Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora
ISSN: 0215-837X (p); 2460-7606 (e), Vol. 24 (1), 2026, pp. 78-112
DOI: 10.18592/khazanah.v24i1.19800
Submit: 08/01/2026 Review: 16/06/2026 Publish: 31/07/2026

JAVANESE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES IN ECOLOGICAL PRESERVATION: RITUAL AND TRADITION IN HARMONY

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Abstract: *This research explores the integration of Javanese cultural and religious values in environmental preservation, focusing on how rituals and traditions in Tajakembang, Cilacap, embody harmony between humans and nature. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study investigates local practices that reflect deep-rooted cultural wisdom and religious teachings promoting environmental care. Findings reveal that Javanese rituals serve as a medium for transmitting environmental ethics, fostering community cohesion, and sustaining natural resources. Javanese cultural and religious values influence environmental preservation by embedding ecological ethics within ritual practices that promote harmony between humans and nature, fostering sustainable behaviors rooted in spiritual and social norms. The study highlights the significance of preserving these traditions amid modernization, offering insights for cultural-based environmental strategies.*
Keywords: *Javanese Cultural; Religious Values, Environmental Preservation, Ritual and Tradition; Harmony*

Introduction

Javanese culture is characterized by its strong emphasis on harmony, respect and discipline. These elements are integral components of social interactions, decision-making processes and holistic behavioral norms in sustainable resource management. Within the broader environmental discourse, there is growing recognition that ecological preservation cannot rely solely on scientific and technological approaches but must also incorporate indigenous cultural and religious value systems that have long guided human–nature relationships. Rather than viewing culture as a supplementary factor, scholars increasingly argue that indigenous worldviews constitute an essential foundation for sustainable resource management because they embed environmental responsibilities within social institutions, moral obligations, and everyday

practices.[1,2,3,4] In Javanese society, cultural rituals and religious beliefs deeply influence interactions with the natural environment.[5,6] The intricate relationship between cultural and religious practices and environmental preservation reflects a holistic worldview that respects nature as sacred and integral to human well-being.[7] Religions provide a foundation for ethical and moral principles for environmental protection, facilitating the integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary environmental science in the construction of culturally appropriate conservation strategies.[8,9] It is evident that mainstream cultures and spiritual traditions may offer insights into the level of sacred natural sites and the spiritual well-being of individuals, thereby serving as representative manifestations of the cultural context.[10] This shows that nature and ecosystems contribute to human well-being through relationships that are intangible, such as culture. The establishment of these relationships transpires through a series of interconnected processes, including knowledge, comprehension, interaction, and habitation within these relationships. These relationships exert a profound influence on the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of individuals, fostering inspiration and contributing to the formation of their identity.[11] The socio-

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[2] Bas Verschuuren et al., *Sacred Natural Sites: Conserving Nature and Culture* (Routledge, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781849776639.

[3] Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, 4th ed. (Routledge, 2017), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315114644.

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[5] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic books, 2017).

[6] Laurajane Smith, "Uses of Heritage," in *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, ed. Claire Smith (Springer International Publishing, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30018-0_1937.

[7] Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426982.

[8] Jianchu Xu et al., "Cultures and Landscapes in Southwest China," *Ecology and Society* 10, no. 2 (2005), http://www.jstor.org/stable/26267737.

[9] Dhruvee Sinha, "Eco-Spiritual Synergy: Harnessing Hindu and Islamic Teachings for Effective Conservation Strategies," *Journal of Dharma Studies* 8, no. 2 (2025): 301–17, https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-025-00202-6.

[10] Robert Wild and Christopher McLeod, *Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers*, no. 16 (IUCN, 2008), https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=en&lr=&id=2OTEoYdXS3QC&oi.

[11] Roly Russell et al., "Humans and Nature: How Knowing and Experiencing Nature Affect Well-Being," in *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, vol. 38, no.

ecological benefits or services that indigenous and local communities derive from their relationship with ecosystems are contingent upon the capabilities (i.e., knowledge and skills) that these communities possess.[12]

The practice of traditional land use and cultural customs has long enabled indigenous communities to maintain landscapes while safeguarding forests, water catchments, and biodiversity. Rather than relying solely on formal environmental regulations, many indigenous societies sustain ecological resilience through systems of religious beliefs, taboos, and the protection of sacred sites, which regulate human interaction with nature.[13,14,15] Within these systems, taboos represent an important component of socio-ecological memory, integrating ecological knowledge, social practices, and spiritual beliefs into everyday resource management. Sacred forests and culturally protected sites are therefore not merely symbolic spaces but institutional mechanisms that limit exploitation and preserve ecological integrity.[16,17] Studies from indigenous communities worldwide consistently demonstrate that taboo systems encourage voluntary compliance with conservation norms and provide an effective, low-cost mechanism for regulating human–environment relationships.[18] Likewise, ritual practices associated with sacred groves have been shown to contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of ecosystem

Volume 38, 2013, Annual Reviews, 2013, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-012312-110838.

[12] Kamaljit K. Sangha et al., "An Ecosystem Services Framework to Evaluate Indigenous and Local Peoples' Connections with Nature," *Ecosystem Services* 31 (June 2018): 111–25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2018.03.017.

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[14] Akpofure Rim-Rukeh et al., "Traditional Beliefs and Conservation of Natural Resources: Evidences from Selected Communities in Delta State, Nigeria," *International Journal of Biodiversity and Conservation* 5, no. 7 (2013): 426–32, https://doi.org/10.5897/IJBC2013.0576.

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[16] Agni K. Boedhihartono, "Can Community Forests Be Compatible With Biodiversity Conservation in Indonesia?," *Land* 6, no. 1 (2017): 21, https://doi.org/10.3390/land6010021.

[17] Nancy J. Turner et al., "Well Grounded: Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge, Ethnobiology and Sustainability," *People and Nature* 4, no. 3 (2022): 627–51, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10321.

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services.[19,20] These findings reinforce the importance of examining sociocultural mechanisms, including taboos, rituals, and customary resource practices, to understand their ecological significance within traditional societies.[21] Such mechanisms are further strengthened through cultural values that promote care and respect for nature, as traditional stories teach communities to take only what is needed while maintaining respect for all forms of life.[22] Collectively, these practices illustrate how ecological knowledge and environmental ethics are transmitted across generations, ensuring the continuity of sustainable relationships between people and nature.

A notable example of this phenomenon is found in the Tajakembang indigenous community in Cilacap, Central Java, where Javanese cultural values and religious beliefs continue to shape environmental stewardship through intergenerational transmission.[23] As an indigenous Javanese community, the people of Tajakembang maintain cultural practices centred on traditional storytelling, hunting taboos, and the protection of sacred sites, making the community a particularly relevant case for examining how cultural and religious values operate as practical mechanisms of ecological preservation.[24,25] These traditions reflect broader patterns identified in Javanese society, where rituals, ceremonial offerings, and expressions of gratitude toward nature reinforce ecological balance and strengthen the moral relationship between humans and

[19] Julia P. G. Jones Et Al., "The Importance Of Taboos And Social Norms To Conservation In Madagascar," *Conservation Biology* 22, No. 4 (2008): 976–86, Https://Doi.Org/10.1111/J.1523-1739.2008.00970.X.

