

The Role of Customary Leaders in Preserving the *Nogigi* Tradition in the Kaili Rai Traditional Marriage Ceremony

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of traditional leaders in preserving the *Nogigi* tradition within the Kaili Rai traditional wedding ceremony in Tanjung Padang Village, Sirenja District, Donggala Regency. *Nogigi* is an essential stage containing philosophical, religious, and social values, and is understood as a symbol of self-purification before entering married life. Amid modernization, the continuity of this tradition is closely linked to the role of traditional leaders as guardians of local cultural values. This research applies a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving traditional leaders and community members directly engaged in the practice of *Nogigi*. The findings indicate that traditional leaders serve as mediators, protectors of tradition, guides of the customary procession, and transmitters of cultural values to the younger generation. Although certain adjustments have occurred in terms of timing, ceremonial equipment, and youth participation due to social change, the core philosophical meaning of *Nogigi* remains intact. Thus, the sustainability of the *Nogigi* tradition is maintained through the active involvement of traditional leaders, supported by the community and local government.

Keyword : traditional leaders; *nogigi* tradition; traditional wedding ceremony; Kaili Rai; cultural preservation.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran tokoh adat dalam mempertahankan tradisi *Nogigi* pada prosesi pernikahan adat Kaili Rai di Desa Tanjung Padang, Kecamatan Sirenja, Kabupaten Donggala. *Nogigi* merupakan tahapan penting yang mengandung nilai filosofis, religius, dan sosial, serta dimaknai sebagai simbol penyucian diri sebelum memasuki kehidupan rumah tangga. Di tengah modernisasi, kelestarian tradisi ini sangat dipengaruhi oleh peran tokoh adat sebagai penjaga dan penguat nilai budaya lokal. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Informan terdiri atas tokoh adat dan masyarakat yang terlibat langsung dalam pelaksanaan *Nogigi*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh adat berperan sebagai mediator, pelindung tradisi, pengarah prosesi, serta pewaris nilai budaya kepada generasi muda. Pelaksanaan *Nogigi* di Desa Tanjung Padang masih mengikuti ketentuan adat turun-temurun, meskipun terdapat penyesuaian pada waktu pelaksanaan, perlengkapan, dan partisipasi generasi muda akibat perubahan sosial. Namun, makna filosofis utamanya tetap terjaga. Dengan demikian, eksistensi tradisi *Nogigi* tetap bertahan berkat peran tokoh adat serta dukungan masyarakat dan pemerintah setempat.

Kata kunci : tokoh adat; tradisi *nogigi*; pernikahan adat; Kaili Rai; pelestarian budaya.

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Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country with extraordinarily rich cultural diversity, marked by the existence of 1,340 ethnic groups spread from Sabang to Merauke (Gafuri, 2025). Each region and ethnic group possesses traditions and customs that have been passed down from generation to generation as part of the local community's cultural identity. However, along with the advancement of modern times and the strong influence of globalization, many local cultures have begun to experience a decline in their existence. Aslan and Pugu (2025) explain that the processes of modernization and globalization have encouraged shifts in social values within society, causing local traditions to become increasingly marginalized. This condition indicates that not all local traditions are able to survive amid the currents of social change, thereby requiring special attention and efforts to preserve the sustainability of cultures that continue to exist within society (Fauzan, 2025; Mukhlis et al., 2025).

One form of cultural diversity that still survives in Indonesia can be found among the Kaili Rai ethnic community. The Kaili Rai are one of the subgroups of the Kaili ethnic group inhabiting the Central Sulawesi region. Historically, this ethnic group is believed to have originated from Austronesian communities that migrated to Sulawesi in the past (Timbang et al., 2024), later developing into various subgroups, one of which is the Kaili Rai. Over time, the Kaili Rai people spread across several areas, particularly in the northern part of Palu City and Donggala Regency, both in inland and coastal regions. To this day, the community continues to preserve its dialect and maintain distinctive Kaili Rai customs in everyday life as part of its cultural identity.

