

# **On Human-Nature Relations: The Importance of Malay *Adat* and Rituals in Protecting the Suhaid River in West Kalimantan, Indonesia**

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## **Abstract**

Many scholars have examined human-nature relations through various frameworks. A few researchers, however, have studied human-nature relations through Malay *adat* (custom) and rituals concerning the Suhaid river in Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan. The purpose of this study is to examine whether the relationship between humans and nature is made significant through Malay *adat* and rituals that protect rivers. This study uses manuscript data, interviews, and observations in Suhaid of Kapuas Hulu regency in West Kalimantan. The respondents consisted of the head of the Malay traditional court, village religious leaders, and the local Malay community. In addition, researchers also used an anthropological approach to study Malay culture. This study shows that the relationship between humans and nature in the river illustrates: 1) *adat* and rituals have local values and beliefs which protect rivers; 2) the Suhaid Malay community is concerned with protecting rivers; 3) Malay customary laws aimed at maintaining the relationship between humans and nature were developed as part of a peace treaty between Pangeran Suma Dilaga and the Iban people; and 4) the contemporary relationship between humans and nature in the Suhaid river has been outlined in customary law (*hukum adat*) and is practiced in the tradition of *buang-buang* rituals. The researcher's findings highlight the importance of Malay *adat* and rituals in the conservation of the Suhaid river in West Kalimantan.

**Keyword:** Nature, *adat*, ritual, river, and Malay

## **Introduction**

Inuvialuk said that “You never starve on land if you have fish” (Inuvialuk, in Todd, 2014). This sentence itself is simple but has broad implications for how humans maintain a relationship with nature, for example, by caring for rivers to maintain a growing fish population. Bagir outlined that protecting the environment is important (Bagir, 2015). Rivers support fish and human life and thus provide balance in natural ecosystems. If a river fish species becomes extinct, this will disrupt the balance of the local and broader ecosystem. In "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", White Jr (1967) recounts that while a coral polyp serves its own purpose, it has created a vast underwater world that can benefit other types of animals and plants. White revealed that when the human species began to multiply, it influenced the environment. In other words, the ecological influence of natural life is based on the development of human life, which has been stigmatized for the needs of human life.

Over time, it turns out that the relationship between humans and rivers has influenced the relationship between humans and other humans, humans and animals, and humans and nature. Rivers not only guarantee a source of water, but rivers also protect fish, animals, and life on earth. Therefore, humans need rivers in order to live and survive in various aspects of life. Nasr likens White Jr.'s argument to the need to compel humans to think about the consequences of living on earth by acknowledging these consequences through the importance of other creatures (Nasr, 1968). Nasr asserts that when ecological crises arrive, few understand the consequences or talk about them and even fewer deeply investigate the causes (Nasr, 1968). People are then often dynamic elements in their environment, but in current circumstances, we do not know exactly when, where or with what

effect human-derived changes will come (White Jr, 1967), and the effects will be gradual, as has been seen in various fields. White questions this issue by suggesting what should we do?

If we return to White Jr.'s statement as a starting point, we should try to clarify our thinking by looking in some historical depth at the assumptions that underlie modern technology and science (White Jr, 1967). According to White, "Science is traditionally aristocratic, speculative, intellectual in intent; low-end, empirical, and action-oriented technology" (White Jr, 1967). In the Indonesian context, technology and science have become traditions in the broader community. But when viewed from a cultural perspective, technology and science have influenced the lives of local people and traditions of life. The practice of *adat* (Ar: 'ādah; customs) by local communities within tradition and ritual is regarded as a local belief system that acknowledges the community's contribution to nature and the environment.

From the perspective of *adat* and rituals, the relationship between humans and nature is critical, as can be seen in practices and rituals. Phenomena in indigenous communities, such as rituals related to local ancestors, make the relationship between humans and nature unique. There are important actors in humans' relationship with their environment, which maintain balance in the world. For example, indigenous peoples are actors who provide solutions for nature. They have special rituals to protect nature and the earth. They maintain a cosmic balance, linking the supernatural, nature, and culture.

Catherine Bell points out that formal studies of rituals first emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to identify what were believed to be universal categories of human experience. Catherine explains this term by

revealing the beginning of a major shift in the way European culture was compared to other cultures and religions. Catherine explains that theorists of myth and ritual understood rituals as being forms of religion. On the other hand, social functionalists explored ritual acts and values to analyze society and the nature of social phenomena (Faver, 2009). This is what led scientists to use the term ritual to refer to social phenomenon as well as religious rituals. Likewise, anthropologists understood rituals as culture or local wisdom owned by the community. From W. Robertson Smith to Clifford Geertz, the idea of ritual is meaningful precisely because it is more than a simple analytical tool (Faver, 2009).