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[24] Fikret Berkes, *Advanced Introduction to Community-Based Conservation* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021).

[25] Xu et al., "Cultures and Landscapes in Southwest China."

the natural environment.[26,27,28,29] At the same time, the Tajakembang community illustrates how these long-standing traditions are negotiated amid contemporary social and environmental change, highlighting both the resilience of indigenous ecological knowledge and the challenges facing indigenous communities in a rapidly changing global context.[30] Against this background, the present study investigates how Javanese cultural and religious values are embodied in the rituals and traditions of the Tajakembang indigenous community and how these practices contribute to ecological preservation and the maintenance of harmonious relationships between humans and nature.

Rapid modernization and environmental degradation threaten these traditional practices and the ecological wisdom they embody.[31,32] Preserving Javanese cultural and religious values is urgent to sustain environmental harmony and community resilience in Tajakembang, Cilacap. Previous research has examined the role of local wisdom and religious moderation in cultural rituals, such as environmental activities in the tradition and the fusion of Islamic spirituality and Javanese mysticism, which also addresses ecological

[26] Smith, "Uses of Heritage."

[27] Andrew Davidson and David Henley, *The Revival of Tradition in Indonesian Politics* (Routledge London, 2007), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203965498.

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conservation.[33,34,35] It emphasizes the responsibility of humans as stewards of the Earth, which is in line with the perspective of indigenous communities who view humans as an integral part of the ecological community.[36,37] Research on *Methik Pari* art and *Ngayu-ayu* ritual similarly highlights how cultural practices serve as agents of character education and environmental consciousness.[38] The rituals have been demonstrated to foster community bonds and emphasize environmental harmony. Ancestral traditions are integrated with contemporary practices for sustainable living.[39] Javanese cultural and religious values prioritize harmony with nature through eco-ethics, including environmental preservation. *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono* reflects this philosophy.[40] Islamic and perennial values promote environmental preservation through rituals and traditions. A harmonious relationship with nature is fostered, and stewardship, respect, and harmony between humans and the ecosystem are emphasized.[41] The ritual is

[33] Moh Hisyam Hermawan et al., "Leadership, Islamic Spirituality, and Javanese Mysticism: Cultural Analysis of Islamic Education of Panjang Jimat in Cirebon," Articles, *Eduprof : Islamic Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (2025): 15–25, https://doi.org/10.47453/eduprof.v6i2.296.

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[38] Ririn Purwasih et al., "Methic Arts: Cultural Preservation and Character Education Agent for the Community," *Journal of Social Knowledge Education (JSKE)* 3, no. 4 (2022): 125–31, https://doi.org/10.37251/jske.v3i4.904.

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[40] FX E. Armada Riyanto, "'HAMEMAYU HAYUNING BAWONO'('To Beautify the Beauty of the World')," 2022, 353–62, https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220206.047.

[41] Didi Supandi et al., "Harmony with Nature: A Literature Review of Islamic and Perennial Values in Cikondang Indigenous Traditions," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam; Vol 26, No 2 (2024): EL HARAKAH*, ahead of print, 2024, https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v26i2.27558.

regarded as a sacred custom that fosters wisdom and policies that guide human survival. Consequently, it serves to promote environmental preservation through its symbolic meanings and teachings.[42]

The intersection of spirituality, culture, and ecology is a significant area of study, particularly in indigenous communities where these elements are closely intertwined. This nexus has yielded novel methodologies that not only encourage eco-friendliness but also fortify cultural distinctiveness and societal fortitude, thereby reinforcing social, cultural, and eco-cognizant principles.[43,44] These traditions cultivate profound emotional bonds between humans and the environment, thereby promoting sustainable practices and conservation initiatives.[45,46] Religious eco-dimensionality encompasses inventorying biota and ecosystems, recognizing environmental dynamics at various scales, understanding community and anti-community behaviors, structuring networks, adopting sustainable technologies, and developing a set of religious symbols, aesthetic activities, and ceremonies. This can evolve as issues arise.[47] Like the rituals of the Tengger tribe, they embody Javanese cultural and religious values. They promote environmental preservation through respect for nature and community cooperation.[48] Nevertheless, there is an absence of in-depth research addressing the specific manifestation of these values in the ritual practices and traditions of Tajakembang in Cilacap. Research has highlighted the pivotal role of Javanese

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[43] Sudarto et al., "Pengelolaan Pertanian Berkelanjutan Berbasis Eco-Spirituality Dalam Tradisi Komunitas Adat Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Cultural Socio-Ecological System (Studi Pada Tradisi Komunitas Adat Di Tajakembang, Cilacap, Jawa Tengah)."

[44] Anak Agung Istri Andayani et al., "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Melalui Pengembangan Desa Wisata Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Sosial Budaya Wilayah (Studi Di Desa Wisata Penglipuran Bali)," *Jurnal Ketahanan Nasional* 23, no. 1 (2017): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.22146/jkn.18006.

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[46] Mohammad Fathi Royyani, "Upacara Seren Taun Di Cigugur, Kabupaten Kuningan, Jawa Barat: Tradisi Sebagai Basis Pelestarian Lingkungan," *Indonesian Journal of Biology* 4, no. 5 (n.d.): 78972.

[47] Susan P. Bratton, "Eco-Dimensionality as a Religious Foundation for Sustainability," *Sustainability* 10, no. 4 (2018): 1021, https://doi.org/10.3390/su10041021.

[48] Andri Estining Sejati et al., "The Environmental Conservation Value of Tengger Tribe's Traditional Ceremony in Supporting the Mount Bromo Tourism Area," *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites* 46, no. 1 (2023): 315–26, https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.46135-1029.

cultural and religious principles in environmental preservation. However, there is a notable absence of ethnographic research that specifically delineates the ritual and traditional practices within Tajakembang, Cilacap, and their contributions to environmental harmony. This study uniquely applies an ethnographic qualitative approach to document and analyze the local rituals and traditions in Tajakembang, revealing their role in fostering environmental preservation through cultural and religious values. It contributes to understanding how indigenous knowledge systems can inform sustainable environmental practices.

Method

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to examine how Javanese cultural and religious values are enacted in environmental preservation within the Tajakembang indigenous community of Cilacap. Ethnography was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of lived experiences, cultural meanings, and everyday practices through prolonged engagement in natural settings.[49,50,51,52] Consistent with ethnographic inquiry, the study focused on the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* tradition as an embedded case through which the relationships among ritual practice, religious beliefs, community values, and ecological preservation could be examined in their authentic social context.[53] This approach enabled the researchers to observe rituals, traditions, and everyday interactions as they naturally unfolded, thereby revealing symbolic meanings and collective environmental practices that are often inaccessible

[49] Ann Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures* (Sage, 2002), https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3PIcNST_LKkC&oi.