In their daily lives, the Kaili Rai community strongly upholds various customary values and rules inherited from generation to generation. These customs are reflected not only in social relationships within the community, but also in various important aspects of life, including the human life cycle such as birth, social interaction, and death (Rahmy, 2021). One tradition that continues to be firmly preserved today is the implementation of traditional marriage ceremonies. Virgiawan (2024) states that for the Kaili Rai community, marriage constitutes an important part of a series of customary ceremonies that hold an honorable position. Marriage is understood not merely as the union of two individuals, but also as a social institution guided by specific principles that have been passed down through generations and continue to be maintained within the community.

In the traditional marriage customs of the Kaili ethnic group, there are several stages of ceremonial processes (Idil et al., 2025; Sasmita et al., 2022; Septiwiharti et al., 2020). These include *Notate Dale*, a stage of gathering information to ensure that the prospective bride and groom are not bound to another person; *Neduta* or *Nebolai*, which is the proposal process that includes *Nosipau*, a deliberation regarding *Sambulu Gana* or customary agreements and dowry arrangements. This is followed by *Nanggeni Balanja*, the delivery of shopping goods by the groom's family, and *Nopaso*, a bathing ritual accompanied by fumigation and steaming at the bride's house.

Furthermore, there is *Nogigi*, the shaving of fine facial hair as a symbol of self-purification, followed by *Nokolontigi*, a ritual of applying henna leaves to the nails symbolizing protection and beauty, and then *Monikah*, which marks the official legalization of marriage according to both customary and religious law. Afterward, the process continues with *Nogero Jene* or the symbolic breaking of ablution, followed by *Mandiupasili*, a bathing ritual performed in front of the doorway, and *Mematua*, a visit to the parents' house as a means of strengthening family relationships (Rahmadani, 2020).

Among the various stages of the Kaili Rai traditional marriage ceremony, each procession carries meanings and functions that complement one another. However, not all stages possess the same level of significance and continuity in contemporary social practice. Along with the development of modern times, several stages have undergone simplification due to considerations of practicality, cost efficiency, and changing societal mindsets. Consequently, some traditions have begun to be abandoned or modified, while others continue to be strongly preserved.

One tradition that has survived until today in the Kaili Rai traditional marriage ceremony is *Nogigi*, a ritual of removing the fine hair from the bride's face before the marriage contract ceremony. Unlike several other stages that have experienced adjustments, *Nogigi* continues to be carried out consistently by the community, demonstrating the strength of the values and beliefs underlying the tradition. This ritual is not only symbolic in meaning, but also reflects the value system, beliefs, and social mechanisms that sustain the continuity of Kaili Rai traditions.

The *Nogigi* procession is performed by shaving the fine facial hair which, in the beliefs of the Kaili Rai community, is considered a bearer of misfortune (*vulu cilaka*) (Maarif, 2025). This ritual is generally conducted before sunrise at the bride's house using various ceremonial items such as a razor, brown sugar, eggs, coconut, a glass of water, and Chinese ribbon thread, each of which carries philosophical meanings related to hopes for a harmonious life, smooth sustenance, protection, and longevity (Syafa'ad et al., 2022). In practice, *Nogigi* is understood not only as a symbol of self-purification, but also as a form of respect toward ancestral customs,

making it an important part of the traditional marriage sequence. The continuity of this tradition is inseparable from the role of customary leaders who possess the authority to regulate, direct, and ensure the implementation of customary values within community life.

Customary leaders hold a strategic position in cultural preservation as social leaders as well as intermediaries between traditional values and modern dynamics. Lubis and Rosdiana (2025) explain that customary leaders play a role in preserving cultural values and mediating social change. Meanwhile, Koimah et al. (2025) emphasize their role as important actors in maintaining cultural identity through the transmission of values to younger generations. Sonia and Sarwoprasodjo (2020) as well as Ismanto et al. (2025), also show that studies concerning customary leaders generally focus on cultural preservation in a broad sense or within certain communities such as Kampung Naga and Indigenous Papuan communities. However, studies specifically discussing the role of customary leaders in preserving particular traditions, especially the *Nogigi* tradition among the Kaili Rai community, remain limited, thereby requiring more contextualized research.