In Geertz's view ritual is a sanctified behavior, the belief that religious concepts are true and that religious directives are somehow heard (Geertz, 1973). If rituals are like religion, then the phrase 'religion as culture' becomes the main concept used to interpret the life practices of indigenous peoples. In examining religion, the social scope of religion must be considered. In anthropology, especially social anthropology, practitioners engage in ethnography. Exploring what ethnography entails is crucial as it forms the basis of anthropological analysis, which serves as a form of knowledge acquisition (Geertz, 1973). The religious paradigm provides branches of science in the anthropology of life, such as the development and understanding of the various disciplines in religious traditions. Religious views and beliefs about ancestors provide an understanding of the beliefs held by everyone.

Ritual phenomena in indigenous communities, such as religious rituals related to local ancestors, make each religion unique. The view of religious rituals is one form where we have to look at the human environment that is religious and has a local culture that they continue to maintain in their religious and social life. Religion cannot be considered a valid analytical category because it does not

select the typical cross-cultural aspects of human life (Fitzgerald, 2000). Religion and culture have a mutually influential relationship in social life. Fitzgerald (2000) states people have a very complex contextual hermeneutic issue. When a person understands religion only contextually, then they can only claim to adhere to community life with an animist understanding without an in-depth interpretation of religious theories. This will harm religious scholarship, such that many people will develop a chauvinistic understanding of religion. Scientists need contextual hermeneutics, but hermeneutics must also be based on a strong understanding of religious rituals. Paradigms in world religions are a branch of science that must have scientific qualities that are indispensable for society.

This research focuses on the relationship between humans and nature in a river with a close connection to a Malay community. This study aims to investigate the harmonious relationship between humans and nature through the Suhaid River in West Kalimantan. It provides an overview of the life of the local Malay community, which has a relationship with nature through *adat* and rituals used to protect the Suhaid River. Specifically, this paper answers a series of questions: to what extent are *adat* and rituals important in a social environment? Such as the relationship between humans and nature in the river, which is a traditional source of power in protecting nature. What are the values of local wisdom attached to the river? Do people really care about the natural environment they possess? An in-depth understanding of the relationship between humans and nature in various examples of the social environment provides a model for solving problems and understanding the role of indigenous communities in providing solutions for nature through *adat* and rituals to protect rivers. This research argues for the critical relationship between humans and nature when understanding *adat* and rituals in response to environmental

damage. *Adat* and rituals, as part of relations between humans and their environment, highlight that local wisdom is critical for the inland Malay community to ensure the survival of their culture and social life. The relationship between humans and nature is linked to the community's life system, which provides an overview of the values of local wisdom that must be preserved in the river. At the same time, the culture of local wisdom has developed over time to protect the natural ecosystem. Thus, the importance of the relationship between humans and nature can be seen through Malay *adat* and rituals protecting the Suhaid River.

### **Malays and Identity in Suhaid**

Since the early colonial era of the Dutch East Indies, the Malay people have been recognized as an indigenous community in Indonesia. As the largest ethnic group in Indonesia (Abdullah, 2017), Malays can be found all across Indonesia's geographic and cultural landscape. Inheriting customary lands as Indonesian citizens, Malays initially spread to areas such as West Kalimantan, Riau, South Sumatra, Bangka Belitung, Jambi, Riau Islands, North Sumatra, Lampung, Jakarta, Bengkulu, and Central Kalimantan. Malays also thrive in countries across Southeast Asia such as in Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand and, of course, Kalimantan in Indonesia (see map below). Malay expansion was so rapid that they reached the hinterland (*pedalaman*) villages of West Kalimantan. Abdullah asserted that as a large ethnic group with deep historical roots, Malay identity should be viewed as an ethnic group operating in a strategic environment that is constantly changing (Abdullah, 2017).



**Image 1.** *Map of Borneo* (Source: [www.britannica.com/place/Borneo-island-Pacific-Ocean](http://www.britannica.com/place/Borneo-island-Pacific-Ocean))

As a distinct tradition and culture, Malays have survived in every region through *adat* and rituals. Malay *adat* are adopted through the practices carried out by ancestors. Malays believe that *adat* is a territorial system that can balance human behavior through interaction and social norms. Malay obedience is based on social customs and ethics in establishing relationships between humans and nature.

Today, the Malay community in West Kalimantan is undergoing dynamic change as a result of their migration between regions. Mee argues that one district in West Kalimantan continues to utilize and shape Malay translocations more broadly (Mee, 2010). Interactions within the Malay community, both individually and in social groups, are based on the teachings of Islam, namely monotheism or *tawhīd*

(Mawangir, 2021), which serves as a common denominator for Malay identity. Scholars have observed that the evolution of Malay society involved a transition from non-Muslim to Muslim communities. Consequently, those identifying as Muslims are considered part of the Malay tribes in West Kalimantan. For instance, Prasojo conducted research on the Tidayu (comprising Chinese, Dayak, and Malay) tribes in West Kalimantan, highlighting the importance of recognizing ethnoreligious identity. This identity holds significance among Malays and Dayaks as local ethnic groups intertwine with the realms of Islam and Christianity within the framework of social interactions (Prasojo, 2017). Ibrahim stated that Islam and local traditions in the Malay hinterland of West Kalimantan consist of a mixture of local values (Ibrahim, 2018). Hermansyah revealed that the Malay community of West Kalimantan has a collective memory that is transmitted via oral traditions and other life practices, such as cultivation (Hermansyah, 2018). In line with this statement, Jubba and others also highlighted that there are three elements related to Malay identity; first, Malay identity is maintained through various means, including cultural legitimacy through cooperation between the Malay Customary Institution or *Lembaga Adat Melayu* (LAM) and the local government; second, there is a stigma attached to Malay identity, which some have sought to overcome by reviving Malay identity through various symbols; and third, presenting Malay identity as always having been associated with Islam represents an attempt to show that Malay is not only a cultural identity but also a religious identity (Jubba et al., 2021). The Malay community has always been associated with Islam in Indonesia, especially in West Kalimantan.

