



Ammatoa Traditional System: Ethnographic Study of the Values of Social Structure and Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract: This ethnographic study investigates the Ammatoa Kajang customary system in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, focusing on its "Pasang" tradition, which promotes simple living, reverence for nature, and resistance to modernization that threatens environmental balance. The research aims to examine the community's social structure, the role of Ammatoa leadership, and the customary rules shaping behavior and environmental interaction. Using participant observation and in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders, the study reveals that the "Pasang" tradition serves as a comprehensive guide for sustainable natural resource management. Customary norms, such as prohibiting tree felling and prioritizing forest conservation, have enabled the community to maintain ecological equilibrium. The findings underscore the significance of local wisdom in supporting environmental sustainability. This research contributes to cultural anthropology education by offering insights into indigenous governance and resilience. It also provides a valuable perspective for conservation policies that recognize and integrate the role of indigenous peoples in safeguarding both natural and cultural heritage.

Keywords: ammatoa kajang; customary systems; environmental conservation; ethnography; local wisdom

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INTRODUCTION

The Ammatoa Kajang indigenous people who live in the Kajang area, Bulukumba, South Sulawesi, are among the indigenous peoples who remain strong in maintaining their traditions and value system amid the pressure of modernization. The community is known for its customs, a way of life that has been passed down orally from generation to generation, which contains simple but profound principles such as maintaining harmony with nature, rejecting modern technology that is considered destructive, and living a life in harmony with the environment (Turyani et al., 2024; Tuljanna et al., 2023). The habit is not just a philosophy of life but also a regulation of social interaction, a set of customary rules, and environmental management (Bridge, 2020; Pedwell, 2017). In Indonesia, which is rich in cultural diversity, the existence of indigenous peoples such as themmatoa Kajang is also very important as a representation of unique local wisdom (Dandi & Syahribulan, 2025; Giovagnoli, 2024). The Ammatoa Kajang community has maintained its traditional identity and values despite strong modernization. Local wisdom is not only important for cultural identity but also plays an important role in it. Through their traditional values, the Ammatoa Kajang people protect their forests as a natural resource by prohibiting practices that harm the environment, such as illegal logging and the use of modern technology, which threaten ecosystems (Amirullah et al., 2025; Tahir et al., 2025).

The Ammatoa Kajang community is also known for its traditional leader named Ammatoa. This figure plays a very important role in maintaining the tradition of 'pasang'. Ammatoa acts as the guardian of traditions and moral values in society, and any decision regarding social life and natural resource management must be taken with Ammatoa's approval and guidance (Daniel et al., 2022; Kolopaking et al., 2025; Tahir et al., 2025). This social structure shows that the Ammatoa Kajang community is not only a traditional society but also has a sustainable management system based on traditional values (Dassir, 2022; Samad et al., 2021). Based on this background, this research focuses on several key questions to dig deeper into how the traditional system of Ammatoa Kajang is applied, how its traditional values shape social life, and how these indigenous peoples maintain ecological balance. This research aims to explore in detail how the 'Pasang' custom serves as the primary basis for building social structures, regulating social relations, and managing the environment. In addition, this study seeks to understand the Ammatoa Kajang community's perspective on modernization and how they maintain local traditions and values amid social changes occurring outside their community (Hafid et

al., 2023; Sampean & Sjaf, 2021). Understand and document the Ammatoa Kajang customary system, especially the application of the "*Pasang*" custom in daily life (Hijjang et al., 2019; Surtikanti et al., 2017; Umar & Akbal, 2018). We want to hear directly from the community: how exactly do they organize their relationships with others and with nature? How do these old customary rules live in the daily life of a farmer in the rice fields, a mother in the kitchen, or a young man who chooses to stay in his hometown? This research aims to capture not only the formal structure of the custom but also its breadth, stories, and human experiences. The focus is on how this seemingly simple local wisdom can form a strong social structure and prevent the destruction of forests and rivers, even amid the onslaught of modernization. By examining in depth how this traditional system is maintained and lived by its citizens, this research is expected to make an important contribution to anthropological studies. More than just academic data, we want to offer a valuable story about human resilience, harmony, and efforts to preserve ancestral heritage that protects both cultural identity and ecological balance in modern times (Asrawijaya, 2024; Holtorf, 2018). In essence, this is an attempt to learn from Ammatoa Kajang about a sustainable way of living.