One area that continues to preserve the *Nogigi* tradition is Tanjung Padang Village, Sirenja District, Donggala Regency, where the majority of the population belongs to the Kaili Rai ethnic group. Based on an interview with a local customary leader, Mr. Kifli, the *Nogigi* tradition is still routinely practiced in every marriage ceremony because it is believed to provide protection for the bridal couple. This indicates that its implementation is still regarded as an important part of customary practice.

Previous studies have mostly examined Kaili Rai traditional marriages from descriptive and symbolic perspectives, particularly regarding the meanings of ceremonial stages and customary equipment (Syafa'ad et al., 2022). However, studies specifically highlighting the role of customary leaders in preserving and transmitting the *Nogigi* tradition amid modernization remain limited. In fact, within the context of rapid social change, the role of customary leaders becomes crucial in maintaining the continuity of traditions that are vulnerable to transformation. Therefore, this research is important to examine the implementation of *Nogigi*, the changes that have occurred, and the role of customary leaders in preserving it in Tanjung Padang Village.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method (Creswell, 2015). The qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, particularly concerning the role of customary leaders in preserving the *Nogigi* tradition within the sequence of Kaili Rai traditional marriage ceremonies in Tanjung Padang Village. The selection of this approach is consistent with Sugiyono (2013), who argues that qualitative

research aims to comprehensively understand social phenomena through data collection conducted in natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument, and with findings emphasizing meaning rather than generalization.

The descriptive method was chosen because this study does not focus on testing theories or developing new theories, as commonly found in phenomenological or grounded theory approaches, nor does it involve an in-depth examination of an entire cultural system as in ethnographic studies. Instead, this research aims to systematically, factually, and accurately describe the role of customary leaders in preserving the *Nogigi* tradition, including the processes, meanings, and practices that occur within the social context of the local community. Therefore, the descriptive method is considered the most appropriate approach for presenting the social and cultural realities that exist without intervening in the phenomena under investigation.

This research was conducted in Tanjung Padang Village, Donggala Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, over a period of two months. The research subjects consisted of seven participants selected through purposive sampling, namely the selection of informants based on specific considerations adjusted to the needs of the study. The participants were chosen according to criteria identifying individuals who possessed direct knowledge and experience related to the *Nogigi* tradition in Kaili Rai traditional marriages. Four customary leaders were selected due to their extensive understanding of the rules, meanings, and stages of the customary practices, while three community members were chosen because they had directly experienced the implementation of the tradition. The combination of these two groups was expected to provide comprehensive data from both conceptual and empirical perspectives, thereby supporting the depth and validity of the research findings.

Data collection techniques in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was employed to directly examine the implementation process of the *Nogigi* tradition within community life. In-depth interviews were conducted with customary leaders and community members serving as informants in order to obtain information regarding the meanings, processes, and practices associated with the tradition. Meanwhile, documentation was utilized to complement the data in the form of records, photographs, and archives relevant to the study. The data analysis technique referred to the model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of narrative descriptions to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships among the data. The final stage involved drawing conclusions gradually and

accompanied by verification processes to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, thereby enabling the research findings to be scientifically accountable.

Result and Discussion

Result

The Procession of the Nogigi Tradition in the Kaili Rai Traditional Marriage Ceremony in Tanjung Padang Village

The Kaili Rai community of Tanjung Padang Village interprets *Nogigi* as a process of self-purification, both physically and spiritually. *Nogigi* is the practice of shaving the fine hair on the body of the prospective bride, which is understood as a symbol of removing negative elements believed to affect married life. The customary leader, Indo Emi, explained that: “*The meaning of Nogigi is self-purification. The fine hair is called vulu cilaka or unfortunate hair. If it is not removed, it is believed to bring misfortune*” (Interview, September 28, 2025). This interpretation indicates that, within the cultural perspective of the Kaili Rai community, the body is not merely understood biologically, but also as a symbolic space containing spiritual values and beliefs related to safety and well-being.