[50] K. O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods* (Taylor & Francis, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203864722.

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[52] S. J. Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (Wiley, 2024), https://books.google.co.id/books?id=FJQZEQAAQBAJ.

[53] Dawson R. Hancock et al., *Doing Case Study Research*, A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers (Teachers College Press, 2021), https://doi.org/10.65528/9780807779828.

through quantitative approaches.[54,55,56,57] Such contextual understanding is essential for explaining how environmental preservation is embedded within local worldviews and for informing culturally appropriate conservation strategies.[58]

Fieldwork was conducted in the Tajakembang indigenous community, Cilacap, from July 2024 to January 2025. Tajakembang is a relatively small indigenous settlement comprising 14 households, a demographic structure that has remained stable across generations. The extended period of fieldwork enabled prolonged engagement with the community and facilitated a comprehensive understanding of local cultural practices, religious beliefs, and ecological traditions. The fieldwork was undertaken in four sequential stages. First, permission was obtained from customary authorities and community leaders, followed by an initial period of rapport building through informal participation in everyday community activities to establish trust and cultural familiarity. Second, participant observation was conducted during the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* ritual, customary meetings, communal gatherings, and routine environmental practices to document how cultural and religious values were enacted in everyday life. Third, insights emerging from observations informed the development of semi-structured interview questions, enabling subsequent interviews to explore participants' interpretations of rituals, beliefs, and environmental stewardship in greater depth. Finally, documentary materials and oral histories were collected throughout the fieldwork to contextualize observations and corroborate participants' narratives.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct knowledge of, involvement in, and authority over the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* tradition and related environmental practices. The study involved 18 participants, comprising one customary leader (J-R1), six community figures (T-R2, Z-R3, S-R4, W-R5, C-R6, M-R7), six indigenous community members (Y-R8, K-R9, D-R10, R-R11, U-R12, E-R13), and five young men (A-R14, M-R15, T-R16, N-R17, F-R18). These participants were selected because of their respective roles in

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[55] Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Routledge, 2019), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315146027.

[56] Jian Huang, "Echoes of Folk Culture: An Ethnographic Analysis of Local Narratives in Zhanjiang Communities," Articles, *Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 6, no. 8 (2024): 77–83, https://doi.org/10.53469/jssh.2024.06(08).15.

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maintaining customary institutions, transmitting intergenerational knowledge, preserving ritual practices, and interpreting the relationship between ritual life and ecological stewardship.

Empirical data were collected through methodological triangulation comprising participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis.[59] Participant observation documented ritual performances, social interactions, customary decision-making processes, and environmental practices associated with the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* tradition. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' understandings of cultural values, religious beliefs, traditional stories, hunting taboos, and the protection of sacred sites as expressions of environmental stewardship. Documentary sources included customary records, community documents, and oral histories that provided historical and cultural context for interpreting contemporary practices.

The research adhered to established principles of qualitative research ethics.[60] Ethical approval and organizational permission were obtained before fieldwork commenced. All participants received detailed information regarding the objectives of the study, research procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained prior to interviews and observations. As all participants were adults, parental consent was not required. Participants' identities were protected by pseudonyms, while identifying information was removed from the dataset. Digital records, interview transcripts, and field notes were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team. Throughout the study, reflexive field notes and analytic memos were maintained to monitor researcher positionality, assumptions, and potential interpretive bias.

Data collection and analysis proceeded concurrently, allowing emerging findings to inform subsequent observations and interviews until thematic saturation was achieved. The data were analyzed using Braun & Clarke, six-phase thematic analysis, comprising familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, construction of candidate themes, review and refinement of thematic categories, definition and naming of themes, and production of an interpretive narrative.[61] Coding was conducted iteratively using analytic memos and a

[59] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199896448.001.0001.

[60] Norman K. Denzin et al., "Critical Qualitative Methodologies: Reconceptualizations and Emergent Construction," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 10, no. 4 (2017): 482–98, https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2017.10.4.482.

[61] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis.* (Routledge, 2024), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003362715-21.

structured codebook to enhance transparency and analytical consistency.[62] To complement the thematic analysis, narrative analysis was employed to examine how participants constructed and transmitted ecological knowledge through traditional stories, ritual narratives, and collective memory, thereby revealing the meanings attached to environmental practices across generations.[63,64] Integrating thematic and narrative analyses enabled a comprehensive interpretation of how traditional storytelling, hunting taboos, and the protection of sacred sites function as interconnected cultural mechanisms supporting environmental preservation.[65,66,67]

The rigor of the study was established using the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln & Guba. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement in the field, methodological triangulation across interviews, participant observations, documentary evidence, and member checking with selected participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations.[68] Dependability was strengthened through systematic documentation of methodological decisions, coding procedures, and analytical processes. Confirmability was supported by maintaining reflexive journals and a comprehensive audit trail throughout the study, while transferability was facilitated through rich contextual descriptions of the Tajakembang community and the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* tradition, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to comparable socio-cultural contexts.[69]

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[62] Ashley Castleberry and Amanda Nolen, "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data: Is It as Easy as It Sounds?," *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning* 10, no. 6 (2018): 807–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019.

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[69] Sudarto et al., "Pengelolaan Pertanian Berkelanjutan Berbasis Eco-Spirituality Dalam Tradisi Komunitas Adat Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Cultural Socio-Ecological System (Studi Pada Tradisi Komunitas Adat Di Tajakembang, Cilacap, Jawa Tengah)."

Results

Administratively, Tajakembang is included in Kujang Hamlet, Cijeruk village, Dayeuhluhur sub-district, Cilacap, Central Java, Indonesia. The village is located 11 km from the center of Dayeuhluhur sub-district and 111 km from the center of Cilacap Regency. The livelihood of the Cijeruk villagers is 90% peasant farming and embracing Islam. The region is located at coordinates 7°10'44"S - 108°36'13"E and is in a mountain valley which is a series of Pojoktiga Mountains. The elevation of Cijeruk Village is between 200-1,200 meters above sea level with several mountain peaks such as Mount Subang (1,206 m), Mount Karanggumantung (1,185 m), Mount Palasari (1,062 m) and others. The Cibeet River is the main river that passes through the center of Cijeruk Village, flowing from north to south and meeting the Cidayeuh River. The village is bordered on the east by the Cilumping River and on the west by the Tejakembang River. This village is one of the villages that borders West Java Province to the north. The community is a mix of Javanese and Sundanese, and most of the languages spoken are Sundanese. Despite being administratively enforced in the province of Central Java, it is culture-wise more oriented to Sundanese culture. This is also the case with the use of Sundanese as spoken language. Tajakembang indigenous communities have a cultivated agricultural tradition, which focuses not only on economic outcomes but also on environmental preservation. Their farming practices often involve indigenous methods that are in harmony with natural cycles. This community upholds customary values and norms (*pikukuh karuhun*) as a guide to life, both in terms of sacred ceremonies and daily activities.[70] The Tajakembang indigenous community is a farming community inhabiting a hilly area with a terraced rice field system and dry land utilization. Traditional cultural knowledge concerning agricultural practices is not only a means of subsistence, but also a manifestation of a profound spiritual connection between humans and nature. According to the traditional elders of the area, there are several locations of sacred significance in the vicinity, which are intricately interwoven with mythological tales and are believed to be imbued with the presence of walat and bendu. The area in question encompasses the Awi *Ngambang* forest, the Langis sacred site, the Dewi Palasari sacred site, and the Mandala Si Pasekulan sacred site, in addition to the Dehem Dam, the Cipamali River, the Padontelu mountain, the Ketra mountain, the Pabeasan mountain, and the Cimuncang mountain.