This research has deep, layered significance, both academically and practically. Theoretically, it acts as a bridge between local wisdom, often considered traditional, and contemporary global challenges. It explains concretely that local wisdom is not just a romanticized view of the past, but a complex and functional knowledge system (Huynh & Grossmann, 2020; Pesurnay, 2018; Shaw, 2017). This system operates as a powerful tool for holistic preservation, where culture and ecology are intertwined. By ethnographically documenting the living practices and philosophical values of the Ammatoa Kajang community, this study captures and contextualizes a model of local Indonesian wisdom. This model is a vital reference in the face of the threat of homogenization and cultural erosion posed by a modernization wave that is not always adaptive.

Furthermore, this research makes a fundamental contribution to the study of the environment and political ecology (Elias et al., 2021; Osborne et al., 2021). He offers empirical evidence that community-based conservation approaches and customary rules such as "*pasang*" are not only alternatives, but are often more effective, adaptive, and sustainable solutions for maintaining ecosystem integrity than rigid top-down approaches. These findings support the perspective and other experts who emphasize that true sustainability must be rooted in local values and governance (Lam et al., 2020; Zeemering, 2021). Thus, this research not only records a culture but also offers a critical and inspiring perspective for future conservation and sustainable development policies.

This study of the Ammatoa Kajang community is not just an academic record, but an important voice to be heard by the government and cultural institutions. This research offers a real picture of how cultural heritage lives and breathes in a community's daily life, far beyond a list of artifacts or ceremonies alone. It reminds us that behind the policies and regulations lie people, values, and ways of life that have shaped the archipelago's cultural landscape for centuries. Its relevance becomes very concrete when it is associated with the spirit of Law Number 5 of 2017 concerning the Advancement of Culture (Wulandari, 2024). The law affirms that indigenous peoples, with all their knowledge systems, are the backbone of our national identity. Therefore, this kind of research provides the indispensable "living material": not just data, but a deep understanding of the social mechanisms, cultural resilience, and preservation logic held by communities like Ammatoa Kajang. This information becomes a crucial foundation for protection efforts that are not just labeled, but actually empowering and engaging.

The relevance of the relationship between indigenous peoples' cultural values and environmental sustainability has long been recognized in academic discourse, but its implementation in conservation policy remains largely procedural and top-down. This research departs from theoretical anxiety about conventional conservation approaches that tend to reduce indigenous peoples to objects of conservation rather than subjects with valid knowledge systems. This study offers an alternative approach through an in-depth exploration of the Ammatoa Kajang community, where sustainability practices are inseparable from the community's cosmology and daily cultural values. The analytical contribution of this research lies in documenting, ethnographically, how the values of "*Pasang*" function as adaptive mechanisms that regulate the relationship between humans and nature. In contrast to mainstream conservation studies that rely solely on ecological indicators, the approach used in this study reveals that the ecological resilience of the Ammatoa community rests on their cultural resilience. In other words, environmental preservation cannot be separated from the preservation of the value system that underpins daily practice. Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on *sustainable development* by offering a knowledge *dialogue* model between modern science and traditional wisdom, an approach that has rarely been done equally. As Kunz et al. (2020) and Scoones et al. (2020) affirm, long-term conservation success requires recognizing local perspectives as a valid source of knowledge, not merely a complement. The practical implication of these findings is the need to reorient conservation policy in Indonesia from a protectionist model to a truly empowering participatory approach. Indigenous peoples need to be positioned as strategic partners, not objects of intervention. Thus, this study not only contributes ethnographic data on the Ammatoa community but also offers a conceptual framework for formulating conservation policies that are more humane, contextual, and socially just.

METHODS

This research uses an ethnographic approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the Ammatoa Kajang customary system in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi (King-White, 2017; Roller, 2020). Ethnography was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the patterns of behavior, values, and norms of the community through direct interaction and involvement in the daily lives of the people, thereby obtaining an authentic indigenous perspective on their indigenous systems, particularly regarding the preservation of the environment and social structures. The research design focused on two main techniques: participant observation and in-depth interviews (Cheong et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022; Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). To complement the observation data, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants using open-ended questions. This process aimed to explore their understanding of customary systems and the values they uphold. All conversations were recorded and transcribed in detailed field notes and verbatim transcripts. To ensure data credibility, this study employed source triangulation, comparing information between informants and with participant observation results. A member-checking strategy was also employed, in which interview summaries were reconfirmed with informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations and thus the validity of the findings.

