

## Rituals and Social Cohesion: Cultural Preservation Through Djawa Sunda Cosmology in Cigugur, Kuningan, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This research aims to explore how the Djawa Sunda Religion (Agama Djawa Sunda-ADS) contributes to the preservation of cultural identity and religious practices in the Cigugur community, Kuningan, amidst modernisation and globalisation. Using a qualitative and ethnographic approach, the study focused on documenting the evolution and continued relevance of ADS cosmology through rituals and ceremonies such as Seren Taun. Data collection was conducted through interviews with religious leaders and community members, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that ADS plays a significant role in maintaining social cohesion and cultural continuity through its cosmological teachings and community rituals despite external pressures of cultural assimilation. The study also highlights the role of ADS in fostering religious pluralism and tolerance in a diverse religious community. The application of this research provides insights for scholars and policymakers interested in cultural preservation and religious pluralism in indigenous communities. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of ADS within the framework of Sundanese cosmology, contributing new perspectives on the intersection of religion, culture, and modernisation in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Cultural preservation, Djawa Sunda Religion, modernisation, Sundanese cosmology.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana Agama Djawa Sunda (ADS) berkontribusi terhadap pelestarian identitas budaya dan praktik keagamaan di komunitas Cigugur, Kuningan, di tengah modernisasi dan globalisasi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan etnografi, studi ini mendokumentasikan evolusi dan relevansi kosmologi ADS melalui ritual dan upacara seperti Seren Taun. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara dengan tokoh agama dan anggota komunitas, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ADS memainkan peran penting dalam menjaga kohesi sosial dan kontinuitas budaya melalui ajaran kosmologis dan ritual komunitas, meskipun menghadapi tekanan eksternal berupa asimilasi budaya. Penelitian ini juga menyoroti peran ADS dalam memupuk pluralisme agama dan toleransi di komunitas yang beragam agama. Aplikasi dari penelitian ini memberikan wawasan bagi akademisi dan pembuat kebijakan yang tertarik pada pelestarian budaya dan pluralisme agama di komunitas adat. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada analisis komprehensif terhadap ADS dalam kerangka kosmologi Sunda, yang memberikan perspektif baru tentang persilangan antara agama, budaya, dan modernisasi di Indonesia.

**Kata Kunci:** Pelestarian budaya, Agama Djawa Sunda, modernisasi, kosmologi Sunda.

### 1. Introduction

From an anthropological perspective, the role of religion is pivotal in shaping the cultural evolution of societies. However, the teachings of *Sunda Wiwitan*, predominantly adhered to by the Sundanese ethnic group, diverged from conventional religious propagation or missionary activities. *Sunda Wiwitan* is characterised as a belief system specific to the Sundanese community, distinguished by unique rituals and linguistic elements. It is commonly articulated among the Baduy Kanekes people, for example, that *Sunda Wiwitan* is intended exclusively for the indigenous Kenekes community, underscoring the challenge that even native practitioners may face in fully adhering to its doctrines. As

an ancestral religion, *Sunda Wiwitan* and its various derivatives are intrinsically inherited from ancestors and preserved within the community, upholding an indigenous cosmology and worldview.

Religious or belief systems typically undergo a process of transmission across generations. Nonetheless, in certain contexts, this transference is profoundly restricted, confined to individuals who align themselves with the religion's cosmological framework (Koentjaraningrat, 2000; Woodward, 2004). This phenomenon does not entail an overarching imposition of beliefs but unfolds at a local level, influenced by individual consciousness. A notable example of this is the Djawa Sunda religion (ADS), promulgated by Ki Ayi Madrais from Cigugur Kuningan, which reflects mystical cultural aesthetics and exhibits cosmological parallels between Sunda and Java. Central to Sunda cosmology is the belief in *Sang Hyang Tunggal*, the progenitor of both the *Niskala* (unseen) and *Sakala* (seen) realms. This complexity of cosmological understanding and belief systems suggests they are uniquely formulated by ethnic groups possessing extensive civilisations and cultures, encompassing facets such as religion, society, knowledge, language, arts, livelihoods, and life equipment systems.