In addition, Malay communities in West Kalimantan developed as a result of the establishment of Muslim monarchies, such as the kingdoms of Sambas, Mempawah, Pontianak, Sanggau, Sintang, Melawi and Kapuas Hulu. The early emergence of these kingdoms



reflected that Malays submitted to local culture based on Islam. Their rituals were also related to Islamic texts mixed with traditional Malay culture. At its peak in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Malay culture extended into the interior of West Kalimantan, including Nanga Suhaid, Kapuas Hulu District, West Kalimantan, which is famously home to Malay tribes living in along the rivers there.

As the majority of those living in Nanga Suhaid work as fishermen, they have a relationship with the river through traditions, customs and rituals aimed at protecting nature. Their life in the waters of Nanga Suhaid fosters harmony while safeguarding natural ecosystems. Ibrahim described the significance of the inland Malay community in referring to the followers of Islam in the hinterland of West Kalimantan, especially in the Upper Kapuas River which is commonly referred to as Kapuas Hulu (Ibrahim, 2018). Nanga Suhaid is one of the hinterland areas which was Islamized. This can be seen from the formation of an Islamic kingdom in Suhaid led by Pangeran Anom Soeria Negara from 1809 to 1879 (Suprianto et al., 2021). The early spread of Islam took place under Sultan Nata Ade Abdurrahman alias Abang Pikai and Sultan Abdurrahman Muhammad Jalaluddin or Sultan Aman, who ruled from 1150 to 1200 H (1737-1785 AD). Sultan Aman was a Malay who spread Islam in the upper Kapuas River area, alongside a noble and religious leader named Madil bin Luwan, who then spread Islam among the rulers of the Silat kingdom, Suhaid, Selimbau, Piasak, Jongkong and Bunut (Suprianto et al., 2021). From 1700 to 1916 the Nanga Suhaid area was a kingdom founded by Abang Ripong Nanga Tawang as its first ruler. Abang Ripong ruled from 1700 to 1720. From 1809 to 1879 the Suhaid kingdom was led by Pangeran Suma Dilaga, who built the kingdom's first mosque alongside the palace (*keraton*), located on the riverbank. The kingdom was still under the authority of the Dutch East Indies as could be seen in the royal seal, which still used the colonial name, Van Soehaid. The river crossing is massive,

passing through the Kapuas River in West Kalimantan. Thus, the Malay people can be considered to have spread throughout the Indonesian hinterlands as a result of the religious transformation of the Malay kingdoms in the Kapuas Hulu district in West Kalimantan. The following is a table of the names of rulers of the Suhaid Kingdom:

The Name of Prince	Title	Year
Abang Ripong	Demang Nutup	1700 to 1720
Abang Semang	Pangeran Agung Abang Usman	1720 to 1750
Abang Payang	Pangeran Anom	1750 to 1770
Abang Loyan	Kyai Dipati Agung	1770 to 1790
Abang Saka	Kyai Dipati Mangku	1790 to 1809
Abang Oesman	Pangeran Suma Dilaga Mangku Negara	1809 to 1879
Abang Ismail	Pangeran Kesuma Anom Surya Negara	1879 to 1916

**Table 1** *Names of King* (quoted from Syarifuddin, 1979)

## **The Laut Tawang – Iban Batang Lupar Peace Treaty and Protection of the River**

The intertwining of Malay history and Islamic religious identity has served as a symbol of community life. The Malay people pride themselves on being Islamic because Malay history is linked to the spread of Islamic kingdoms, like the kingdom of Samudra Pasai in the northern tip of Sumatra. This can also be seen in Malay history in West Kalimantan described in the manuscript of Pangeran Suma Dilaga, the Sea King of Tawang (Raja Laut Tawang) Nanga Suhaid in 1297 H or around 1880 AD. This manuscript discusses a letter from Kusuma Anom Surya Negara, the King of Negeri Suhaid, regarding the establishment of *Tembang*, monuments signifying peace between the Iban Batang Lupar people, Pangeran Suma Dilaga and the people of Laut Tawang Nanga Suhaid. The *Tembang* was established in two treaties between the Iban Batang Lupar people and Pangeran Suma Dilaga, the king of the Tawang Laut Nanga Suhaid since 1232 H/1816 AD.