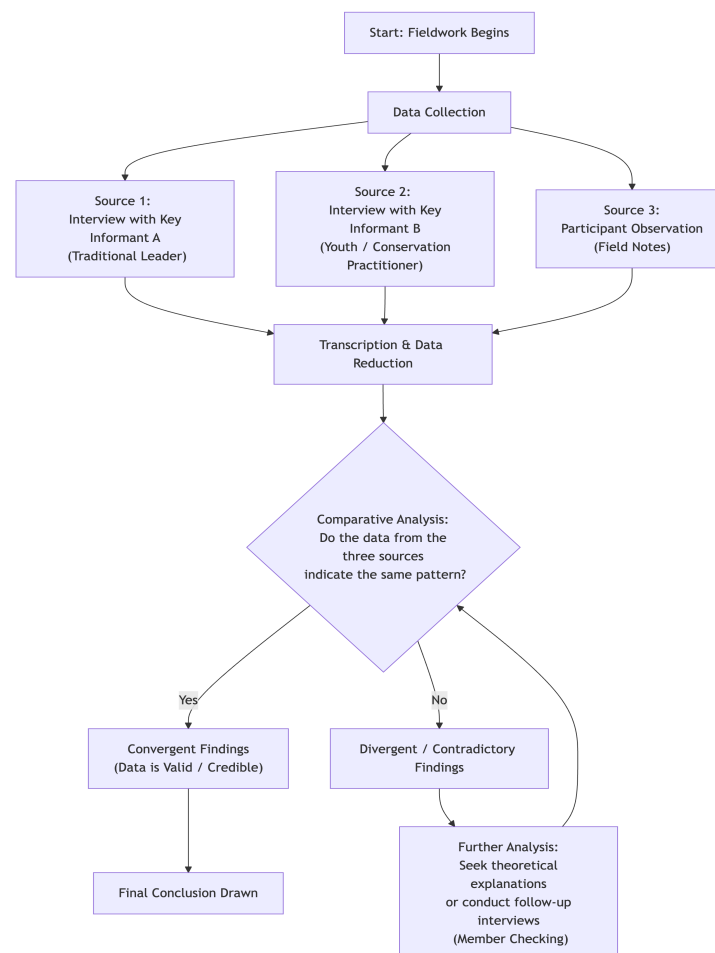


Figure 1. Research Flow

The location of the research is the Kajang Dalam area in Bulukumba Regency, which is famous as the center of the Ammatoa Kajang indigenous people, who firmly adhere to a strict and unique customary system. The study subjects were indigenous leaders, community elders, and residents selected according to specific criteria, with Ammatoa, the supreme indigenous leader, serving as the main informant. Data collection techniques include participant observation to understand behavioral patterns and social structures from a societal perspective, in-depth interviews to obtain detailed information about the implementation of "*pasang*", and visual and written documentation to complement the data.

Data analysis is carried out qualitatively through the reduction, categorization, and interpretation of data within an ethnographic theoretical framework (Mihās, 2019). Data from observations, interviews, and documentation are simplified and grouped into categories such as 'customary values', 'social structures', and 'environmental conservation'. These categories were then analyzed to identify patterns and themes that showed how Ammatoa customs were applied in people's lives. Data interpretation refers to cultural value theory, which emphasizes that each culture has a unique value system that guides behavior and maintains social cohesion.

The analysis is carried out repeatedly until consistent, in-depth patterns are identified, with the aim of providing a comprehensive understanding of how the Ammatoa Kajang community maintains its traditional values and social structure amid social change and modernization.