Ancient Sunda Cosmology manuscripts delineate a macrocosmic model associated with *Sang Hyang Tunggal/JatiNiskala*, which can establish boundaries yet remain unconfined by them, and the microcosmic *Niskala* earth. *Sang Hyang Tunggal* is perceived as the embodiment of a singular space-time continuum, arising from the void with intention, speech, and energy. Within Sunda tradition, it is believed that upon death, the Sundanese people will "return to Hyang, not to the Gods," with their posthumous fate determined by their conduct, attitudes, and actions in life. Negative behaviours might result in reincarnation into a lower existence or damnation, whereas virtuous conduct is believed to elevate the soul to the agreeable *Niskala* realm (Ekadjati, 2006).

Ekadjati (2006) elucidates that Ancient Sunda Cosmology transcends mere cosmic structure, also serving as a conduit to discern the ultimate purpose of life - attaining happiness and tranquillity in the *Niskala* and *JatiNiskala* realms. This cosmological belief is frequently manifested in arts and traditions, perceived as reflections of societal cosmological perspectives. In certain circumstances, traditional arts are revered as "rituals" that forge a connection between individuals and their hallowed historical narrative. The sanctity of traditional arts resides not in the objects themselves but in the communal veneration of their historical significance. In this context, traditional arts, as embodiments of cosmological views, are deemed congruent with the religion practised within the community.

The Sundanese artistic tradition, renowned for its emphasis on gentleness and compassion, mirrors the cosmological perspective inherent in Sundanese mythology. This mythology venerates figures such as *Sunan Ambu* and *Dewi Sri* as paragons, embodying ideal traits. Central to this mythological framework is the reverence for the "mother" archetype, a motif that resonates with the agrarian way of life in Sundanese culture, symbolising both the fecundity and nurturing aspects of womanhood. In contrast to Javanese cosmology, which utilises symbols like the *Lingga* and *Yoni* to represent fertility, Sundanese mythology portrays the female or "mother" figure in a spectrum of admirable maternal qualities, encompassing steadfastness, tenderness, and nurturing love.

Extensive research has been undertaken to examine Sundanese cosmology and the reciprocal influences exerted by local religions or belief systems among the Sundanese populace. A notable study by Sumarlina, Permana, & Darsa (2020) investigated the cosmological spatial organisation in the indigenous Kampung Naga community. This study revealed the Sundanese perspective of a correlation between the macrocosm and the microcosm, bridging the cosmic universe with the human realm. In this context, the Sundanese endeavour to discern worldly meanings and immerse themselves in their essence. The cosmological principles of the Kampung Naga, particularly focused on maintaining Sundanese cosmology, are intrinsically linked to the '*Tri Tangtu di Bumi*' concept. This encompasses 'territorial governance,' 'temporal governance,' and 'conduct governance,' all of which interconnect cohesively within their cultural and traditional framework.

Another important study by Kushendrawati (2015) investigated the implementation of the *Seren Taun* ceremony, a distinctive religious event in Sundanese society. The ceremony demonstrates the community's belief in a divine power as the source of a bountiful harvest, which is different from the God described in the scriptures. In their tradition, God is regarded as the giver of agricultural produce

and is an integral part of daily spiritual life. Therefore, the Seren Taun ceremony is not just a ritual, but a representation of community identity, reflecting the influence of ancient archipelago cultures such as animism, dynamism, worship of ancestral spirits, natural forces, and Hindu doctrines on ancient Sundanese beliefs. Meanwhile, my research explores Agama Djawa Sunda (ADS) more broadly, covering its evolution and role in maintaining traditional values amid acculturation and syncretism. Using a qualitative methodology, the research shows how ADS, rooted in Sunda Wiwitan, preserves cultural heritage and shapes Sundanese cosmology through rituals and moral teachings, and highlights tolerance and social cohesion in Cigugur society. My research extends Kushendrawati's findings by providing a more comprehensive context of Sundanese beliefs and practices.

Djunatan (2013) provides a contrasting viewpoint, portraying Sundanese cosmology as primarily focused on the human life journey towards individual consciousness, rather than delving into mystical realms. Sundanese cosmology, as per this perspective, does not concern itself with celestial bodies or a hierarchical structure of a supernatural world. Instead, if myths of deities exist within Sundanese cosmology, they serve to elucidate and symbolise the human quest for understanding the profound essence of life (*kahuripan*) in pursuit of enlightenment about the nature of 'strength, capability, or the fundamental source of all existence' (*kahirupan*). Thus, Sundanese cosmology signifies a spiritual journey towards comprehending the core essence of life, moving beyond mere theoretical knowledge of the universe represented through formulas and numbers.