[70] Sudarto et al., "Pengelolaan Pertanian Berkelanjutan Berbasis Eco-Spirituality Dalam Tradisi Komunitas Adat Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Cultural Socio-Ecological System (Studi Pada Tradisi Komunitas Adat Di Tajakembang, Cilacap, Jawa Tengah)."

Figure 1. Traditional rice field management

The study found that Javanese rituals in Tajakembang are closely tied to environmental cycles and natural elements, such as water, trees, and land. According to the statements provided by the participants, the rituals are meticulously synchronized to align with seasonal fluctuations, agricultural activities, and natural occurring phenomena, reflecting a profound cognizance of ecological rhythms. This assertion is supported by the inclusion of techniques such as soil conservation, the implementation of crop rotation, and the management of pest populations that have been adapted to the local characteristics of the ecosystem, as well as the hydro-social cycle and the astronomical calendar system of *Pranata Mongso*. For example, ceremonies involving offerings to rivers, such as the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* ritual and sacred trees symbolize respect for water sources and forest ecosystems, which are vital for community sustenance. The land is honored through the *Molah* ritual (cultivate or hoe the land) and soil-related rites that express gratitude and seek blessings for fertility and balance. In the interest of demonstrating respect for the plants, the *Tebar* ritual (scattering rice seeds), *Ngaseuk* ritual (initiating the planting process), *Ngoyos/Ngaramet* ritual (removing weeds or grass). In acknowledgment of the bounty of the land and as an expression of profound respect for the harvest season, communities engage in a series of ritual practices. These include the *Nyalin* ritual, which is a ceremony conducted to initiate the first harvest of rice. The *Sadon* procession marks the commencement of the harvest season (when the rice is in the middle of its *Mbobot* or full), followed by the *Dadung* party tradition, which is a celebratory event that occurs after the rice harvest. Subsequently, the *Mbisu* ritual involves the traditional pounding of rice for consumption, and the *Nutu or Ngayaran* tradition involves the processing of the harvest.

Figure 2. Forms of *Dawuhan* and Daily Rituals

The participants collectively recognized, respected, and deeply valued water as a sacred resource essential to all forms of life. This understanding went beyond mere acknowledgment; it shaped their relationship with water, embedding a profound sense of reverence in every aspect of its use. Water was not simply viewed as a commodity or resource to be exploited but as a vital, life-giving element that sustains ecosystems, communities, and cultures alike. It further emphasized that the utilization of the flow of springs from Taja Padaya-Padusa was intrinsically linked to this respect. This flow of water is subsequently utilized in their rice farming system through the *Ngabeungkat Dawuhan* tradition, which is observed annually to mark the commencement of rice planting. This tradition comprises numerous ritualized practices, including the recitation of *ijab* and prayers, as well as a set of guidelines that are to be adhered to and executed by community members. The practices surrounding the use of water were guided by principles that recognized its sacredness. This ensured that consumption and management were conducted in a sustainable and thoughtful manner. This holistic perspective fostered a harmonious balance between human needs and the natural environment, reinforcing the idea that protecting water is tantamount to protecting life itself.

It is asserted that these rituals are not engaged in without purpose; rather, they are perceived as vital expressions of environmental harmony. These practices are regarded to maintain balance and respect between humans and nature. It is their belief that rituals such as communal offerings and harvest ceremonies are not only spiritual obligations, but also practical measures to sustain natural resources and ensure ecological well-being. The incorporation of religious tenets within these practices serves to cultivate a sense of gratitude and responsibility towards the environment, thereby engendering a collective commitment to the preservation of their natural surroundings through cultural tradition. In the context of Tajakembang, traditional leaders assume a pivotal role in fostering environmental harmony through ritual practices. They function as custodians and facilitators of cultural and religious traditions, playing a crucial part in preserving the region's ecological integrity. The role of these leaders is to organize and lead communal ceremonies, ensuring that the rituals are performed correctly and meaningfully. This, in turn, helps to transmit environmental ethics rooted in Javanese values. Furthermore, these leaders disseminate information to the community regarding the spiritual significance of respecting nature and sustainable resource use, thereby reinforcing social cohesion and collective responsibility for environmental preservation. The leadership exhibited by these communities plays a pivotal role in preserving the continuity of these traditions, particularly in the context of evolving social dynamics. This commitment to tradition fosters a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural

environment, underscoring the significance of cultural and environmental sustainability.

Rituals like *Babaritan* (earth thanksgiving) or *Jaga-jaga Babaritan* and *Rereongan Bersih Desa* (village cleansing) embody gratitude and respect for nature, reinforcing community responsibility for environmental care. These traditions not only preserve cultural identity but also function as living frameworks that guide communities toward harmonious and responsible interactions with their environment. Through these rituals, environmental stewardship becomes a communal value, encouraging sustainable practices and protection of natural resources. It is acknowledged that nature plays a pivotal role in the sustenance of life and the provision of means of subsistence. This underscores the imperative to show profound respect for the elements of nature, including soil, water, flora, and fauna. This approach is further reinforced by the sacredness these elements hold in Javanese cosmology. Moreover, a daily set of rituals has been observed, including fortune telling, the invocation of safety, and specific wishes for the fulfilment of dreams, notably the *Nepus* ritual. This ritual is also employed to predict future expectations. The ceremony commences with a prayer, the cleansing of the grave of *Karuhun* (*Eyang Suradika* or *Suradaka*), prayers to *Karuhun*, the performance of *Ijab* and *ngusulkeun*, and the bending of the *tepus* rod. It is customary for the ritual to be performed on Tuesday *Kliwon* and Saturday *Legi*. It is the belief of the local culture that this day is considered auspicious for the performance of hajat, a practice that is also associated with myths surrounding *Eyang Suradika's* journey to Cirebon for Friday prayers at the Cirebon Great Mosque.