Table 1. Research Subject

Category Information	Number of Informants	Selection Criteria	Role in the Tatta Customary System
Ammatoa Indigenous Leaders	1 person	The highest traditional authority, able to interpret and enforce customary rules	Key informants: Key interpreters and enforcers of customary norms
Local Traditional Figures	3 people	Selected based on their influence and deep understanding of local customs and traditions	Guardian of traditional values, ritual actors, and intermediaries with the people
Community Leaders	4 people	Socially influential individuals involved in the preservation of customary practices	Transmitter of customary norms and monitors their application in the community.
Population	6 people	Selected from diverse social backgrounds in terms of age, occupation, and education level	Provide social, cultural, and ecological perspectives from the community's perspective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research explores the social dynamics, cultural values, and challenges faced by the Ammatoa Kajang indigenous people in South Sulawesi. The Kajang people are known for adhering to the custom of "Pasang," a life guide for interacting with nature, fellow community members, and the outside world. Based on participant observations and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and members of the Kajang community, this study found that customs play a central role in maintaining social harmony and preserving the environment. However, modernization brings challenges to the sustainability of these practices. The social structure of the Kajang community is structured around a hierarchy led by an indigenous leader named Ammatoa. Ammatoa is the supreme leader in the customary structure and has the authority to interpret and enforce the customary rules of the 'ups and downs' that govern people's lives. This hierarchical structure reflects the central role of Ammatoa as a figure respected and trusted by society, not only as a political leader but also for maintaining spirituality and balance with nature (Sampean & Sjaf, 2021).

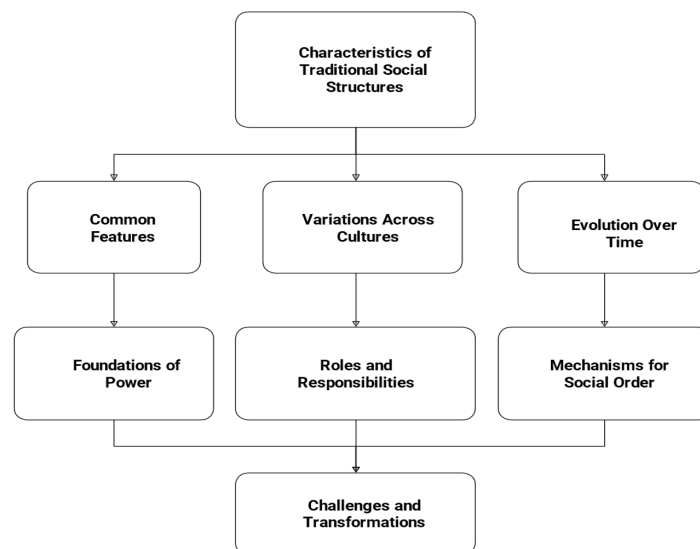


Figure 2. The Characteristics of Traditional Social Structure

Figure 2 presents a conceptual map of the characteristics of traditional social structures. It outlines common features, variations across cultures, and their evolution over time. Key elements include the foundations of power, specific roles and responsibilities within the community, and the mechanisms that maintain social order. The framework also addresses the challenges and transformations these structures face, providing a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of indigenous and traditional societies. In addition to Ammatoa, other figures in the regular structure served as regular advisors or implementers in the field. These figures are responsible for ensuring that community members follow the usual rules of daily life. Traditional rules cover

various aspects of life, including how to dress, speak, and interact with nature. This hierarchy maintains the social system of the Kajang community by assigning each member a clear role and subjecting them to the Ammatoa customary authority (Dassir, 2022). The traditional principle of "Pasang" guides the lives of the Kajang people. One of the main principles of this custom is the prohibition on the use of modern technology in the Kajang Dalam area, which is considered sacred. This prohibition aims to maintain the purity of customs and to avoid external influences that could change society's social order. In addition, the Kajang people are required to wear black clothes as a symbol of simplicity and humility. The color black is considered to reflect simplicity and honesty, which are core values in Kajang culture (Samad et al., 2021).