Prior research highlights the intricate nature of cosmology, underscoring the need for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding. This complexity stems from grasping societal perspectives on nature and examining theological beliefs and their interplay with everyday life practices. Therefore, this study delves deeper into the dynamics of Sundanese cosmology, especially as influenced by the Djawa Sunda religion (ADS). It explores how this cosmology endures and adapts within a constantly evolving society, making concerted efforts to maintain its distinct identity through syncretism and cultural adaptation. This examination is pivotal for understanding the fluid nature of religious beliefs and practices in Indonesia, particularly within the framework of cultural diversity and tolerance (Pals, 2012; Simuh, 1996; Suwardi, 2006).

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in Peursen's (1988) conceptualisation of culture as a human-devised strategy oriented toward the future. According to this theory, each culture and its corresponding society undergo three essential stages: mystical, ontological, and functional. Culture transcends the role of a mere tool for goal attainment, embodying a comprehensive long-term strategy for life. Human actions, transmitted across various life aspects, are seen as strategies to simplify life's complexities, eventually enshrined and given significance as "tradition." In this context, as further elaborated by Geertz (1983), religion is perceived as an aggregation of cultural values. These values coalesce into a collective of meanings, guiding individuals in interpreting their experiences, shaping behaviour, and defining their perception of the world. This process culminates in the formation of distinct cosmological views, deeply ingrained and perpetuated through generations.

The spectrum of traditional relationships within the Sundanese context is categorised into four principal structures: authentic Sundanese tradition, Islam-influenced Sundanese, original Jawa-Mataram, and Jawa Mataram-Islamic. Each category bears distinctive traits. Nonetheless, the foundational principle in both Sundanese and Javanese cosmologies is grounded in asceticism and a symbolic interpretation that culminates in the unification of the self, nature, and the divine. This unification is typically pursued through practices such as meditation or specific rituals like *Ruwatan*, executed voluntarily, and driven by personal spiritual intent rather than external compulsion. In both Sundanese and Javanese traditions, enlightenment or salvation is believed to be attained through a deep comprehension of ancestral values, a wisdom often encapsulated in profoundly meaningful songs passed down across generations (Beatty, 1999; Muhaimin, 2001).

The practitioners of the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) explicitly do not seek to proselytise or encourage conversion to their faith, adhering to the principle that ADS is not a religion of mission or propagation. Their respect for diverse beliefs is encapsulated in the philosophy of "*embung dijajah jeung moal ngajajah*," which translates to a reluctance to either dominate or be dominated by external cultural

or belief systems. The intersection of cultural and religious dimensions in West Java has fostered a milieu conducive to the flexible adaptation of an array of customs and faiths, as exemplified by the Djawa Sunda religion in Cigugur, Kuningan. The Sundanese community is characterised by a philosophical approach that navigates a middle path, maintaining an openness to new religious influences while simultaneously preserving their ancestral faiths.

This research is important because it highlights the ADS community's efforts to preserve traditional values amidst a process of acculturation, assimilation and syncretism with various cultural and religious influences. With the dynamics of globalisation and modernisation, many indigenous communities face significant challenges in maintaining their cultural heritage. In West Java, the ADS community is an interesting example to study as they have managed to maintain their cultural and religious identity despite strong external pressures. Therefore, this study aims to explore how ADS communities manage and preserve their beliefs and traditions in the context of rapid social change, as well as to understand the strategies they use to deal with such challenges.

In the context of this research, the urgency of this topic lies in the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of cultural preservation in communities under the pressure of social and cultural change. It is relevant to the study of anthropology, sociology, and religious studies as it provides insights into the ways in which indigenous communities maintain their cultural sustainability. Relevant references to support this research include the works of Koentjaraningrat (2000) on Indigenous peoples in Indonesia, Woodward (2004) on religion and culture in Java, as well as Beatty (1999) who examined cultural traditions in Indonesia.

This research is fundamentally dedicated to elucidating the historical evolution of the Djawa Sunda (ADS) religion from its origins to the present day, with a particular focus on the methods used in maintaining its beliefs amidst acculturation, assimilation, and syncretism with external cultural and religious influences. Specifically, this research delves into the exploration of Sundanese Cosmology within the framework of ADS teachings, reflecting their interpretation of cosmology passed down through generations. As such, this research aims to investigate in depth the existence, doctrines, and impact of external cultural and religious influences on ADS, with particular emphasis on the dynamics of the belief system and the formulation of a unique cosmology.