The two *Tembangs* were established on the banks of the Tangit River on the border of two territories, one *Tembang* facing the Iban Batang Lupar's land and the other facing Pangeran Suma Anom Dilaga's lands. In order to establish a blood pact between the ruler and the people in Suhaid, they both drank each other's blood. Following this, according to religious law, the Iban slaughtered a pig, while Pangeran Suma Dilaga slaughtered a goat. The Iban then presented traditional Dayak weapons—a spear (*sangkuh*), shield (*perisai*) and sword (*pedang nyabur*)—to Pangeran Suma Dilaga. Likewise, Pangeran Suma Dilaga presented traditional Malay weapons to the Iban and then made a series of agreements with the Iban, which included:

First, that the people of Iban Batang Lupar and Laut Tawang (River) were forbidden from killing each other under punishment of death by *sangkuh*. Second, if someone from either side took the life of someone from the other side and fled, both sides would pursue the fugitive under a shared oath: “Whoever plants rice, the rice will die and they cannot eat it, if he walks he will die, if he goes to the forest, a large tree will strike him, if he goes down into the water, he will be eaten by a large crocodile, he will die from eating poison, if he works then he will not live in peace for generations.” Third, if the Iban Batang Lupar people were attacked by an enemy, they were obliged to send news to Pangeran Suma Dilaga to seek his assistance. Similarly, if Pangeran Suma was attacked by an enemy, the Iban Batang Lupar were obliged to come to his aid.

The fourth vow pertained to the *Tembang* monument facing the land under the control of the Iban Batang Lupar, which denoted that the hills, small hills, and land covered with belian wood (*Eusideroxylon zwageri*), popularly known as Bornean ironwood, used for cultivating plantations all belonged to Batang Lupar. The fifth vow involved the the *Tembang* monument facing the river, belonging to Pangeran Suma, meaning that his land encompassed amparan, lake land planted with tembesuk, kawi, kamsiak, kubah, taun, and rengas wood (names of trees in Suhaid). Additionally, the Lebak river, home to fish in Laut Tawang, would also be under the control of Pangeran Suma Dilaga. The sixth vow permitted the Iban Batang Lupar to fish in the Laut Tawang lake for fish, labi, and biukuk (a type of turtle) without prohibition since the Iban lacked fishing gear like rods, traps, and nets. If Pangeran Suma Laut Tawang caught fish, these would have to be shared with the Iban. The seventh vow obliged the people from Laut Tawang to seek permission from the Iban Batang Lupar if they required food or resources from Iban land. Iban should not deny essentials like wood, stones, or thorns for livelihood. If people from Laut Tawang

came across fallen fruit on the way to Iban land, they could consume it but could not take it home. When people from Laut Tawang visited an Iban house, the Iban were obliged to provide food and water. Rich Iban were obliged to share rice and fruit from their plantations. The Iban Batang Lupar formalized this agreement using a rope, while Pangeran Suma Dilaga, the king of Laut Tawang, had the agreement written down.

The agreement became a defense pact for indigenous communities in maintaining the culture and *adat* of Nanga Suhaid. Indigenous Malays, in Bourdieu's nomenclature (1984), utilized various political, cultural, social and symbolic strategies for survival. Pangeran Suma Dilaga was part of the Malay community's political strategy. He wielded power as king of Nanga Suhaid and could issue regulations regarding regional border *adat*. Pangeran Suma Dilaga had a key role as a political actor, a figure who could influence power relations in the political system to achieve their goals, embracing a set of beliefs and doctrines, norms and religious laws that motivated and guided them to behave from an ideological perspective (Pötz, 2016). This political role illustrates that the Malay leader had a goal in creating peace between the Malay and Iban tribes on the Nanga Suhaid border.

Preserving local cultural values and traditions of life has become an *adat* of the local community. This goal is to maintain the existence of Malays in Nanga Suhaid as an indigenous community. The history of Pangeran Suma Dilaga in this manuscript illustrates that local cultures aim to maintain the relationship between humans and nature, as could be seen in the seventh declaration in the peace treaty between Pangeran Suma Dilaga and the Iban people. In addition, in this culture, there are close kinship values between the Malays and Iban, who assist each other when they lack basic

necessities. Culture fosters harmony between groups of humans and between humans and their environment.

The Pangeran Suma Dilaga manuscript outlines values that reflect the social life of the Malay and Dayak Iban tribes in social interactions in a community environment. The values in the manuscript illustrate that social strategies developed as a way of resolving conflict between Malays and the Dayak Iban. This resolution provides space to avoid the traumatic history of conflict that once existed between the Malay and Dayak Iban. In addition, the *Tembang* Monument built by Prince Suma Dilaga and the Dayak Iban depicts a symbol of peace between the Malay and Dayak Iban tribes at the Nanga Suhaid Border. This illustrates how the strategy of symbolism helped maintain the life of indigenous people in the local area. Thus, the manuscript shows that the local community of Nanga Suhaid ensured its survival by maintaining cultural values through an agreement (Bourdieu, 1984). This agreement continues to play an important role in maintaining the relationship between humans and nature in social interactions and community life.