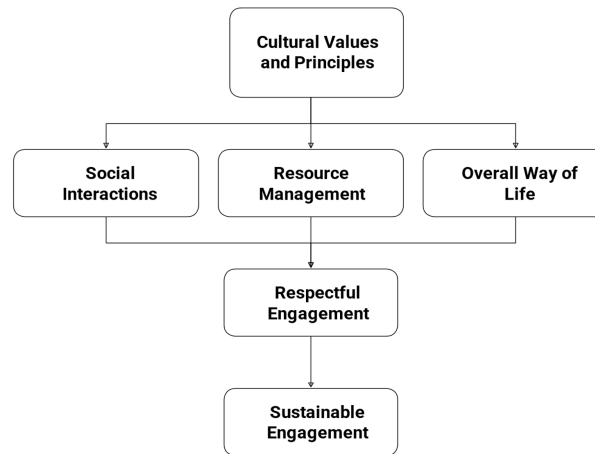


Figure 3. The Relationship Between Cultural Values and Principles and A Community's Way of Life

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between cultural values and principles and a community's way of life. These values serve as the foundation that influences social interactions, resource management, and the overall way of life. Ultimately, social interactions give rise to respectful engagement practices, while resource management leads to sustainable engagement, which together shape the community's overall way of life. The 'pasang' custom also reflects the Kajang people's view of nature as a unit that must be respected and protected. This principle of life holds that nature is a source of life to be protected, not just a resource to be exploited. The trust of the Kajang people in nature is reflected in strict environmental protection practices, such as the prohibition of cutting down trees without customary permits and restrictions on land use (Rahman et al., 2019; Ridhoh & Alfian, 2025). These values help maintain the ecosystem's balance in the Kajang area and strengthen the community's relationship with nature.

The custom of "*pasang*" not only regulates social and spiritual aspects but also helps preserve the environment. One form of conservation is the prohibition of indiscriminate tree felling, which is strictly enforced in the Kajang Dalam area. The forests in this area are considered sacred places and are an important part of the ecosystem that supports the Kajang people. The ban on tree felling without Ammatoa's permit aims to maintain ecological sustainability and prevent damage to the ecosystem. In addition to the ban on tree felling, the Kajang community has a sustainable natural resource management system. For example, in agricultural practices, they use techniques that do not damage the soil or deplete natural resources. This aligns with traditional principles that hold that nature must be protected to remain sustainable for future generations. In this context, '*pasang*' acts as an ecological rule that ensures human activities do not threaten ecological sustainability (Hijjang et al., 2019).

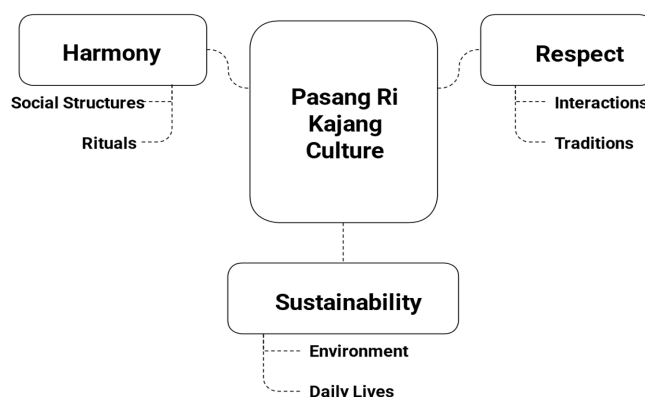


Figure 4. Cultural System of the Kajang Community

This image illustrates the interconnected cultural system of the Kajang community. At its core is the *Pasang Ri* tradition, which radiates outward to shape social structures, interactions, and rituals. The core values of harmony and respect guide these elements. This cultural framework directly influences the community's daily lives and its approach to the environment, ultimately ensuring the sustainability of both its traditions and its natural surroundings. This principle of environmental conservation demonstrates that the Ammatoa Kajang custom takes a balanced, sustainable ecological approach. In contrast to modern approaches that are often exploitative, the Kajang people have a harmonious relationship with nature, viewing nature not only as a resource but also as an entity worthy of respect. Social solidarity is an important aspect in the life of the people of Ammatoa Kajang. The values of solidarity and cooperation are reflected in community activities such as building houses, managing land, and conducting traditional ceremonies. Cooperation is not only a social activity but also strengthens bonds among residents and maintains social harmony. According to the Kajang community, solidarity is a form of social responsibility that must be carried out by every individual (Umar & Akbal, 2018).