The belief in *vulu cilaka* constitutes the primary basis for the implementation of this tradition. The Kaili Rai community believes that the presence of fine facial hair is not merely a physical aspect, but also carries symbolic meanings associated with the potential arrival of misfortune. Furthermore, *Nogigi* is linked to hopes for the future life of the bridal couple, as expressed in the statement that through the *Nogigi* procession, it is intended that “*the bride and groom will have a good life, and their faces will shine like diamonds and jewels*” (Indo Esa, interview, September 29, 2025). This finding demonstrates that *Nogigi* is oriented not only toward warding off misfortune, but also as a form of prayer and hope for the future of the newlywed couple.

The implementation of *Nogigi* follows relatively strict regulations, both in terms of timing and the individuals permitted to perform it. This tradition is generally conducted one or two days before the marriage contract ceremony and is carried out in the morning. As stated by the customary leader Indo Esa, “*Nogigi is performed in the morning because the morning is considered a good beginning. It symbolizes a new life*” (Interview, September 2025). Moreover, not everyone is allowed to conduct the procession. The *Nogigi* practitioner is usually an elderly woman who is considered knowledgeable about customary traditions and who possesses a respected lineage. “*The person who performs Nogigi cannot be just anyone. Usually, it is an elderly woman who thoroughly understands the customs, passed down from generation to generation*” (Indo Esa, interview, September 2025). This indicates the existence of a customary knowledge transmission system that is exclusive and experience-based.

In its implementation, *Nogigi* begins with the preparation of ceremonial equipment known as *Jajaka Nogigi*. These materials consist of various items such as

yellow rice, bananas, brown sugar, candles, and pillows arranged in a single container. After the preparations are completed, the procession begins with the recitation of intentions. *“Before starting, Bismillah is recited, followed by intentions spoken in the Kaili Rai language so that the bridal couple will have good descendants and radiant faces”* (Indo Esa, interview, September 29, 2025). The inclusion of the phrase *Bismillah* in this procession indicates an adaptation of customary practices to religious values without eliminating the pre-existing ritual structure.

The central stage of the procession is the shaving of fine hair from several parts of the body. This practice is understood as a form of symbolic purification. *“The shaving begins from the face, eyebrows, to the hands and feet. It is intended to remove vulu cilaka”** (Indo Emi, interview, September 29, 2025). In addition to the shaving process, there are other rituals such as rotating a candle in front of the bride’s face while reciting *shalawat* and *dhikr*. The community interprets this practice as a form of seeking protection. *“The candle is rotated while reciting shalawat and dhikr so that the bride and groom may receive guidance and be protected from harmful things”* (Indo Esa, interview, September 29, 2025). Subsequently, traces of candle soot are applied to several parts of the bride’s body, symbolizing self-control. *“This means that speech, thoughts, and sight must all be guarded so that problems do not arise within the household”* (Indo Esa, interview, September 29, 2025). This sequence of practices demonstrates that *Nogigi* is not merely a physical ritual, but also contains moral values and principles of self-control that are internalized within the prospective bride and groom.



Nogigi Equipment and Materials



Candle Rotation Procession

One of the key findings of this study is the strong belief within the community regarding the consequences if the *Nogigi* tradition is not performed. As stated by the customary leader Indo Emi, *“If Nogigi is not performed, it is believed that misfortune will occur and the marriage will not be harmonious”* (Indo Emi, interview, September 28, 2025). In addition, there is also a belief related to the bride’s physical appearance, in which failure to perform *Nogigi* is believed to result in a lack of radiance on the bride’s face during the wedding ceremony (Faedah, interview, September 30, 2025). These beliefs serve as the primary factors sustaining the continuity of the *Nogigi* tradition to the present day.