Islamic values are integrated into environmental conservation through several practices that encourage environmental stewardship, gratitude, and harmony with nature. It was agreed that Islamic teachings encourage humans to act as *Khalifah* of the Earth, leading the community to manage agricultural activities sustainably, respecting natural cycles and avoiding overexploitation. In the context of religious ceremonies, prayers and offerings are integral components that express gratitude to Allah for natural resources. This reinforces a spiritual connection and responsibility towards environmental preservation. In the words of the traditional leader, "*Migawe land teu dugi ngagunasika kangge hirup di waktos kapayunna atawa ngereut jeung neundeun keur jaga ning esuk*". This is consistent with the principles of *maslahah* (public interest and community well-being), which guide decisions related to sustainable agriculture, prioritizing the collective good over immediate gains. Furthermore, Islam emphasizes justice (*'adl*) through the tenets of equity and fairness in all dealings and relationships, ensuring that each individual receives their rightful share. The concept under discussion here is that of treating oneself, others, and even one's enemies with fairness and respect. Community members demonstrate a clear preference for long-term sustainability

over short-term financial gain, acknowledging the need to consider the broader implications for ecosystem balance and the needs of future generations.

All participants reached a consensus that this represented a manifestation of *Maslahah* (public interest or community well-being) in guiding decisions related to sustainable agriculture, with a focus on the public interest beyond immediate gains. The prevailing ethos among community members is one of long-term sustainability, superseding immediate economic gain. Their deliberations encompass a wide-ranging perspective, incorporating considerations of ecological equilibrium and the needs of subsequent generations. It is the considered opinion of several community members that human beings are obliged to be civilized both (*Adab*) towards other human beings and the natural environment (moral conduct - respectful interactions with nature). This emphasizes ethical behavior towards all living things. In the context of agriculture, this translates into practices that respect animal welfare and biodiversity, thereby avoiding harm to ecosystems. Moreover, the practice of *Ihsan* (excellence in conduct) has been demonstrated to encourage community members to strive for excellence in agricultural practices. The objective of these initiatives is to optimize yield, ensuring the efficient utilization of resources, including water and land. This principle is predicated on the promotion of efficient farming methods that benefit both humans and nature. It is via the practice of prayer that individuals seek protection and express their sentiments. This is a form *Shukr* (gratitude) is the expression of gratitude for divine or natural endowments. This value system has been found to inspire community members to care for their land and resources as a form of appreciation for what they have been given. In like manner, the *Karuhun* taught that one must perform the *Ijab* and engage in prayer prior to undertaking any action. It is imperative to acknowledge and value the natural resources endowed by the divine, which fosters a sense of responsibility towards their conservation.

Furthermore, the traditional leader emphasised that "*Gunung teu meunang dilebur, lebak teu meunang diruksak*", thereby implying that humans should not be arbitrary towards nature and should be mindful of the fact that succeeding generations will continue the human struggle in the world. The world is merely a trust, and it is incumbent upon us to instill goodness in the next generation. It is imperative to ensure that the subsequent generation does not bear the consequences of our contemporary actions. Justice (*'adl*), it is our collective obligation to ensure that our actions today do not adversely impact the well-being and prospects of the generations that follow us. The community members express a shared aspiration that all legislation and regulations (*Pikukuh Karuhun*) and Islamic values that have been established are intended to serve a single, overarching objective: the promotion of the common good and the welfare of society. The concept of "*baldatun thayyibatun wa rabbun ghofur, gemah ripah loh jinawi*

tata tentrem kerta raharja" which translates as a land of plenty where all live in harmony with nature, is realized.

These rituals promote respect for natural elements, encourage sustainable resource use, and strengthen social cohesion. Religious teachings integrated into these practices emphasize gratitude, balance, and harmony with nature, reinforcing environmental ethics. These rituals foster a profound respect for natural elements by symbolically acknowledging the sacredness of the environment. Through ceremonial practices, community members are reminded of their interconnectedness with nature, which encourages the sustainable use of natural resources. Moreover, these rituals serve as social glue, strengthening community bonds and collective responsibility toward environmental stewardship. Embedded within these practices are religious teachings that emphasize core values such as gratitude for nature's gifts, maintaining balance between human needs and ecological limits, and living in harmony with the natural world. Together, these cultural and spiritual dimensions reinforce a strong environmental ethic that guides behavior and decision-making, ensuring the preservation of both cultural heritage and the environment. These practices demonstrate how Islamic beliefs in Tajakembang underpin and motivate environmental conservation efforts within the community. This intimate connection between rituals and natural elements demonstrates how Javanese cultural and religious practices function as mechanisms for environmental stewardship, reinforcing sustainable interactions with the surrounding ecosystem. Javanese cultural and religious values significantly influence environmental preservation practices by embedding principles of respect, harmony, and stewardship toward nature within local rituals and traditions. These values, often a syncretism of indigenous Javanese beliefs and Islamic teachings, promote environmental ethics that guide community behavior in sustainable resource use and ecological balance.[71,72]

The study found that Javanese rituals in Tajakembang, such as communal offerings, harvest ceremonies, and ancestral commemorations, embody principles of environmental stewardship. These practices reflect a profound respect for nature, emphasizing the interconnectedness between humans and the environment. Communal offerings serve as expressions of gratitude to natural spirits and forces, reinforcing sustainable resource use.

[71] Abdul Khobir et al., "The Interaction of Islam and Local Beliefs: A Study of Djawa Soenda's Model of Religious Worship in the Review of Islamic Education," Articles, *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 1 (2025): 59–104, https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol24.iss1.art3.

[72] Mohamad Toha et al., "Acculturation of Mataraman Local Wisdom with Islamic Values: Implications for Social and Economic Development," Articles, *Danadyaksa: Post Modern Economy Journal* 2, no. 1 (2024): 33–47, https://doi.org/10.69965/danadyaksa.v2i1.143.

Harvest ceremonies celebrate the bounty of the land while promoting responsible agricultural practices that maintain soil fertility and ecological balance. Ancestral commemorations honor past generations who lived in harmony with nature, inspiring contemporary community members to uphold these environmental ethics. Collectively, these rituals function not only as cultural and religious observances but also as vital mechanisms for preserving biodiversity and fostering a sustainable relationship with the natural world. The Tajakembang community, with its commitment to upholding *Pikuhuh Karuhun* as a guide to action, which is based on Islamic values as a guide, seeks to preserve nature as a place for their life and livelihood and to pass on the same nature to future generations. The transmission of this knowledge is typically achieved through folklore or taboos established by elders within the community.[73] Indigenous stories have the potential to offer valuable insights and wisdom, and it is important to ensure a balanced and inclusive approach that recognizes the diverse perspectives and knowledge of both conservation practitioners and local communities. This could be a valuable approach to guide future efforts in biocultural conservation practice.[74]

Discussion

The findings indicate that environmental stewardship in the Tajakembang indigenous community cannot be adequately explained by indigenous ecological knowledge, Javanese cultural traditions, or Islamic teachings as separate determinants of conservation. Instead, these elements operate through a mutually reinforcing socio-cultural process that institutionalizes ecological values into enduring collective practices. This interpretation shifts the analytical focus from identifying environmental values to explaining how they are legitimized, reproduced, and sustained across generations through culturally embedded governance. Consequently, environmental stewardship emerges not simply as an individual ethical commitment but as a collective institutional process that regulates relationships among humans, nature, and the sacred.