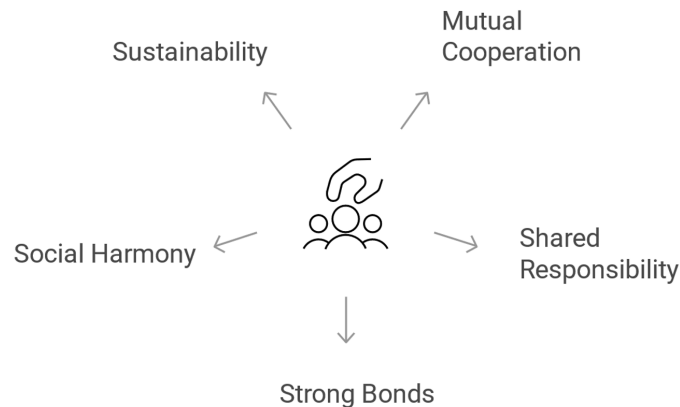


Figure 5. Core Values of the Kajang Community

This image presents four interconnected core values: Sustainability, Cooperation, Shared Responsibility, and Strong Bonds. These elements form a cohesive framework for community life. Cooperation and Shared Responsibility reinforce each other, creating Strong Bonds among community members. These strong bonds, in turn, make Mutual Cooperation and Shared Responsibility natural practices. Together, these three elements support the overarching goal of Sustainability. This conceptual diagram suggests that communities built on cooperation, responsibility, and strong social connections are better positioned to achieve long-term sustainability in their way of life and in their relationships with the environment. This practice of solidarity can be seen in traditional ceremonies and other communal activities, in which each member of the community actively participates. This value of solidarity is reinforced by traditional rules, which stipulate that everyone should help others without expecting anything in return. Thus, the values of solidarity and cooperation form the foundation of the Kajang community's social life, creating order and peace.

Modernization and globalization have had a significant impact on the people of Kajang. However, the people of Kajang, especially in Kajang Dalam, are doing their best to maintain their traditional identity amid modernization. One of the biggest challenges we face is external pressure to adopt modern technology and economic systems. Although some people, especially the younger generation, are beginning to take an interest in modern lifestyles, Ammatoa and other indigenous leaders still emphasize the importance of maintaining the "pasang" tradition as part of their cultural identity. However, the changing times have brought new dynamics that the people of Kajang must face. For example, the younger generation faces a dilemma between following tradition and adopting modern values. Another challenge is economic pressure that encourages some communities to clear land or carry out economic activities that are not in accordance with customary principles. This indicates a shift in the social order; The custom of " *pasang* " is under threat from the community itself (Ridhoh & Alfian, 2025)

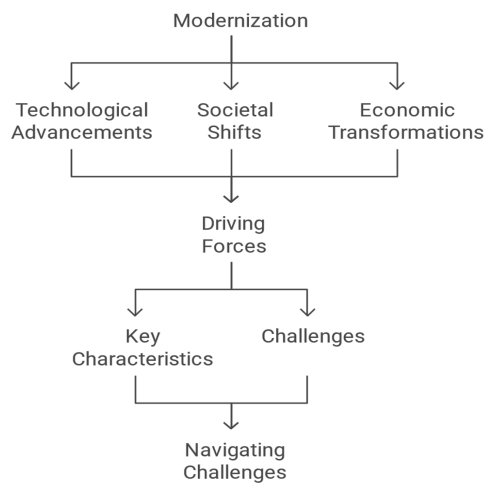


Figure 6. Conceptual Framework for Understanding Modernization

This image presents a conceptual framework for understanding modernization. It identifies the main driving forces: Technological Advancements, Societal Shifts, and Economic Transformations that propel the process. These drivers give rise to Key Characteristics that define modern societies. However, modernization also presents various Challenges that communities must address. The framework concludes with Navigating Challenges, suggesting strategies for managing the complexities and impacts of modernization. To face these challenges, Ammatoa and traditional leaders continue to strive to preserve traditions through various means, including strengthening traditional education and raising awareness of the importance of protecting the environment. The Kajang people strive to maintain their traditional identity while adapting to changing times. In this context, the custom of "*Pasang*" serves not only as a way of life, but also as a symbol of resistance to the currents of globalization, which are considered to destroy local values.

