 2019). The parade is heading towards the village hall for the Kayumas Village meeting.

Source: <https://jatim.antaranews.com/foto/315190/selamatan-desai/3>.



Figure 11: A group of residents parading a tumpeng during Ajheru' Aghung Ritual tradition in Kayumas Village, Thursday (August 29, 2019), accompanied by Sholawatan and Hadrah music, heading towards the village hall for the Kayumas Village meeting.

Source: <https://jatim.antaranews.com/foto/315190/selamatan-desa/3>.



Figure 12: A group of residents paraded a 2-meter and 1.5-meter tall cone-shaped rice dish in the traditional Ritual Ajheru' Aghung ceremony in Kayumas Village on Thursday (29/8/2019). It was paraded towards the village meeting hall.

Source: <https://jatim.antaranews.com/foto/315190/selamatan-desa/3>

4.3 Transforming Ritual and Dance into Tourism in Kayumas Village (2019-2023)

Kayumas Village, located in Arjasa Subdistrict, Situbondo Regency, is renowned for its natural beauty. One of the main commodities that the village takes pride in is coffee, which has long been an integral part of the local community's life. To enhance the village's potential and attract more tourists, the Village Head, Abdul Jalil, initiated the creation of a dance that reflects the life of the coffee plantation community. He proposed this idea to Vivin Eka Indrawati, S.Pd., Gr., a teacher at SMPN 3 Arjasa (see Figure 16), who has an educational background in Dance and teaches Cultural Arts. Vivin agreed, and in July 2019, she created a unique and meaningful dance

called "*Molong Kopi*". The word "*Molong*" is derived from the Madurese language, meaning to pick or harvest. The term "*Molong*" is fitting, as the majority of the Kayumas Village population is of Madurese ethnicity, who migrated during the Dutch colonial era. Tari Molong Kopi was performed after the *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual procession and became part of the efforts to promote Kayumas Village as a cohesive event.

Vivin Eka Indrawati, S.Pd., Gr., was inspired to create *Molong Kopi* dance by the daily activities of coffee farmers in Kayumas Village, especially during harvest season. This dance portrays the joy and gratitude of the farmers, particularly the women, as they pick the ripening coffee cherries, signaling that the coffee is ready to be harvested. Every movement in this dance reflects the deep happiness and gratitude towards nature for providing an abundant harvest.



Figure 13: The 2-meter and 1.5-meter tumpeng (yellow coconut rice) along with its side dishes arrived at the meeting hall of Kayumas Village in 2019. (Researcher's Document).



Figure 14: Communal Feast during Ajheru' Aghung, 2019 (Researcher's Document).



Figure 15: The cutting of the 2-meter tumpeng (yellow coconut rice) by a Situbondo Regency Government Official, 2019 (Researcher's Document).

The dance movements are adapted from various stages in the coffee-picking process, from carefully picking the coffee cherries to the farmers' joy at the abundant harvest. *Molong Kopi* dance is a visual celebration of the farmers' hard work and perseverance. Through this dance, the people of Kayumas Village aim to show the importance of coffee in their lives, not just as an economic commodity but also as a symbol of unity and gratitude towards nature. By presenting "Tari Molong Kopi" as part of Kayumas Village's tourism agenda, the community hopes that this dance will become an attraction that invites tourists to come and experience the unique culture of the village. Tourists are not only spectators but are also invited to feel the positive energy and joyful spirit that the farmers experience during the coffee-picking season.

Molong Kopi dance is not merely a series of graceful movements flowing to the rhythm of traditional music, but also a symbol of the living and evolving traditions in Kayumas Village. Through this dance, Kayumas Village has successfully introduced not only its stunning natural beauty but also its rich cultural traditions and values. Each performance features at least five beautiful young girls from SMPN 3 Arjasa as the main dancers (see Figures 17 and 18). They wear brightly colored costumes that symbolize the joy and vibrancy of village life. Equipped with baskets in hand, the dancers energetically and gracefully perform the coffee-picking movements, transporting the audience into the lush coffee plantations at the foot of the mountains. The dance can also be performed with 50 dancers (See Figures 19, 20, and 21).

This dance serves as an effective medium to demonstrate how plantation community traditions can be revitalized and adapted as a key element in village tourism development.