This interpretation both supports and extends scholarship on spiritual ecology and ecospirituality. Previous studies have shown that religious beliefs cultivate ecological awareness by fostering moral responsibility toward

[73] Fikret Berkes et al., "Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management," *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5 (2000): 1251–62, https://doi.org/10.1890/1051-0761(2000)010%5B1251:ROTEKA%5D2.0.CO;2.

[74] Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares and Mar Cabeza, "Rediscovering the Potential of Indigenous Storytelling for Conservation Practice," *Conservation Letters* 11, no. 3 (2018): e12398, https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12398.

nature.[75,76,77] However, they provide comparatively limited explanation of the institutional processes through which spiritual commitments become enduring forms of collective environmental behaviour. The Tajakembang case suggests that spiritual values become environmentally effective only when institutionalized through ritual participation, customary authority, and shared cultural obligations that translate moral commitments into routine environmental practice.

The findings also reframe the role of ritual within environmental governance. Rather than serving merely as a symbolic expression of cultural identity or religious devotion, ritual functions as an ecological institution that legitimizes environmental norms, reinforces collective accountability, and facilitates the intergenerational transmission of ecological responsibility. This interpretation extends Durkheim concept of collective conscience by demonstrating that ritual not only strengthens social cohesion but also institutionalizes environmental stewardship.[78] Likewise, consistent with practice theory, the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* tradition illustrates how recurrent communal practices, rather than beliefs alone, reproduce environmental governance over time.[79,80]

More broadly, the findings reinforce arguments that environmental sustainability cannot be separated from its cultural foundations.[81] Rather than operating as parallel dimensions, Javanese philosophy, Islamic ethics, ritual participation, and customary institutions function as an integrated governance system that continually reproduces ecological responsibility within everyday

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[75] Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, in *Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (University of California Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520944459.

[76] Leslie E. Sponsel, "Spiritual Ecology," in *Encyclopedia of Religious Psychology and Behavior*, ed. Todd K. Shackelford (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38971-9_2054-1.

[77] C. Edward R et al., *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping* (Oxford University Press, 2019), https://books.google.co.id/books?id=hkK1DwAAQBAJ.

[78] Emile Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life," in *Social Theory Re-Wired*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2023), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315775357-6.

[79] Sudarto et al., "Pengelolaan Pertanian Berkelanjutan Berbasis Eco-Spirituality Dalam Tradisi Komunitas Adat Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Cultural Socio-Ecological System (Studi Pada Tradisi Komunitas Adat Di Tajakembang, Cilacap, Jawa Tengah)."

[80] T. R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), https://books.google.co.id/books?id=KYgbUegR3AMC.

[81] Mensah, "Sustainable Development: Meaning, History, Principles, Pillars, and Implications for Human Action: Literature Review."

community life. Accordingly, the principal contribution of this study lies not in documenting the coexistence of indigenous traditions and Islamic ecological ethics, but in explaining the institutional mechanism through which environmental values become enduring governance practices. This institutional perspective provides the conceptual foundation for re-examining indigenous environmental governance and Islamic ecological ethics in the following sections.

The Tajakembang case extends contemporary understandings of indigenous environmental governance by demonstrating that sustainability depends not only on ecological knowledge and customary institutions but also on the cultural processes that transform environmental values into collectively binding obligations. Existing scholarship has established that indigenous governance is rooted in Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK), customary norms, and adaptive resource management developed through long-term human–environment interactions.[82,83,84] Likewise, studies on multiple knowledge systems emphasize that sustainable environmental management emerges through the integration of diverse ecological knowledge systems.[85] However, these perspectives provide limited explanation of how ecological knowledge becomes socially legitimate and continuously reproduced within community life.

The Tajakembang evidence reveals that ecological knowledge alone is insufficient to explain the endurance of environmental stewardship. Knowledge becomes operational only when embedded in ritual practices, customary authority, collective narratives, and moral obligations that regulate everyday relationships between humans and nature.[86] This finding shifts the analytical understanding of governance from a static institutional arrangement toward an ongoing process of cultural reproduction. Environmental responsibility persists not primarily through formal enforcement mechanisms but through repeated communal practices that generate voluntary compliance, social accountability, and collective commitment.

This interpretation also challenges the conventional view of ritual as merely symbolic or expressive of cultural identity. The *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* tradition demonstrates that ritual functions as a constitutive mechanism of

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[82] F. Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resousrce Management* (Taylor and Francis, 1999).

[83] Berkes et al., "Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management."

[84] Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*.

[85] Maria Tengö et al., "Taboos and Forest Governance: Informal Protection of Hot Spot Dry Forest in Southern Madagascar," *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment* 36, no. 8 (2007): 683–91, https://doi.org/10.1579/0044-7447(2007)36%5B683:TAFGIP%5D2.0.CO;2.

[86] Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future.*

governance by institutionalizing ecological norms,[87] legitimizing customary authority,[88] and transmitting environmental commitments across generations. Thus, ritual is not an external cultural element accompanying governance; rather, it is one of the processes through which governance itself is continuously enacted. This finding extends practice theory by showing that environmental governance is reproduced through recurrent social practices in which ecological meanings are collectively performed and reinforced.[89]

Therefore, the Tajakembang case broadens the concept of indigenous environmental governance beyond the conventional focus on knowledge systems and institutional arrangements. Governance should be understood as a culturally embedded socio-ecological process where knowledge, values, rituals, and institutions interact to sustain environmental responsibility.[90,91] While complementing Berkes', emphasis on adaptive governance, this study advances the argument that ritual serves as a critical institutional mechanism through which ecological knowledge gains legitimacy, collective commitment, and intergenerational continuity.[92] The central theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating that the persistence of indigenous environmental governance depends not merely on possessing ecological knowledge, but on continuously institutionalizing ecological ethics through collective cultural practice.

The findings extend contemporary scholarship on Islamic ecological ethics by demonstrating that religious environmental principles derive their practical effectiveness not solely from theological doctrine but from their continuous integration with culturally embedded institutions. Islamic ecological ethics has traditionally been grounded in the normative concepts of *khalifah* (stewardship), *amanah* (trust), and human responsibility for safeguarding God's

[87] Sudarto et al., "Pengelolaan Pertanian Berkelanjutan Berbasis Eco-Spirituality Dalam Tradisi Komunitas Adat Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Cultural Socio-Ecological System (Studi Pada Tradisi Komunitas Adat Di Tajakembang, Cilacap, Jawa Tengah)."

[88] Maria Tengö et al., "Taboos and Forest Governance: Informal Protection of Hot Spot Dry Forest in Southern Madagascar."

[89] Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*.

[90] Khobir et al., "The Interaction of Islam and Local Beliefs: A Study of Djawa Soenda's Model of Religious Worship in the Review of Islamic Education."

[91] Toha et al., "Acculturation of Mataraman Local Wisdom with Islamic Values: Implications for Social and Economic Development."