The findings also reveal the existence of a taboo that must be observed by the bride after undergoing the *Nogigi* procession, namely the prohibition of looking in a mirror. A community member who had experienced the ritual stated, *“After Nogigi,*

one is not allowed to look in the mirror until all ceremonies are completed. If the bride looks in the mirror, the radiance of her face may disappear" (Faedah, interview, September 30, 2025). This taboo indicates that the meaning of *Nogigi* does not end with the ritual itself but continues into the post-ritual stage. Although the majority of the community still preserves the *Nogigi* tradition, there are variations in how it is interpreted. Some community members regard *Nogigi* as a customary obligation, while others emphasize its symbolic meaning. Nevertheless, based on field data, no open rejection of this tradition was found. The community tends to continue practicing *Nogigi* as a form of respect for customary law, even though its interpretation may vary among individuals.

The Role of Customary Leaders in Preserving the *Nogigi* Tradition

Customary leaders play a crucial role in preserving the *Nogigi* tradition among the Kaili Rai community in Tanjung Padang Village. Their role is not limited to safeguarding cultural heritage, but also extends to serving as key actors in the transmission of customary values, norms, and knowledge to younger generations. In this context, cultural preservation is not merely understood as the performance of rituals, but also as an ongoing process of cultural value internalization. As stated by Mr. Kifli, "*the most important aspect of maintaining the Nogigi tradition is how knowledge is transferred to the younger generation, because if only the elders know it, eventually the tradition may disappear*" (Interview, September 22, 2025). This indicates that customary leaders function as primary mediators in the process of cultural transmission.

In addition, customary leaders serve as guardians of the cultural identity of the Kaili Rai community. The *Nogigi* tradition, which has been passed down through generations, continues to be preserved as part of local cultural identity. Mr. Kifli explained that "*nowadays not all families perform Nogigi, but as customary leaders we continue to remind people that it is part of the cultural identity of the Kaili Rai*" (Interview, September 22, 2025). This statement shows that customary leaders are not only responsible for maintaining practices, but also for sustaining collective awareness of cultural values within the community.

In carrying out their roles, customary leaders do not use coercive approaches, but instead prioritize advice and guidance. Mr. H. Ansarudin H. Lakando stated that "*today it is more about advice rather than coercion, so that younger generations continue to recognize customary traditions*" (Interview, September 22, 2025). This demonstrates that customary leaders function as cultural facilitators who adapt preservation strategies to contemporary social conditions. They also play a role in maintaining the social values embedded in the *Nogigi* tradition, such as togetherness, mutual cooperation, and social solidarity. Mr. Sadri explained that "*the Nogigi tradition is not regulated in written form, but is maintained through norms of harmony and social solidarity within the community*" (Interview, September 23, 2025). This indicates that the

sustainability of the tradition does not rely solely on formal rules, but also on living social values within the community.

Beyond preserving cultural values, customary leaders also act as cultural educators through the socialization process directed at younger generations. Mrs. Faedah explained that *“young people are invited to help prepare the ceremonial equipment and are explained the meaning of each stage, so that they not only observe but also understand”* (Interview, September 26, 2025). This approach demonstrates that cultural preservation is conducted through direct experience (learning by doing), enabling younger generations not only to know but also to understand the values embedded in the *Nogigi* tradition.

In practice, customary leaders also function as directors of the ceremonial process. Mr. H. Ansarudin H. Lakando stated that *“we always ensure that every stage of the Nogigi ceremony is carried out in accordance with the customary rules passed down through generations”* (Interview, September 26, 2025). This shows that customary leaders possess cultural authority in ensuring the orderliness and conformity of customary practices. In addition, they also play a role in maintaining social harmony through deliberation when differences of opinion arise in the implementation of customs. Mr. Kifli explained that *“when there are differences of opinion, all parties are gathered, discussed together, and a middle ground is sought so that the custom can continue”* (Interview, September 25, 2025). This role indicates that customary leaders not only function as ritual regulators but also as social mediators in maintaining balance within community relations.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the role of customary leaders in preserving the *Nogigi* tradition includes functions as guardians of cultural identity, facilitators of value preservation, directors of customary implementation, social mediators, and cultural educators for younger generations. Thus, customary leaders serve as key actors in ensuring the continuity of the *Nogigi* tradition through educational, persuasive, and socially grounded approaches.