Every movement of the dancers illustrates the hard work, togetherness, and gratitude that consistently color the lives of coffee farmers in Kayumas Village. Ultimately, *Molong Kopi* dance has become not only a cultural icon but also a source of pride for the people of Kayumas Village. Through this dance, they weave together the threads of tradition that form the foundation of their identity while promoting the village's tourism potential, which is becoming increasingly recognized. This dance is a tangible manifestation of the harmony between nature, tradition, and the younger generation who continue to uphold their ancestral heritage.

4.4 Social Changes in Kayumas Village from 2019 to 2023

This study applies a cultural sociology approach (Alexander, 2008). According to Alexander, the cultural sociology approach provides a framework for understanding culture not only as a product of social processes but also as a force that actively shapes social life and societal structures. This approach is particularly suitable for analyzing phenomena where culture plays a significant role in determining social dynamics, such as in the transformation of rituals or other cultural practices. The theory used in this study is structural functionalism (Craib, 1986). This theory will be employed to analyze the impact of the transformation of the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual, which has shifted from a sacred context to a promotional tool, on social equilibrium in Kayumas Village. Through the lens of structural functionalism, this research will assess whether this transformation results in harmony or dysfunction within the community, as well as how the community adapts to these changes.



Figure 16: The creator of the "Molong Kopi" Dance, Vivin Eka Indrawati, S.Pd., Gr., a teacher at SMPN 3 Arjasa, Situbondo, in 2023 (Researcher's Document).



Figure 17: Dancers of the “Molong Kopi” Dance in 2019 (Researcher’s Document).



Figure 18: “Molong Kopi” Dance, 2022 (Researcher’s Document).

Between 2019 and 2023, Kayumas Village in Situbondo underwent significant social changes, primarily as a result of the promotion of the Ajheru’ Aghung Ritual and tourism development. These changes reflect the social dynamics that occur when local traditions are promoted on a global stage and how this affects the local community (Alexander, 2008). This has led to transformations in various aspects of life in Kayumas Village, including:



Figure 19: A Colossal “Molong Kopi” Dance, 2023 (Researcher’s Document).



Figure 20: A Colossal “Molong Kopi”, 2023. (Researcher’s Document).



Figure 21: The Dancer of the Colossal “Molong Kopi” Dance, 2023 (Researcher’s Document).

4.4.1 Changes in Economics, 2022-2023

The coffee farmers in Kayumas Village are organized into eight farming groups, overseeing a total of 410 members. These groups include: 1) Sukmaelang Jaya Farmers Group

(Chairman: Ahmad Imam Miftahul Arifin, 17 members); 2) Mulya Jaya Farmers Group (Chairman: Mulyono, 131 members); 3) Sumber Kayuputih II Farmers Group (Chairman: Herman Rahman, 77 members); 4) Delima Farmers Group (Chairman: Edianto, 20 members); 5) Delima II Farmers Group (Chairman: Markus, 32 members); 6) Sumber Kayu Putih III Farmers Group (Chairman: Hariyono, 66 members); 7) Sukma Jaya Farmers Group (Chairman: Iwan Kurniawan, 47 members); and 8) Sejahtera Farmers Group (Chairman: Alex Siswo DR, 20 members) (Izzah, 2023b).

The introduction of Kayumas Village's Arabica coffee through the promotion of the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual and the Kayumas Coffee Festival has brought significant changes to the marketing of coffee in the village. Although sales were halted from 2020 to 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they began to recover in 2022 and 2023. Previously, coffee from Kayumas Village was only known locally or in nearby areas, but this promotional event has expanded its market reach to a broader scale. This is evidenced by the increased demand for coffee products from Hariyono (Chairman of the "Sumber Kayuputih III" farmers group), both in ose (unprocessed) and powdered form, which in 2022 reached areas like Jember, Jakarta, and Bandung, whereas previously, it only catered to orders from around Situbondo and Bondowoso. Hariyono can now ship 4-5 quintals in ose form (see Figures 22 and 23), and up to 50 kg of powdered coffee per customer. Similarly, the coffee products from Alex (Chairman of the "Sejahtera" farmers group), sold through Shopee and Tokopedia, have seen an increase, even extending to exports to Malaysia and Singapore. Alex often buys raw coffee beans from other farming groups, such as the "Mulya Jaya" farmers group, which usually sells in bulk (see Figures 24 and 25), and processes them further. Alex is more professional compared to other group leaders. The bulk coffee from the "Mulya Jaya" farmers group is purchased up to 2 tons. Likewise, the coffee produced by other groups has experienced faster sales growth compared to before the promotion through the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual.