## 2. Methods

This research utilises qualitative methodology and ethnographic techniques to study the dynamics of the religion of Djawa Sunda (ADS) and Sundanese Cosmology, with a particular focus on the Cigugur community in Kuningan. The methodology is carefully crafted to explore, document and analyse the evolution and preservation of ADS and Sundanese cosmology amidst a changing socio-cultural landscape.

Data collection included structured interviews with three prominent religious leaders and five active members of indigenous communities involved in ADS. These interviews were crucial for gaining an in-depth understanding of the nuances of interpretation and practice associated with ADS, as well as for examining individual and collective viewpoints regarding ADS doctrines and traditions. The research team further immersed themselves in the community through participatory observation, actively engaging in various rituals and ceremonies related to ADS that have some distinctive and important rituals in maintaining and preserving traditional Sundanese values such as; Seren Taun, Ngabungbang, Ngaruwat, Mapag Sri, Kawalu Ceremony, Tingkeban Ceremony. This in-depth approach facilitated detailed documentation of the practices, rituals and interactions prevalent in the religious and social fabric of the community. In addition, the research also included an extensive review of documents, particularly those relating to Sundanese cosmology, which provided a critical understanding of the historical evolution and current interpretations.

Post-data collection, a thematic analysis was conducted, meticulously identifying and dissecting major themes, patterns, and core concepts inherent in ADS and Sundanese cosmology. This analytical process involved a comprehensive examination of data sourced from interviews and observational studies to unearth underlying connections and broader significances. The study further employed a

comparative analytical approach, juxtaposing its findings with those of preceding studies. This comparative dimension aimed to delineate parallels, distinctions, and developmental trajectories in the comprehension and implementation of ADS. This approach not only furnishes novel perspectives but also contextualises the findings within a broader scholarly discourse encompassing both historical and contemporary examinations of Sundanese religious and cultural practices.

### 3. Results

#### *The historical evolution and significance of the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS)*

The Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) represents a significant component of the *Sunda Wiwitan* teachings, a localised belief system prevalent within Indonesia. This system of belief, *Sunda Wiwitan*, finds its followers across various Indonesian regions, notably among indigenous communities in locations such as Cigugur in Kuningan, Cireundeu in Cimahi, the Sundanese in Garut, Kampung Naga in Tasikmalaya, Kampung Susuru in Ciamis, and the Kanekes area in Lebak Banten. As an integral aspect of Sundanese Culture, *Sunda Wiwitan* symbolises the cultural and spiritual heritage preserved and transmitted by the Sundanese people.

The status of *Sunda Wiwitan*, whether as a formal "Religion" or a specialised belief system of the Sundanese community, remains a subject of scholarly debate. Central to this discourse is the contemporary relevance of *Sunda Wiwitan* within modern Sundanese society and the extent to which its recognition is confined to communities like Baduy or Kanekes. Additionally, discussions focus on the alignment of *Sunda Wiwitan* values with those of the broader community of Believers in God Almighty, particularly in its divergence from the Abrahamic faiths. This ongoing debate also examines the efforts of Sundanese adherents to *Sunda Wiwitan* in preserving their cultural and personal identities amidst the evolving legal and historical landscapes of Indonesia, spanning from prehistoric epochs to present times (Indrawardana, 2012; Saputra, 2017).

The legitimacy of *Sunda Wiwitan* as the indigenous religion of the Sundanese is substantiated by archaeological findings from various sites in West Java and Banten, like Mount Padang in Cianjur and the Arca Domas Site in Kanekes. These artefacts, including Menhirs, Lingas, and Yonis, are indicative of religious practices centred around ancestral reverence and fertility symbolism traceable to prehistoric periods. Specifically, the Linga and Yoni epitomise the understanding of natural laws and the principle of duality or complementarity in life, corroborating the deep-rooted presence of *Sunda Wiwitan* in the annals of Sundanese history and culture (AS et al., 2020).

Exploring the spiritual and religious heritage of historic Sundanese societies is pivotal in unveiling facets of their cultural existence, encompassing their primordial belief systems. Amidst internal debate within the Sundanese community, there exists a dichotomy of views: some posit that ancient Sundanese kingdoms and their monarchs adhered to Hinduism, while others advocate for a pre-Hindu, original Sundanese religion or ancestral belief system. The Believers in God Almighty, often perceived as diverging from mainstream Abrahamic faiths, continue to face societal challenges, including constraints on practising traditional Sundanese rituals like *Seren Taun* (Ekadjati, 2006).