This research provides valuable insights into the local wisdom of the Ammatoa Kajang community, which effectively combines social and environmental practices. This study contributes to understanding how customs function not only as social rules but also as guidelines for environmental conservation. The local wisdom of the Kajang people emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature, a concept that predates modern conservation practices (Dandi & Syahribulan, 2025; Rahman et al., 2019). This supports the view that local wisdom reflected in Ammatoa customs can be a solution for preserving the environment and strengthening the community's cultural identity (Rahman et al., 2019; Ridhoh & Alfian, 2025; Umar & Akbal, 2018). The study also shows that Tair practices provide a framework for living that focuses on sustainability principles, such as the prohibition of modern technology and strict regulations on the use of natural resources. By increasing understanding of these practices, this research highlights the potential of local wisdom as a model that can be applied to other communities to preserve the environment and cultural identity (Dandi & Syahribulan, 2025).

The results of this study show that the Ammatoa Kajang community has an opportunity to maintain its traditions despite modernization challenges. One of the most important opportunities is strengthening traditional education among the younger generation, which can be achieved through formal and informal efforts (Ardilla et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2019). Traditional education enables future generations to understand the values and principles contained in "*Pasang*," thereby better preparing them to preserve their cultural heritage (Asrawijaya, 2024; Gani et al., 2023; Hijjang et al., 2019). In addition, the development of community-based cultural tourism can introduce Ammatoa's traditional values to the outside world while maintaining environmental sustainability. However, this approach must be carried out carefully to avoid damaging the community's cultural integrity (Khalaf, 2022; Tahir et al., 2025).

The government and cultural institutions play an important role in protecting and recognizing the indigenous people of Ammatoa Kajang as part of the national cultural heritage (Fisher & Van der Muur, 2020; Gani et al., 2023). As a first step, the government can ensure the official recognition of the traditional rights of the Kajang people in the management of their territory. This ensures that general rules, such as bans on tree felling and the use of technology, are adhered to by external parties (Zelfia et al., 2024). In addition, cultural institutions can support documentation and publications on "*Pasang*" customs to improve public understanding and facilitate further research (Dandi & Syahribulan, 2025; Hafid et al., 2023). In this way, governments and cultural institutions can help preserve Ammatoa traditions as valuable cultural heritage.

The Ammatoa cultural system offers a profound critical reflection on contemporary sustainability governance by showing that sustainability is not only a matter of ecological technicality, but also of spirituality and ethics. The concept of "*pasang*," which prohibits excessive exploitation of forests, demonstrates that

indigenous peoples' knowledge systems have maintained ecosystem balance for centuries, long before the discourse of sustainable development became popular globally. The broad implications lie in Ammatoa's success in integrating socio-cultural sanctions with environmental protection. While modern policy often relies on formal regulation and costly law enforcement, indigenous peoples like Ammatoa have shown that customary norms grounded in sacred values are more effective because they are internalized as collective consciousness rather than simply obedience to written rules. This challenges the modern governance paradigm that tends to separate nature from culture. In the contemporary context, the Ammatoa system strengthens the case for *decolonizing knowledge*. Local knowledge that has been marginalized by Western science is proving relevant to tackling the climate crisis. The Ammatoa model teaches that equitable conservation must recognize indigenous peoples as subjects, not objects of development, and integrate local wisdom into national and global policies to create a more resilient and sustainable future.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the "Pasang" tradition plays a central role in maintaining social and ecological harmony within the Ammatoa Kajang community. The hierarchical structure led by Ammatoa ensures that customary rules are followed, reflected in values of simplicity such as the prohibition on using modern technology and the obligation to wear black clothing. In the context of conservation, the "Pasang" system has proven effective in preserving ecosystems and biodiversity through sustainable natural resource management. Although modernization presents significant challenges, particularly in the social and economic spheres, Ammatoa serves as a guardian of traditional identity, upholding local values amidst globalizations. These findings affirm that the local wisdom of indigenous communities can serve as a model for sustainable traditional conservation and provide important guidance in addressing contemporary environmental challenges. The implications of this research encourage policymakers to integrate local value systems into national conservation strategies while strengthening cultural preservation efforts for future generations. Thus, this study contributes to the development of more inclusive policies and enriches cultural anthropology scholarship on the resilience of indigenous communities.

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