Through this event, the wider public now knows that Kayumas Village produces high-quality Arabica coffee with a unique flavor that distinguishes it from other coffees on the market. This distinctive taste has attracted coffee enthusiasts from various regions, reaching national and even international levels, as seen with Alex's coffee products, which have buyers from Malaysia and Singapore. As a result of this promotion, the demand for Kayumas Arabica coffee has increased, providing greater opportunities for coffee farmers in the village to boost production and expand distribution. Consequently, farmers are not only gaining better economic benefits but also helping to strengthen Kayumas Village's identity as one of Indonesia's producers of quality coffee. Additionally, this event has encouraged the development of a stronger local coffee brand, with a clear positioning as a premium product in the coffee

market. There are many coffee brands sold by the coffee farmers of Kayumas Village (see Figure 26).



Figure 22: Ose Arabica Coffee owned by one of the smallholder coffee farmers in Kayumas Village, 2023 (Researcher's Document).



Figure 23: Ose Arabica Coffee owned by one of the smallholder coffee farmers in Kayumas Village, 2023 (Researcher's Document).



Figure 24: Coffee ready for harvest, 2019 (Researcher's Document).



Figure 25: Coffee harvest results in the form of cherries, 2022 (Researcher's Document).



Figure 26: Downstream Product of Ground Coffee from Kayumas Village Farmers, 2023 (Researcher's Document).

The above data shows that Arabica coffee production by eight farmer groups in Kayumas Village has experienced a growth trend over the past five years (see Figure 27). However, the pattern has not been entirely linear. This trend indicates increased productivity, which can be attributed to the improvements in cultivation techniques, the use of agricultural technology, and a growing collective awareness fostered through cultural promotion initiated in 2019 via the *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual.

The Mulya Jaya Farmer Group is recorded as the most significant contributor to production, despite experiencing a decline in 2020–2021, but it managed to reach the highest yield in 2023 at 1.043 tons. This pattern reflects an adaptive capacity in the face of agricultural challenges, likely influenced by climate factors and land management practices. Sumber Kayuputih II and Sukma Jaya show a relatively stable upward trend, reflecting sustainable farming governance and substantial organizational consolidation. Groups such as Delima I and Delima II demonstrate more moderate but consistent growth trends. At the same time, Sukmaelang Jaya experienced a significant surge from a low starting point, indicating strengthened institutional capacity and increased motivation among its members. Meanwhile, the Sejahtera group shows a tendency toward stagnation and experienced a slight decrease in production in 2023, possibly due to internal factors such as labor rotation or limited innovation in cultivation methods.

From the perspective of social history and structural functionalist theory, this production dynamic reflects that cultural revitalization through ritual has contributed significantly to building social solidarity and enhancing a sense of ownership over local commodities. The promotion of *Ajheru' Aghung* has acted as a catalyst for cultural change, which in turn has elevated the collective spirit of farmers to improve their harvests. Local culture functions not only as heritage but also as a driver of social and economic development in the village community.

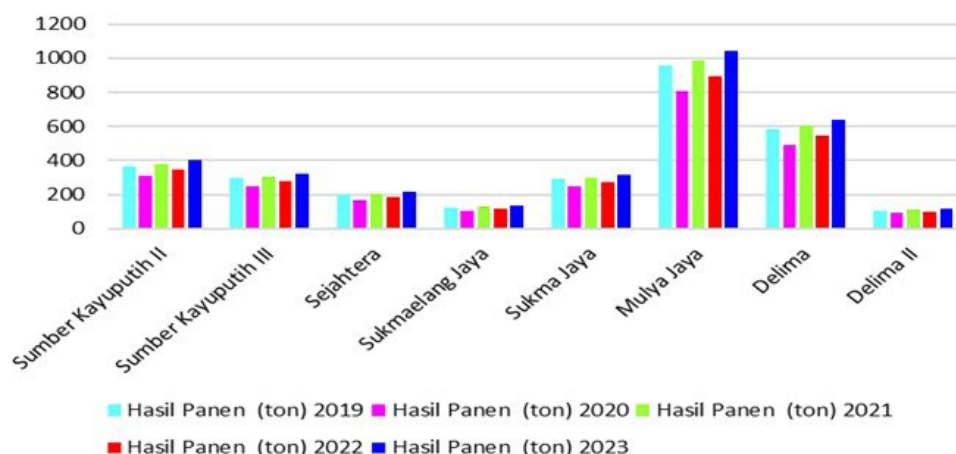


Figure 27: Wet Arabica Coffee Cherry Harvest in Kayumas Village 2019-2023.