[92] Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resousrce Management*.

creation creation.[93,94,95] While these perspectives provide a robust ethical foundation for environmental responsibility, they offer comparatively limited explanation of how religious principles become enduring forms of collective environmental governance within indigenous Muslim communities.

The Tajakembang case suggests that Islamic ecological ethics should be understood not only as a theological framework but also as a socially embedded governance system. Rather than replacing indigenous traditions, Islamic teachings reinforce the Javanese philosophy of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono*, creating a complementary moral order that legitimizes environmental stewardship as both a religious obligation and a cultural responsibility.[96] Consequently, the effectiveness of Islamic ecological ethics depends less on doctrinal instruction than on its continuous institutionalization through ritual participation, customary authority, and shared communal practices that translate moral principles into collective environmental action.

This interpretation challenges approaches that treat Islamic environmental ethics primarily as a universal theological discourse detached from local socio-cultural contexts.[97,98,99] Instead, the findings demonstrate that religious ethics acquire practical authority through cultural institutionalization, where rituals, customary norms, and traditional leadership function as governance mechanisms that reproduce ecological values across generations. In this respect, environmental stewardship derives its legitimacy simultaneously from theological authority and from the collective acceptance generated through customary institutions.

Accordingly, this study advances Islamic ecological ethics beyond its predominantly normative orientation toward an institutional perspective of environmental governance. By demonstrating how religious ethics are transformed into durable collective practice through the interaction of culture, ritual, and customary institutions, the Tajakembang case provides a conceptual

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[93] Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* (Routledge, 2003), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426982.

[94] Roger S. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*, Oxford University Press, 2006, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195176483.001.0001.

[95] Willis Jenkins and Christopher Key Chapple, "Religion and Environment," in *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, vol. 36, no. Volume 36, 2011, Annual Reviews, 2011, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-042610-103728.

[96] Riyanto, "'HAMEMAYU HAYUNING BAWONO'('To Beautify the Beauty of the World')."

[97] Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*.

[98] Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*.

[99] Jenkins and Chapple, "Religion and Environment."

bridge between Islamic ecological ethics and indigenous environmental governance, paving the way for the Integrated Socio-Ecological Governance Framework developed in the following section.

Taken together, the preceding analyses demonstrate that environmental stewardship in Tajakembang cannot be adequately explained through indigenous environmental governance, spiritual ecology, or Islamic ecological ethics as separate analytical perspectives. While each framework illuminates an important dimension of community-based conservation, none independently explains how ecological values become institutionalized and sustained over time. The ethnographic evidence instead indicates that long-term environmental stewardship emerges through the reciprocal interaction of ecological knowledge, Javanese cultural values, Islamic ethical principles, ritual practices, and customary institutions operating as an integrated socio-ecological governance system.

This interpretation synthesizes insights from indigenous environmental governance[100,101,102], multiple knowledge systems,[103] practice theory,[104] spiritual ecology,[105,106,107,108] environmental ethics,[109,110] and Islamic ecological ethics.[111,112,113] Rather than representing competing explanations, these perspectives become analytically complementary when viewed as mutually constitutive processes through which environmental governance is socially reproduced. In particular, Berkes explains the adaptive role of ecological

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[100] Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resousrce Management*.

[101] Berkes et al., "Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management."

[102] Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*.

[103] Maria Tengö et al., "Taboos and Forest Governance: Informal Protection of Hot Spot Dry Forest in Southern Madagascar."

[104] Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*.

[105] Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*.

[106] Bron Taylor, "From the Ground Up: Dark Green Religion and the Environmental Future 1 Green and Dark Green Religion," in *Ecology and the Environment: Perspectives from the Humanities*, ed. Donald K. Swearer et al. (2009).

[107] Sponsel, "Spiritual Ecology."

[108] Edward R et al., *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping*.

[109] Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," in *The Ethics of the Environment* (Routledge, 2017), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315239897-8.

[110] Robert Elliot, *Environmental Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1995), https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FYWcAQAAQBAJ&oi.

[111] Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*.

[112] Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*.

[113] Willis Jenkins et al., *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Routledge, 2016), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315764788.

knowledge, Durkheim clarifies how ritual generates collective conscience,[114] and Schatzki demonstrates how recurrent practices reproduce institutional order.[115] Their integration provides a more comprehensive explanation of how environmental governance is institutionalized through the interaction of knowledge, values, ethics, ritual, and customary institutions.

The originality of this study therefore lies not in demonstrating that Javanese cultural values and Islamic ecological ethics coexist in environmental stewardship but in explaining the institutional mechanism through which these normative systems become enduring environmental governance. The proposed Integrated Socio-Ecological Governance Framework conceptualizes ritual as the mediating governance institution that translates ecological knowledge, cultural values, and religious ethics into sustained collective environmental action. This perspective extends indigenous environmental governance beyond its conventional emphasis on Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) and customary institutions, while simultaneously advancing Islamic ecological ethics from a predominantly theological framework toward a culturally embedded model of environmental governance.

The ethnographic evidence further reveals a sequential governance mechanism underlying this process. Ecological knowledge provides practical understanding of environmental management; Javanese cultural values establish normative expectations concerning harmonious human–nature relationships; Islamic ecological ethics confer moral legitimacy upon environmental responsibility; ritual institutionalizes these commitments through repeated collective practice; and customary institutions reinforce accountability and intergenerational transmission. Together, these interconnected processes generate culturally embedded environmental governance capable of sustaining long-term ecological resilience. Although developed from a single ethnographic case, the proposed framework is intended as an analytical model rather than a site-specific explanation. By identifying the institutional pathway linking ecological knowledge, culture, religion, ritual, governance, and ecological resilience, it offers a transferable conceptual lens for analysing indigenous environmental governance across diverse socio-ecological contexts.

[114] Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life."

[115] Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social.*

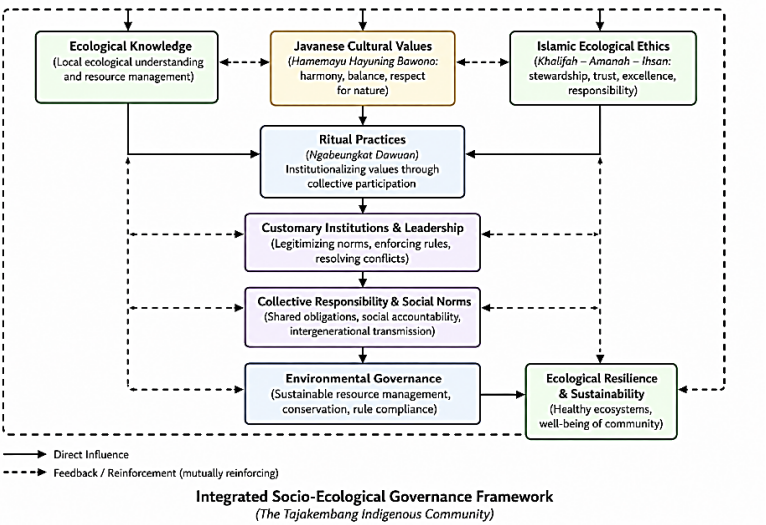

Figure 3. Conceptual Integrated Socio-Ecological Governance Framework

The findings generate important implications for environmental governance theory and conservation practice by challenging approaches that treat indigenous environmental governance, Islamic ecological ethics, and spiritual ecology as analytically separate domains. The Tajakembang case demonstrates that sustainable environmental stewardship emerges through the continuous interaction of ecological knowledge, cultural values, religious ethics, ritual practices, and customary institutions. This perspective shifts analytical attention from identifying isolated determinants of environmental behaviour toward examining the socio-cultural processes through which ecological values gain legitimacy, collective commitment, and intergenerational continuity. Accordingly, the proposed Integrated Socio-Ecological Governance Framework advances existing approaches by conceptualizing governance as a dynamic process of cultural reproduction rather than a static institutional arrangement.