### **The *Serabibihim* Ritual in Suhaid Malay Society**

Malays establish a harmonious relationship with the environment through *adat*, such as through the *serabibihim* ritual performed by the Malay community in 1970. The *serabibihim* ritual involves porridge being placed into the river as an expression of the traditions and beliefs of the Malay community. Members of the community used a large yellow boat containing 5-10 people. They paddled the boat around the Suhaid River. They bore a round traditional cake sprinkled with coconut. A customary elder (*punggawa adat*), Norhamdan (57), explained that *serabibihim* is a sacred ritual regarding the supernatural world or the relationship

between humans and nature (interview, April 29, 2022). The community performed this ritual as a way of guarding against disease outbreaks, which occurred as a result of magic in ancient times. He said that his father, Muhammad Saleh, a former traditional leader, performed this ritual. According to Norhamdan, Malay traditional leaders performed this ritual to honor the ancestors in the river. According to Norhamdan, they believed that diseases that spread in the river were a result of disharmony between humans and nature. The *serabibihim* ritual sought to pay respect to ancestors as part of the beliefs of the Malay community.

In this ritual, the relationship between humans and nature is nurtured by reciting *tola' bala* (literally, 'rejecting misfortunes') prayers and throwing the cakes and bananas into the river. Before performing the ritual, Norhamdan's father performed two sets of Islamic ritual prayer and then went to the river by boat to visit Nanga Suhaid Village. Uju Resad, a 59-year-old Malay community member who participated in the ritual, said that *serabibihim* can be interpreted as *tarbihim*. She said that the purpose of this ritual was to keep the people of Nanga Suhaid safe from witchcraft. He also said that this ritual is performed when many people in the village have died (interview Uju Resad, 59). The indigenous community pray for the safety of the village. She believes that the river is home to a guardian and the local community asks God for protection. In addition, Uju Resad revealed that the ritual is performed so that the community can connect with their ancestors who live in the river.

Rituals are a symbolic activity that refer to something that is independent and selfish in character (Staal, 2013). In line with this, Rossano and others explain that rituals are a mechanism for managing human resources which means they can foster, build and direct (Rossano, 2020; Seijo et al., 2016). Humans have developed rituals through practice and experience in interacting with nature.

In addition, there are important features in the diversity of ritual expressions and experiences observed both over time and between different cultures (Kapitány et al., 2020). This means that the ritual pattern of human life is always based on the local culture and *adat*. Boyer and Liénard (2020) identify four mechanisms that appear in rituals, namely (i) normative writing of actions; (ii) use of interactions to signify coalition identity, affiliation, cohesiveness; (iii) magical claims based on intuitive expectations about contagion; and (iv) ritualized behavior based on special handling of behavioral flows.

The *serabibihim* ritual is an attempt to protect the river, which has become a shared civilization of humanity and nature. Catherine revealed that the rituality of human life consists of a model based on two structural patterns, where rituals are an activity and a combination of thought and activity ultimately involving a third pattern, a pattern in which the dichotomy underlies thinking (Faver, 2009). This pattern gives birth to a role where the relationship between humans and nature creates an argument that the *serabibihim* ritual is a part of human life in the past and as local wisdom that holds important values for indigenous peoples. Similarly, Maarif said that the local indigenous community are concerned with protecting nature and the environment (Maarif, 2021). For the Malay indigenous people protecting nature is important for life. They make the river a social need where humans live and depend on each other. This ritual narrative explains that the Malay community has a role in protecting the river as part of humanity's relationship with nature.



## **The *Buang-buang* Ritual**

In 2020, several researchers studied the *buang-buang* (offering) ritual. The researchers interacted directly with the tradition and witnessed the production of the *buang-buang* offerings. This ritual is a local tradition in the Malay community when a circumcision (*khitanan*) takes place (Suprianto, 2020). Those who perform the *buang-buang* ritual believe that they have a connection between humans and nature. As stated by Cik Demui on July 6, 2020 when she performed the ritual in the water and on land by saying in Malay, “*Bismillah, nusah ngaruh kami bahrt*” (interview, July 6, 2020). When the *buang-buang* ritual is carried out by placing food on the ground and in the river, the introduction to the ritual asks Allah for help and asks permission from the ancestors, so as not to disturb their celebration, through speech and prayer. He believes that ancestral spirits still exist alongside humans but take on a different form. Ngah Syarief, representing the elder members of the Suhaid Malay community, said that the *buang-buang* ritual is frequently performed within the community due to ancestral concerns about spirits or demons residing in the river and on the ground (Interview, 23 September 2020). Additionally, Ngah Syarief noted that while some Malays continue to believe in this ritual, others do not. In the *buang-buang* tradition, essential components used as primary offerings during the ritual include rice, eggs, whiting (a type of fish), cigarette leaves, areca nut, and tobacco. These staples are presented as gifts to the unseen world, offered to the rivers and the ground as part of the ritual.