Source: Situbondo Regency Agriculture and Food Security Office (2023).

4.4.2 From Ritual to Resilience: Socio-Cultural Transformations Through *Ajheru' Aghung* in Kayumas Village (2019–2023)

Ajheru' Aghung Ritual, which was once a sacred ceremony performed by the people of Kayumas Village before the harvest to ensure abundant and blessed crops for farmers and their families, has undergone significant transformation since it was used as a promotional tool by the Village Head of Kayumas in 2019. The promotion of this ritual not only altered its nature and essence but also impacted various social and cultural aspects of the local community.

Initially, *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual was conducted with great reverence, involving collective prayers among farmer groups or performed individually with the hope of a bountiful harvest. However, since the ritual was promoted as part of a strategy to attract both domestic and international tourists, changes began to emerge in how the ritual was interpreted and conducted. What was once an exclusive and sacred ceremony has now become a more open and profane event, aimed at drawing public attention and showcasing the cultural richness of Kayumas Village to the outside world.

This transformation not only changed the way the ritual is performed but also brought broader impacts on the social and cultural life of the community. One of the main effects is the increased interaction between local residents and tourists, which in turn introduced external cultural influences into the daily lives of the Kayumas people. This interaction has led to changes in mindset, lifestyle, and community values, making them more open to change and innovation, although it also presents challenges in preserving the original culture.

The promotion of *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual also affected the social structure, reflecting hierarchical relationships and the distribution of power, which could influence access to resources. Previously, the Regent of Situbondo had never visited Kayumas Village due to its higher elevation compared to other villages in the Arjasa District. However, following the promotion of the ritual, in 2022, Regent of Situbondo Karna Suswandi brought coffee buyers from Jakarta to hold a Sharing Session with Kayumas Village coffee farmers, exploring cooperation in the purchase of Kayumas Arabica coffee (see Figure 28).

Nevertheless, not all the impacts of this promotion are positive. Some members of the community, particularly the older generation, believe that this transformation erodes the traditional values and sacred meaning of *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual. There is concern that in the pursuit of economic gain, the original essence of the ritual will be lost, and the culture that has been passed down through generations will be replaced by a commercial culture that prioritizes profit.



Figure 28: Situbondo Regent, Karna Suswandi, with the author at the Sharing Session with Kayumas Village Farmers, 2022 (Researcher's Document).

4.4.3 Youth, Culture, and Continuity: Tracing Student Efforts in Safeguarding the Ajheru' Aghung Ritual (2019–2023)

In 2019, when students were invited to participate in the Molong Kopi Dance, which was performed alongside *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual, their awareness of *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual began to grow and develop. Through regular practice and participation in this dance, they not only learned the dance movements but also started to understand the profound meaning behind the ritual. They were encouraged to feel and internalize the cultural values embedded in *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual, a ritual that was once sacred and has now become part of the cultural promotion of their village.

This awareness was further reinforced by explanations from teachers involved in the practice sessions. They learned that *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual is not just a ceremony performed by their parents to honor their coffee plantations, but rather a crucial part of their cultural identity, passed down from generation to generation. Through the Molong Kopi Dance, students began to realize their role in preserving this tradition and how the ritual has transformed in the modern context as part of tourism promotion. Evidence of this is that out of 50 students interviewed, 40% have shown a willingness to help their parents prepare ceremonial items such as *nasi tumpeng*, roasted chicken, and cakes. Before 2019, the students were unaware that their parents routinely conducted *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual before the coffee harvest.

This experience provided students with new insights into the importance of appreciating and preserving their cultural heritage while also showing them how culture can evolve and adapt to changing times.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The *Ajheru' Aghung* Ritual represents the dynamic process of continuous cultural change. Evolving from a sacred customary practice passed down through generations, the ritual has transformed into a strategic instrument for strengthening local identity and serving as a medium for culture-based tourism promotion. Village government's initiative to bring the ritual into the public sphere has contributed to the preservation of traditional values while also reinforcing the status of Kayumas Arabica coffee as a leading village commodity on a broader scale.

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7 AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Conceptual Idea: Izzah, L.; Methodology Design: Izzah, L.; Data collection: Izzah, L.; Subaharianto, A.; Ariwidodo, E.; Trihartono, A.; Data analysis and interpretation: Izzah, L.; and Writing and editing: Izzah, L.; Asrumi (editing).

8 DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available upon request to authors.

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