Nevertheless, the array of prehistoric relics, historical documentation, and ancient manuscripts collectively affirm the longstanding religious disposition of Sundanese society, underpinned by a foundational belief in a supreme deity. Terms like "*Hiang*," "*Hyang Tunggal*", and "*Batara Tunggal*" reflect the ingrained religious sentiments and practices among the Sundanese of bygone eras. The Parahiyangan narrative, penned by Prince Wangsa Kerta circa 1680 about the Kingdom of Saung Galah in Kuningan, for instance, vividly portrays the influential legacy of *Rahiyangtang Kuku*. Revered for his unwavering dedication to his ancestral teachings, termed "*Dangiang Kuning*", *Rahiyangtang Kuku*'s role in amalgamating diverse cultures and traditions within his realm is notably highlighted. His stature is such that even Rahyang Sanjaya, desiring dominion over Saung Galah, acknowledged and esteemed *Rahiyangtang Kuku*'s ancestral doctrines (R1, personal interview, 20/10/2022).

The Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) emerged as a derivative of the *Sunda Wiwitan* teachings. This religious community, often referred to as ADS, was initially labelled by external observers to describe

a group of adherents worshipping the Almighty God under the guidance of Ki Ayi Madrais. This nomenclature acknowledges the diversity of its followers, encompassing not only those of Sundanese ethnic origin but also Javanese adherents. Within this study, it is revealed that ADS stands for “*anjawat lan anjawab roh susun-susun kang den tunda*.” Here, “Djawa” is an abbreviation derived from “*anjawat lan anjawab*”, signifying the processes of filtering, accommodating, perfecting, and taking responsibility. The term “Sunda” originates from “*roh susun-susun kang den tunda*”. Extracting “*sun*” from “*susun*” and “*da*” from “*kang den tunda*”, the term Sunda encapsulates the essence of all living entities present in everything, birthed from the collective earth’s soul (*roh hurip tanah pakumpulan*).

The founder of ADS was Prince Sadewa Alibassa Kusuma Wijaya Ningrat, predominantly known as Madrais. A descendant of the Gebang Sultanate, Madrais was entrusted to Ki Sastrawadana in Cigugur around 1825 due to threats from the Dutch colonialists, and was raised as his son. Engaging in religious exploration from his adolescence, Madrais sought the true essence of faith, journeying to various spiritual centres and learning from various mentors, including a Cirebonese prince. Establishing a *paguron* in Cigugur’s Pandara hamlet in 1840, Madrais, known as Ki Ayi Madrais, imparted Islamic teachings while emphasising the significance of honouring and practising indigenous Jawa-Sunda customs and resisting foreign cultural appropriation. His teachings fostered a sense of national identity and cultural pride.

Madrais’s teachings underscored the importance of consciousness and national identity as expressions of divine faith. Uniquely, he incorporated insights from various religious traditions, advocating for a universal understanding of God. This theological approach promoted egalitarianism and compassion among his followers. His approach to teaching at his pesantren diverged from conventional Islamic practices, incorporating nationalistic elements and broadening the spiritual discourse. This humanistic and nationalistic emphasis, however, met resistance from the colonial Dutch government, leading to his exile to Boven Digoel between 1901-1908 on charges of apostasy and other alleged religious deviations.

In 1936, facing the imminent threat of an eruption from Mount Ciremai, Ki Ayi Madrais, alongside several of his adherents, performed rituals aligned with the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) to alleviate the volcanic activity. Their actions included the strategic creation of three substantial openings near the crater, a method to release air pressure and prevent an eruption. This approach showcased not only Madrais’s knowledge of physical phenomena but also his application of spiritual beliefs to natural events. Subsequently, Madrais founded a retreat in Curug Goong, a location where he reportedly attained spiritual enlightenment or “*wangsit*.”

Ki Ayi Madrais passed away in 1940 at 108 years of age. His burial took place at the family cemetery located at Puncak Bukit Pasir. The legacy of his teachings, which his son Prince Tedjabuana Alibassa inherited, notably emphasised humanistic elements over the divine. These teachings, appealing to followers of diverse faiths, were underpinned by the belief that all religions inherently advocate for goodness and humanity, transcending religious distinctions. Madrais asserted the concept of a singular, omnipotent God in all religions, and his teachings underscored nationalism and the development of human character, positing the necessity of shared understanding in humanity and nationalism, beyond mere concurrence in viewpoints.