The *serabibihim* ritual was a practice from the past that now remains only as a story among the community, reflecting its connection to nature. Meanwhile, the *buang-buang* ritual illustrates the revitalization of traditions in the present, involving various figures and participants in its execution. The *buang-buang*

ritual, as practiced by the Malay community who still believe in a connection to the spiritual world, is performed for various reasons such as celebrating circumcision (*khitanan*), marriages, constructing new homes, canoe races, and ensuring protection for expectant mothers and their babies. However, the focal point of this ritual is the river, which they believe holds significance. In an interview with Uju Resad, it was revealed that this river is believed to be protected by ancestral spirits. The purpose of this ritual is to communicate with these ancestral spirits and seek protection from Allah (interview, 28 April 2022). Uju Resad also mentioned that these powerful ancestral spirits must be respected. Within Malay traditional culture, *Serapah* is referred to as the community's belief in guardians of the river and nature.

The *buang-buang* ritual serves as an illustration of rituals aimed at maintaining and caring for nature through Malay beliefs regarding ancestors. The local belief represents a human relationship with the spirits to maintain the balance of biodiversity ethically and in human action (Ives & Bekessy, 2015). This leads to a formulation of environmental ethics that emphasizes the obligation to protect, preserve, or maintain various values in nature (Dicks, 2017). The *buang-buang* ritual understands the morality system of nature in ritual practice. The ritual responds to the presence of ancestral spirits in the river as the medium of the Malay people's beliefs. They perform rituals that are ecocentric in nature, and call for the re-establishment of the relationship between humans and nature in an ecological manner (Maarif, 2021). Hence, the *buang-buang* ritual is a tradition that galvanizes a human ethic towards nature for ancestors and the seeks environmental balance on earth.

## Religion and Ecology

Religion and ecology are interrelated tools of life. Merchant said that the center of organic theory is the identification of nature, especially the earth (Merchant, 1817). Ecology generates a new sense of right and wrong in communities, which Leopold calls the 'soil ethic'; "Something is right," according to him, "when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of biotic communities (Northcott, 2015)." Religion and ecology are related in life. Local tradition in Malay tribes is one of the rituals that has aspects of religious value through prayers, rituals, and indigenous peoples' practices to protect nature. Religion is the key to all aspects of the rituals carried out to convey messages and prayers to the Creator.

In the rituals of *buang-buang* and *serabibihim*, religion cannot be measured or compared. In this way, religion can be seen as *sui generis*. In line with this, Eliade reveals that for profane experiences, on the other hand, space is homogeneous and neutral; there are no gaps to qualitatively distinguish the various parts of the mass (Eliade, 1957). Religion and ecology occur when people who understand religious teachings then practice these rituals in the natural environment. Eliade reveals the phenomenology of life in a ritual-oriented world and the construction of sacred spaces. In this case, religion is a symbol that makes humans always obey their limitless God. As Max Weber said, specifying a religious approach, this can be achieved through experience or social life (Weber, 1992). When humans deepen their connection with God, it naturally results in activities that reflect obedience to the Creator and a closer relationship with both fellow humans and nature. In this context, Eliade's theory offers an evaluation of the phenomenological dimension of human existence, suggesting that the presence of the sacred fundamentally shapes the world's

ontology (Eliade, 1957). Religion has become a symbol of cultural identity in Malay society.

If we look at every religion, most pious people have a strong social role in religion. On the one hand, it is cognate with “man” which reminds us (as does the Biblical Hebrew *Adamah*, the earth, with Adam, man) of the “nature” of man, of what man has in common with all living things (Rappaport, 1999). For example, in the relationship between humans and the natural environment, such as the activities of indigenous peoples who adhere to Islam in their customary practices to protect their traditional rivers. Rituals such as *buang-buang* and *serabibihim* establish links between religion and natural (river) ecology. The relationship between religion and ecology includes various phenomenology of natural destruction. The role of religion is one of the rituals of life that can contribute to responding to the relationship between humans and nature.

### **Malay Customary Law on the River**

The Malay community in Kapuas Hulu District developed their ancestral customs as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This can be seen from the discovery of Malay royal manuscripts in Kapuas Hulu District that discuss the kingdoms in 1700. These customs have become a tradition in people’s lives, both as individuals and groups, resulting in the formation of village customs (H. M. Salim, 2016). History is based on a view of the world that consists of visible (physical) and invisible (spiritual) elements (Thompson, 2000). The Malay community forms elements of community life into norms that are inherited by others. In the Suhaid Malay community, norms are adopted from customs and the concept of community life in protecting the river from pollution and damage caused by irresponsible people. In this way, the customs of the Suhaid Malay

community have a strong focus on protecting the river as a source of life, both as a source of drinking water, and as a source of livelihood for the fishing community.