Social Changes in the Nogigi Tradition

The findings of this study indicate that the *Nogigi* tradition among the Kaili Rai community in Tanjung Padang Village has undergone social changes in several aspects, namely ritual implementation, belief systems, and social values within the community. The first change is evident in the ritual implementation, particularly in the prayers and recitations used during the *Nogigi* procession. Previously, the tradition involved customary prayers associated with ancestral beliefs; however, it has now been adapted to Islamic religious values. This was stated by Mr. Kifli, who explained that *“in the past, customary prayers for ancestral spirits were still used, but now they have been replaced with dhikr, shalawat, and prayers in Arabic”* (Interview, September 22, 2025).

In addition, there is a change in the interpretation of the shaving practice within the *Nogigi* tradition. Some members of the community still interpret it as a symbol of self-purification and protection from misfortune, while others have begun to consider its religious aspects. This indicates the existence of differing interpretations within the community regarding the implementation of the *Nogigi* tradition. Changes are also evident in the socio-economic aspects of its practice. Mrs. Indo Esa stated that *"in the past, those who helped were not given payment because it was based on mutual assistance, but now some people give voluntary money as a form of gratitude"* (Interview, October 2, 2025). This reflects a shift from mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) toward voluntary monetary contributions.

Furthermore, changes can also be seen in the status of the tradition's implementation. Based on interviews, not all community members still consider *Nogigi* obligatory in marriage ceremonies. Some individuals choose not to perform it due to religious considerations. This indicates a shift from a compulsory tradition to a more optional practice. In terms of belief, some members of the community still maintain the belief in consequences if the *Nogigi* tradition is not performed. Mr. H. Ansarudin H. Lakando stated that *"in the past, it was believed that not performing Nogigi could bring misfortune to the household"* (Interview, September 22, 2025). Another informant also stated that *"if Nogigi is not performed, the bride's face will not appear radiant during the wedding"* (Faedah, interview, September 30, 2025). This shows that traditional beliefs are still maintained among certain segments of the community.

In addition, there is a taboo in the *Nogigi* tradition, namely the prohibition of looking in the mirror after the ritual has been performed. One informant stated that *"after Nogigi, the bride is not allowed to look in the mirror until the ceremony is completed, as it may cause the loss of facial radiance"* (Faedah, interview, September 30, 2025). This taboo is still observed by some members of the community as part of the ritual sequence. Overall, the findings show that the *Nogigi* tradition has experienced changes in ritual practices, social values, and belief systems. Nevertheless, several elements of the tradition continue to be preserved by the Kaili Rai community in Tanjung Padang Village.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the role of customary leaders in preserving the *Nogigi* tradition cannot be understood merely as a structural function within the customary system, but also as a social mechanism that is continuously negotiated within the context of changing societal values. These findings demonstrate that customary leaders do not operate within a stable normative space as assumed in Tarimana (1989) traditional approach, but rather function in a social setting characterized by tensions among customary authority, religious values, and modern societal rationality. Thus, the mediating function of customary leaders is not

limited to resolving conflicts between families, but also extends to managing broader value-based tensions within society.

In practice, customary leaders do perform their role as mediators in family deliberations, as described in Tarimana (1989) theory. However, field findings indicate that this role has evolved into a form of cultural negotiation, namely the ability of customary leaders to adjust the meaning of traditions so that they remain acceptable within the increasingly dominant framework of Islamic values. This is evident in the reinterpretation of the *Nogigi* ritual, which is now accompanied by *dhikr* and *shalawat*. In this context, customary leaders do not merely preserve tradition, but also reconstruct its meaning so that it maintains religious legitimacy within society.