This process-oriented perspective provides a broader analytical lens for understanding environmentally sustainable governance in culturally embedded communities. Rather than viewing indigenous governance primarily through ecological knowledge or institutional structures, the framework highlights how knowledge becomes effective when embedded within cultural and moral systems that continuously reproduce environmental responsibility.

The findings also offer practical implications for conservation policy. Contemporary conservation programmes often prioritize scientific expertise, regulatory mechanisms, and technical interventions while paying insufficient attention to the socio-cultural institutions that sustain long-term

stewardship.[116,117] The Tajakembang experience demonstrates that rituals, customary institutions, and religious values function not merely as cultural symbols but as active governance mechanisms that foster collective responsibility, voluntary compliance, and social legitimacy. Conservation initiatives that neglect these dimensions may undermine community participation and weaken long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge not simply as ecological information but as part of a culturally embedded governance system through which environmental values are interpreted, negotiated, and transmitted across generations[118]. Consistent with broader perspectives on culturally grounded sustainability,[119] conservation strategies are more likely to achieve durable outcomes when indigenous communities are recognized as governance partners whose traditions, religious ethics, and customary institutions represent strategic resources for environmental management.[120,121]

Ultimately, the Tajakembang case suggests that strengthening environmental resilience requires protecting the cultural processes that sustain ecological ethics amid social change. Supporting ritual continuity, customary leadership, and intergenerational knowledge transmission can enhance the adaptive capacity of indigenous governance systems. Future comparative research across diverse Muslim indigenous communities is needed to test the broader applicability of the Integrated Socio-Ecological Governance Framework and refine its explanatory capacity across varied socio-cultural and ecological settings.

The proposed Integrated Socio-Ecological Governance Framework explains environmental stewardship as a sequential and mutually reinforcing governance process rather than as the outcome of isolated cultural, religious, or institutional factors. The ethnographic evidence indicates that environmental governance develops through interconnected stages in which each component

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[116] Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*.

[117] Wild and McLeod, *Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers*.

[118] Maria Tengö et al., "Taboos and Forest Governance: Informal Protection of Hot Spot Dry Forest in Southern Madagascar."

[119] Mensah, "Sustainable Development: Meaning, History, Principles, Pillars, and Implications for Human Action: Literature Review."

[120] Sudarto et al., "Pengelolaan Pertanian Berkelanjutan Berbasis Eco-Spirituality Dalam Tradisi Komunitas Adat Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Cultural Socio-Ecological System (Studi Pada Tradisi Komunitas Adat Di Tajakembang, Cilacap, Jawa Tengah)."

[121] Anna M. Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms," in *Religious and Social Foundations* (Columbia University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.7312/gade19104-007.

enables and strengthens the next, ultimately generating long-term ecological resilience.

The process begins with ecological knowledge, which provides the community with practical understanding of local ecosystems, natural resources, and environmentally appropriate management practices.[122,123,124] However, knowledge alone does not necessarily produce environmentally responsible behaviour. Its governance function emerges only after ecological understanding is interpreted through Javanese cultural values, particularly the principle of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono*, which establishes normative expectations concerning harmony between humans, nature, and the spiritual world.[125] These cultural values subsequently acquire stronger moral authority through Islamic ecological ethics, where environmental stewardship is framed as a religious obligation grounded in khalifah, amanah, and human responsibility toward God's creation.[126,127,128]

These normative commitments become socially effective through ritual practices, particularly the *Ngabeungkat Dawuan* tradition, which repeatedly institutionalizes shared environmental values through collective participation. Consistent with Durkheim concept of collective conscience[129] and Schatzki theory of social practices,[130] ritual transforms moral principles into collectively enacted environmental responsibilities by reinforcing shared meanings, reciprocal obligations, and routine ecological behaviour. Through repeated participation, these practices are embedded within customary institutions, where traditional leadership, social norms, and customary regulations maintain collective accountability while facilitating the intergenerational transmission of ecological knowledge and ethical values.

The cumulative interaction of these processes generates a culturally embedded system of environmental governance characterized by voluntary compliance, collective legitimacy, and adaptive community participation. Rather than relying primarily on external regulation, governance is sustained through internalized ecological ethics that are continuously reproduced through cultural

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[122] Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resousrce Management*.

[123] Berkes et al., "Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management."

[124] Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*.

[125] Riyanto, "'HAMEMAYU HAYUNING BAWONO'('To Beautify the Beauty of the World')."

[126] Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*.

[127] Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*.

[128] Jenkins and Chapple, "Religion and Environment."

[129] Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life."

[130] Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*.

and religious institutions. This institutional continuity ultimately strengthens ecological resilience, enabling the community to maintain environmental sustainability while adapting to changing ecological and social conditions. Accordingly, the proposed framework should be understood not as a linear sequence but as a dynamic governance cycle in which ecological resilience continuously reinforces ecological knowledge, cultural values, and institutional commitment, thereby sustaining long-term community-based environmental governance.

Conclusion

Javanese cultural and religious values in Tajakembang play a crucial role in environmental preservation through rituals and traditions that promote harmony with nature. This ethnographic study highlights the importance of cultural heritage as a foundation for sustainable environmental practices. Recognizing and supporting such indigenous frameworks can contribute significantly to ecological conservation and community resilience. The study demonstrates that Javanese cultural and religious values in Tajakembang function as intertwined spiritual and social mechanisms that promote ecological sustainability. It is therefore concluded that environmental policies can enhance community-based conservation efforts. These findings are theoretically grounded in ecospirituality, social practice, and local ecological knowledge frameworks, while also acknowledging the dynamic nature of culture in the face of modernization. It is imperative to acknowledge and endorse these cultural mechanisms in order to formulate efficacious and culturally sensitive environmental conservation strategies. These indigenous practices have the potential to enhance environmental sustainability in rural Indonesia. It is recommended that policymakers, cultural institutions, and environmental organizations collaborate with local communities to preserve and revitalize Javanese rituals and traditions. Further research should explore how these practices can be adapted to contemporary environmental challenges without losing their cultural essence.

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