Bedner and Arizona reveal that issues around *adat* dominate discourse on the Indonesian state's policy of appropriation of land and other natural resources (Bedner & Arizona, 2019). Customary law provides a solution to maintain culture and nature on earth. Salim said that implementing this custom includes efforts: (1) the establishment of a customary bureaucracy; (2) the restoration of customary cultural sovereignty; (3) the seizing of customary rights over natural resources; and (4) strengthening traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (A. Salim, 2021). To protect customary nature, regulations are needed in the form of customary law to achieve harmony with the natural environment. The presence of customary law within a community serves as a demonstration of fair governance for indigenous populations while also aligning with the objectives of local governments (Adnyani, 2021). Thus, customary law plays a crucial role in maintaining natural harmony within the framework of customary regulations

Malay customary law provides an understanding for local people to protect nature through the river. This law was developed based on an agreement among the local indigenous community observing the movement of people in the river. In a study of Suhaid's Malay customary law regarding *tuba* (poisoning fish in rivers) and killing fish with electric shocks, Article 19 of the law explains that if someone is discovered poisoning (*menuba*) and electrocuting fish in lakes and rivers, they will be subject to a customary fine of IDR 5 million and their equipment used will be confiscated as evidence. If they do not accept these sanctions, they will be reported to the authorities. This regulation aims to prevent human abuse of fish in the rivers and lakes. Indigenous Malays strictly forbid the poisoning

and electrocution of fish in the Suhaid River because it can cause water pollution and pose a risk of killing oneself and others.

Article 21, paragraph 1 of the customary law stipulates that individuals or groups found using *lanit putas* poison (fish-killing poison) will face a customary fine of IDR 1 million, and the poison will be confiscated as evidence. If they disregard these sanctions, they will be referred to the authorities. Paragraphs 2 and 3 outline that catching Toman and Ringau fish incurs a customary fine of IDR 500,000, the seizure of fishing equipment, and outlining that the fish seeds must be released back into the river. Paragraph 4 addresses the setting up of unclean fishing nets, resulting in a fine of IDR 50 thousand. Paragraph 5 pertains to installing wood in river flows without cleaning them, leading to an IDR 100,000 fine. Paragraph 6 specifies that individuals outside the village area of Nanga Suhaid, wishing to fish in the waters, must seek approval from the village head and fishermen. Paragraph 7 prohibits the installation of any fishing equipment at a river shortcut, with violators facing a fine of IDR 200,000 and confiscation of fishing equipment by the customary leader. This article outlines three prohibitions concerning fish-killing poisons, installation of wood in rivers, and the use of unauthorized fishing equipment.

Articles 19 and 21 of the customary law illustrate its focus on protecting bodies of water and animals that live in rivers. Ya'kub said that this customary law provides better recognition of the distribution of power and benefits of natural resource systems (Ya'kub Aiyub Kadir, 2019). As a result, individuals from both local and external areas who pose a threat to natural resources within the river face sanctions. The Malay community's commitment to safeguarding nature in the river through legal norms serves as a deterrent against potential reoccurrences. This is due to the established customary law's role as a cornerstone of community conduct, serving as norms and guidelines for proper behavior

(Hamzah et al., 2020). In other words, Malay customary laws concerning rivers have become part of the lives of local indigenous peoples, serving as a mechanism to protect rivers from environmental harm and promote sustainable water preservation.

### **Local Values and Beliefs about River Harmony**

We can see that Malay life harmoniously protects local rivers through the values of local beliefs. This harmony is rooted in traditional practices and local wisdom from the local community's ancestors, which are believed to contain noble values and truth (Mutawali, 2021). The community has preserved these values through *serabibihim* rituals in the past, the Suhaid peace treaty, *buang-buang* rituals and customary law which provide the fundamental values and beliefs guiding their approach to safeguarding human relations with the river. In addition, Uju Resad and Hermansyah mention that the local community use mantras in rituals related to rivers, such as for catching or warding animals. These spells are used by fishermen every time they want to find fish in the river:

Ilmu Jaring Ikan (Fishing nets)	Ilmu Ikan (Fish)	Ilmu memancing (Fishing)
<i>Asal air seriang-riang</i> (happy water origin) <i>Asal ikan nabi Idir</i> (Origin of fish from prophet Idir) <i>Masukkanlah kedalam</i> <i>bubuh</i> (Put it in the fishing net) <i>Masukkanlah kedalam</i> <i>sungai</i> (Put it in the river)	<i>Ya bulya</i> <i>Ya bulkam</i>	<i>Mut mut tali penyamut</i> <i>Na nangkap pedih payut</i> <i>Nangkap yabit mulut</i>

**Table 2** *Magic spells used by fisherman* (source: Hermansyah, Ilmu Ghaib Melayu, 2010)

The Malay people of Suhaid or Kapuas Hulu use mantras in this ritual to convince them to look for fish in the river. By casting this spell, they are able to easily catch fish in the river using nets or fishing rods. In response, they take responsibility for conducting ecocentric rituals, and call for a re-establishment of the ecological human-nature relationship (Maarif, 2021). Rumahuru argues that rituals have become an inseparable part of the existence of every individual and community group (Rumahuru, 2018). This illustrates that customs and the ritualization of human life have a strong influence on reconstructing human awareness regarding the relationship between humans and nature, highlighting trust and awareness of the customary environment.