Prince Madrais, originating from the Gebang palace and formally recognised as Sadewa Alibassa Koesoema Widjajaingrat, established ADS. His persona, marked by a profound sense of nationalism, particularly resonated during the period of Dutch colonial rule. Leveraging his spiritual and mystical knowledge for the benefit of the community, Madrais played a pivotal role in community formation. His tenure as a leader was primarily devoted to cultivating spiritual growth and promoting nationalistic fervour within ADS. Nonetheless, his spiritual endeavours were perceived as a menace by the Dutch authorities, culminating in his exile to Merauke in Boven Digul.

Prince Tedja Buana, Madrais’s progeny, faced considerable challenges from societal factions and ruling authorities, particularly during the Japanese occupation and the Old Order period. In 1964, under duress, Tedjabuana proclaimed the disbandment of ADS and converted to Catholicism. However, the resurgence of ADS occurred during Abdurrahman Wahid’s presidency, facilitated by the

efforts of Prince Djatikusuma, Madrais's grandson. Djatikusuma revitalised the former ADS community through the establishment of the Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang (PACKU) organisation in 1981.

Under the stewardship of Prince Djatikusuma, the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) witnessed continued evolution, focusing on the '*Pikukuh Tilu*' concept that integrated humanistic and spiritual dimensions. Known for his firm leadership, Prince Djatikusuma was instrumental in perpetuating Madrais's teachings. Following his tenure, Prince Gumirat Barna Alam, also known as Rama Anom, assumed the helm of ADS, continuing the dissemination of its teachings and values. The leadership trajectory of ADS has been marked by charismatic and influential figures, significantly impacting the community throughout its history.

Today, the ADS community in Cigugur is faced with various challenges in their efforts to maintain their traditional values. Modernisation and globalisation have had a significant impact on local culture, including religion and tradition. Social, economic and technological changes can threaten the sustainability of traditional practices and values upheld by the ADS community. Therefore, it is important to identify the concrete challenges faced by the ADS community in Cigugur today in maintaining their cultural heritage and traditional values. With a deeper understanding of the current situation and the challenges faced, this research can provide a more comprehensive insight into the role of ADS in maintaining Sundanese cultural identity amidst the changing dynamics of the times.

#### *The theological and cosmological concepts of the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS)*

The Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS), also known as the Belief and Devotion to the Almighty God, finds its roots in the indigenous Sundanese teachings of *Sunda Wiwitan*, which are encapsulated in the principle of *Pikukuh Tilu*. This principle highlights a profound awareness of human nature and national identity, coupled with a dedication to legitimate authority (*madep ka ratu raja*). Followers of ADS adhere to the belief in a supreme deity characterised as Omnipotent, Just, Merciful, and Wise, placing particular emphasis on the concept of humans as exemplary beings. The '*Sawab Gusti Sikang Sawiji-Wiji*' principle within ADS, translating to the omnipotence of the Almighty God, suggests that devout adherence to this principle allows for the divine illumination to manifest through the execution of human duties and responsibilities (Hakim, 2022; Trimulya, 2000).

ADS further imparts the notion of 'Jati Sunda', centring on belief and human virtues. This teaching encompasses elements such as *welas asih* (compassion), *tata krama* (behavioural norms), *undak-usuk* (ethical demeanour), *budi daya-daya budi* (creativity and linguistic decorum), and *wiwaha yuda na raga* (prudent and considerate attitude). The doctrine emphasises the significance of discerning the divine directive or duty inherent in every individual and nation's nature. Concerning the afterlife, ADS posits that an individual's destiny is determined by their conduct, behaviour, and actions during their lifetime. Negative actions may lead to reincarnation in a lower form or damnation, whereas positive actions facilitate ascent to the blissful realms of *Niskala* or *Jati Niskala*, and possibly achieving moksa, a state of soulful transcendence to paradise.

Distinct from engaging in religious proselytisation, ADS adopts a more contemplative stance when discussing its beliefs. The Kenekes community and ADS practitioners in Cigugur, Kuningan, follow separate *pikukuh* regulations, yet both groups uphold a belief in a solitary supreme entity, *Hyang Maha Tunggal* or *Esa*, also known as *Gusti Sikang Sawiji-Wiji*. In ADS, God is envisioned as the creator of the universe, intimately connected with creation, with the divine essence present in all existence. This principle draws parallels with Islamic views regarding the afterlife, where a person's post-mortem condition is determined by their worldly deeds.

