

# **Riddling traditions in eastern Indonesia and East Timor**

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Telling riddles (Indonesian teka-teki) is a widespread (although often little noticed) tradition throughout insular Southeast Asia. In this paper, I begin by outlining the extent of occurrence of riddling throughout the archipelago (as far as this can be gleaned from the literature). The main focus of the paper will be an examination of riddling traditions in Nusa Tenggara Timur and Timor Leste. I begin by sketching out the primary social functions of riddling. Riddles may be told to encourage sleepless children to sleep, they may be told as part of funerary rites when they are used to help keep people awake while they watch over a newly deceased corpse before burial rites, they may be told competitively, or they may just be told for fun. I also examine the typical structure of riddles in an attempt to outline an initial typology of the forms.