The relationship between humans and nature as exemplified by Maarif provides a broad perspective on how humans view nature



from a different perspective. Maarif explained that the earth is the mother and the sky is the father for indigenous communities. If the mother is hurt and persecuted, the father will be angry and send a warning and punishment (Maarif, 2021). Like *bala'* (Ar.: *balā'*, calamity), they come and ask us to reorganize and rebalance the cosmos (Maarif, 2021). Maarif's research reveals that that humans play an important role in maintaining a reciprocal relationship with nature through social means. This can be articulated as local wisdom in indigenous peoples who are seen as social and communicative systems that produce a kind of self-organization (*autopoiesis*) in a culture (Pesurnay, 2018). Humans need nature for resources, while nature needs humans to protect it from damage. Jaung & Carrasco (2022) revealed that studying the relationship between humans and nature in large socio-ecological systems is critical for sustainability but is also very challenging. These challenges illustrate that human life and nature have a major social impact on the world.

Gebara et al. (2021) argue that in order to transition from the current crisis, we must first renew our relationship with nature, acknowledge our interdependence and find ways to relieve the extraordinary pressures generated by human density on earth while adapting to nature's response. They also show that in the process of transitioning from the current crisis, humans can activate a relational cosmopolitics, in which humans and non-humans are no longer seen as opposing forces but are interdependent. In line with this, Maarif (2021) explains the relationship between humans and nature in the context of indigenous communities in Indonesia. Maarif (2021) argues that Indonesia's indigenous peoples have re-contextualized their customary strategies, enabling them to survive and even offer a lesson worth considering: *adat* ecocentrism. Developing indigenous ecocentrism means enabling indigenous people to become more involved in ecological issues (de Figueiredo

& Marquesan, 2022). In addition, ecocentrism is used as a term for the sustainability of life in protecting nature and securing human needs (Rülke et al., 2020). In this case, Maarif (2021) illustrates that indigenous communities deeply care about protecting the natural environment from ecological damage and also the spread of disease due to natural disasters. In other words, the local values and beliefs embraced by Malay Suhaid harmoniously influence the relationship between humans and nature in the river.

Humans and rivers, thereby, have a complex relationship. Zingraff-Hamed and others (2021) revealed that the relationship between humans and rivers is a human concern and empathy for nature can play an important role in environmental education. The relationship between humans and rivers provides the basis for a peaceful life that can become a source of unity with the environment. As Ryan points out, river-human relationships provide pragmatic conservation measures. The long-term well-being of rivers requires a new perspective on human-water relationships that nurtures the cultural, social, and spiritual significance of rivers (Ryan, 2022). In line with this, Chen notes that human-river relationships during prehistoric times can be understood on three levels: the evolution of continental landscapes and cultural succession, the evolution of watershed landscapes and the rise and fall of cultures, and the process of site formation from geomorphic perspective (Chen, 2019). This means that the relationship between humans and rivers can affect the human environment.

The harmony of human life depends on the health of rivers (nature). Zingraff-Hamed and colleagues argue that the mismanagement of rivers leads to a decrease in the quality of human life, as well as biodiversity and culture (Zingraff-Hamed et al., 2021). This can pose social and ecological risks. For example, a dirty river can

endanger ecological health and also damage natural ecosystems. Rivers play a key role in the spatial organization of human settlements (Fang et al., 2018). In other words, rivers play an important role in maintaining natural ecosystems and also protecting human life.

## **Conclusion**

The relationship between humans and nature in local wisdom is not only based on ecocentrism, but also has a deep relationship with the Malay community's concern for nature. The dynamics of human relations with nature have not been widely explored, partly due to a lack of understanding around the Malay community in Indonesia. The harmonious relationship between humans and nature, including by maintaining *adat* and rituals regarding rivers in the Malay Suhaid region, safeguards against ecological harm. *Adat* and rituals in the past have provided guidance for current rituals and *adat* to protect rivers. This can be seen from the role of Prince Suma Dilaga in establishing an ecological defense through the peace treaty with the Iban. In addition, the rituals of *serabibihum*, *buang-buang* and the customary law of the Malay community illustrate that there is an ongoing desire to safeguard nature. Thus, local wisdom through *adat* and rituals among the Suhaid Malay community maintain the relationship between humans and nature.

This research highlights the relationship between humans and nature not only from the perspective of human needs but also in the importance of *adat* and rituals as being an expression of the Malay community's concern for nature. The diverse interactions between humans and nature concerning rivers serve as the foundation for the significance of customs and rituals. Understanding these elements is crucial for fostering future harmony. The

comprehension of the connection between humans and nature presents a compelling case for the vital role played by Malay customs and rituals in safeguarding rivers. Hence, this paper underscores that examining the relationship between humans and nature requires both theoretical exploration and in-depth analysis within the context of the Suhaid Malay community's life.

This paper is limited in its focus on the Suhaid river area, such that it cannot be used as a strong basis to make broader claims about the relationship between humans and nature through *adat* and rituals as a means of safeguarding nature throughout Indonesia or Malays in the entire Southeast Asia. A broader survey of sites across Indonesia would be required in order to inform broader policy formulation. A survey of several Malay traditional practices and rituals is underway, which will examine the Malay Suhaid river and which may change five to ten years in the future. Further studies could also provide broader analysis and utilize a more in-depth, structured anthropological approach to explore Malay traditional culture.

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