The most significant tension identified in this study concerns the practice of eyebrow shaving in the *Nogigi* tradition. Some members of the community reject this practice because it is considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings that prohibit altering certain parts of the body, while customary leaders interpret it as a symbolic act of self-purification rather than a cosmetic alteration. This condition demonstrates that the relationship between custom and religion is not automatically harmonious, but rather the result of an ongoing process of interpretive negotiation. Accordingly, this finding extends Koimah et al. (2025), who emphasize the social legitimacy of customary leaders, by showing that such legitimacy must now also be negotiated alongside religious legitimacy.

In this context, customary leaders can no longer be understood solely as a “binding force” within the social structure, as suggested in classical literature, but rather as actors who must manage the plurality of value-based authorities. In the past, obedience to custom tended to be relatively absolute; however, in contemporary society, such obedience has become selective and dependent on compatibility with religious values. This reflects a shift from a single authority (custom) toward dual authorities (custom and religion), which directly influences the effectiveness of customary leaders’ roles.

Furthermore, the reinterpretation of the *Nogigi* tradition by customary leaders cannot be separated from the process of cultural Islamization. However, unlike the common view that sees Islamization as a complete replacement of earlier cultural elements, this study shows that the process is selective and symbolic. Ritual elements are not removed but are given new meanings that are more acceptable within a religious framework. In this regard, the findings expand Nuraedah's (2025) concept of acculturation by demonstrating that acculturation in the context of *Nogigi* is not only structural but also epistemological, involving changes in how the community understands the meaning of the ritual itself.

On the other hand, the shift from mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) toward voluntary monetary contributions also indicates that social change within the *Nogigi*

tradition is not solely driven by economic factors, but also by changing societal perceptions of labor and social contribution. Whereas previously contributions to ritual activities were understood as social obligations, they are now increasingly perceived as a form of service with appreciative value. This reflects a shift from mechanical solidarity toward a more transactional form of solidarity, although communal values have not been entirely abandoned.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that the role of customary leaders can no longer be understood in a linear manner as mere guardians of tradition, but rather as actors positioned “in-between” tradition, religion, and social change. It is precisely in this position that the scholarly contribution of this research becomes evident, namely that cultural preservation does not occur through the reproduction of fixed values, but through an ongoing process of meaning negotiation among different value systems. Thus, the *Nogigi* tradition persists not only as cultural heritage, but also as a dynamic social space where encounters and contestations of meaning between custom and religion continuously take place.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the continuity of the *Nogigi* tradition in Tanjung Padang Village does not rest solely on the binding force of customary norms, but rather on an ongoing process of value negotiation between custom and religion that is actively managed by customary leaders. A notable and novel finding emerging from this research is that the preservation of *Nogigi* is not primarily due to its obligatory nature, but rather its flexibility and adaptability. Customary leaders do not preserve the tradition in a rigid manner; instead, they adjust the form of the ritual without eliminating its philosophical meaning. Even in situations where customary norms are no longer accompanied by strict sanctions, the tradition continues to be practiced based on collective community awareness. This indicates that the sustainability of the *Nogigi* tradition lies in its social legitimacy and symbolic meaning, rather than solely in the strength of formal customary rules.

In terms of its academic contribution, this study confirms theoretical perspectives on the role of customary leaders as mediators, facilitators, and social integrators in traditional societies, while also enriching understandings of socio-cultural change. The findings show that changes in tradition do not necessarily indicate decline, but may instead represent a form of creative adaptation through processes of acculturation between local customs and Islamic teachings. Thus, this study contributes the perspective that cultural preservation is dynamic and negotiative rather than static. In addition, it provides empirical contributions to the study of social change at the local community level, particularly in the context of traditional marriage practices and the relationship between custom, religion, and modernization.

The limitation of this study lies in its restricted scope, which is limited to a single village, a relatively small number of informants, and a focus on one tradition within a specific cultural context. The study is also limited to a descriptive qualitative approach, which does not accommodate broader variations, such as comparisons with other Kaili Rai regions or different generational groups. Therefore, further research is needed with a wider geographical scope, more diverse informants (in terms of age, gender, and educational background), and more comprehensive methodological approaches. With more in-depth and extensive findings, policies for the preservation of local culture can be formulated in a more accurate and sustainable manner.

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