Central to ADS teachings is the concept of *Pikukuh Tilu*, delineating three essential tenets integral to life. The term '*pikukuh*', stemming from '*kukuh*', signifies certainty or steadfastness, and '*tilu*' denotes the number three in Sundanese. This concept is grounded in the philosophical notion of *Tri Tangtu*, accentuating the harmony of life both vertically and horizontally, based on the philosophy that the three elements are intrinsically interwoven and interdependent (Miharja, Wahida, & Huriani, 2021; Trimulya, 2000).

Within the traditional Sundanese community, *Tri Tangtu* functions as a behavioural compass, incorporating three life aspects: 1) *Tri Tangtu dina raga or salira* (personal), 2) *Tri Tangtu di buana* (nature), and 3) *Tri Tangtu di nagara* (nation or society). Each aspect embodies specific subdivisions, roles, practices, and execution protocols. For instance, the *Tri Tangtu dina raga* concept is instrumental in guiding individuals towards profound self-understanding. It underscores the imperatives of morality, divinity, and communal coexistence (R2, personal interview, 28/10/2022).

*Pikukuh Tilu*, a foundational principle of the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS), incorporates the concept of *Tri Tangtu di Buana (Nagara)*. This notion encapsulates the laws governing individual and communal existence within a sovereign territory or state, creating a distinct system grounded in principles of goodness, truth, and beauty. Analogous to Montesquieu's *Trias Politica*, which delineates power into Judicial, Legislative, and Executive branches, this concept has been dynamically revised three times to meet evolving societal needs. Originally documented in Sundanese *pupuh* (traditional poetic forms), the *Pikukuh Tilu* manuscript has been translated into modern Sundanese and subsequently into Indonesian, encompassing three pivotal tenets:

- *Ngaji Badan*: This tenet involves discerning and assimilating the collective life force of the earth, upholding five divinely granted human qualities: compassion, behavioural propriety, ethical conduct, linguistic creativity and respectfulness, and a judicious and considerate disposition.
- *Iman Kana Tanah*: This principle is bifurcated into *tanah amparan* (the earth) and *tanah adegan* (the physical human form). It propagates the responsibility to conserve and protect the earth while aiding other divine creations in their return to the creator.
- *Ngiblat ka Ratu Raja*: This aspect symbolises the unique form and essence of each nation and culture, advocating for alignment with or obedience to principles that orchestrate and harmonise the unstructured and imbalanced elements of existence (R1, personal interview, 20/10/2022).

*Pikukuh Tilu* emphasises recognising human existence as an impeccable creation of God, entrusted with maintaining ecological equilibrium. This doctrine impacts the practice of worship and meditation, facilitating a journey towards *si sakarupa sorangan* or self-dialogue. Fire, venerated as a vital symbol and ritualistic element, epitomises purification. Prayer, both individual and collective, forms an essential aspect of religious observance, grounded in the principles of *Pikukuh Tilu*.

*Ngaji Badan* delves into profound self-awareness and interconnectedness with the cosmos. It acknowledges human coexistence with various universal entities, mediated through sensory interactions and shaped by their intrinsic characteristics. *Ngaji Badan* recognises humans as embodying '*tri daya eka karsa*' (three levels of existence): vegetative (passive), animalistic (instinctual), and humanistic (rational, emotional, and moral). Humans are perceived as the culmination of vegetative and animalistic aspects, charged with preserving their humanity against detrimental environmental influences (R1, personal interview, 20/10/2022).

Human beings are tasked with identifying and filtering environmental influences that shape behaviour and thought, both positively and negatively. This principle also highlights the importance of sustaining the integrity of life by adhering to human traits and eschewing negative influences that can degrade human values. This teaching motivates ADS followers to recognise that physical existence is ephemeral and should not dominate life's focus. Instead, rationality and emotion should guide the control of desires and impulses toward positive conduct. Thus, *Ngaji Badan* represents a profound journey of self-comprehension and realisation within the universe's multifaceted tapestry (R2, personal interview, 28/10/2022).

This doctrine encourages individuals to lead a life of balance and harmony with nature and other beings, recognising and valuing the interconnectedness and roles of all entities within the cosmos. It instructs humans to appreciate their existence and role in the universe, maintaining a balance between physical and spiritual needs, embodying the cosmological perspective of the Sundanese community (Trimulya, 2000; Waluyajati, 2017).

The Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) encapsulates its cosmological beliefs and ethical guidelines within the *Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian* scripture, a pivotal text that provides a comprehensive ethical framework for its followers. This scripture delineates a clear distinction between virtuous and



reprehensible behaviours, metaphorically comparing noble conduct to precious elements like gold and gems, emblematic of honesty, inner peace, luminosity in life, and a cheerful disposition. In stark contrast, traits like envy and malice, seen as roots of misery, are vehemently denounced. The scripture further emphasises the necessity of hierarchical respect in societal structures, extending from familial relationships to the reverence of deities and Hyang. It posits that human virtue is a reflection of one's actions, where choices between benevolence and malevolence lead to corresponding consequences of joy or suffering (Mutaqin, 2014).

ADS's teachings further incorporate the concept of *dasa prebakti*, entailing ten tiers of devotion within the societal hierarchy, which serve as a framework for maintaining equilibrium and fulfilling responsibilities in a systematically tiered society. Traditional Sundanese societal norms place significant emphasis on nurturing mutual love, teaching, and caregiving, encapsulated in the principles of *silih asih*, *silih asah*, and *silih asuh*, cultivating an environment of harmony and familial bond. These principles underscore the value of integrity, respect for others' belongings, and the cultivation of gentle speech, which are integral to maintaining societal decorum (Mutaqin, 2014; Waluyajati, 2017).

The ethical dimensions of ADS transcend mere social interactions, extending to a broader perspective of the universe. The religion advocates for a wise and sustainable engagement with nature, cautioning against its overexploitation. Adherents are guided to lead lives marked by simplicity and sufficiency, eschewing superfluous luxury, reflecting the principle of "*siger tengah*" or balance. This principle underscores the importance of sustaining harmony with the natural world and responsibly utilising resources.

In the ADS worldview, humans are perceived as integral, yet modest components of the universe, necessitating a conscious awareness of their role within it. Attributes such as civility, honesty, courage, and fairness are heavily emphasised, with the pursuit of a virtuous life being paramount. Noble character traits, including compassion, ethical conduct, and self-discipline, are disseminated through communal gatherings and ceremonial teachings. The role of educators is revered in Sundanese society, as wisdom and knowledge are considered invaluable assets. Openness to constructive criticism and advice is encouraged as a means of personal development and learning.

Conclusively, the ADS doctrine offers an all-encompassing perspective on life, encompassing social ethics, interaction with nature, and self-improvement. These teachings advocate for a balanced existence, fostering harmonious relationships among humans and with nature, while emphasising spiritual and moral development as the cornerstones of attaining holistic well-being and contentment in life.

ADS, as a local belief system rooted in Sundanese culture, plays an important role in maintaining traditional cultural identity and heritage. In an era of accelerated urbanisation and globalisation, ADS communities are faced with the pressure to adapt to the ever-changing social and environmental changes. However, the existence of ADS as custodians of local and traditional values is becoming increasingly relevant in this context. ADS doctrines, such as the concept of man's relationship with the universe, religious diversity, and cooperation between citizens, still have strong value in building a harmonious and sustainable community. Principles such as *gotong royong*, interfaith tolerance, and respect for nature are important cornerstones in maintaining a balance between local traditions and globalisation.

Despite changes in people's mindsets and lifestyles, many ADS practices and values are still upheld by communities, showing that these teachings still have strong appeal and relevance. In the context of preserving local and traditional values, ADS can act as a pillar that maintains Sundanese cultural identity amidst the ever-evolving currents of modernisation. Thus, an in-depth discussion on the adherence and relevance of ADS teachings today in the context of preserving local and traditional values will provide valuable insights into the role of this religion in maintaining the sustainability of Sundanese culture amidst the challenges of increasing urbanisation and modernisation.

#### **4. The Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) and the preservation of traditions in the Cigugur community, Kuningan**

The Cigugur community in Kuningan District, primarily adherents of the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS), showcases a remarkable instance of religious pluralism. The ADS community in Cigugur, Kuningan, is an interesting example of religious diversity in one area. In 2023, the Cigugur sub-district had a population of 45,435 people. Based on data from BPS Kuningan Regency, the majority of the population embraces Islam, as many as 40,582 people. In addition, there are 312 Protestant Christians, 4,231 Catholics, 2 Hindus, 8 Buddhists, and 293 other people who follow other religions or certain beliefs. This kind of religious diversity in one community can occur due to various factors. One of the main factors is the history of migration, where people from different religious and cultural backgrounds moved to this region and settled. Close social interaction and interfaith marriages also play an important role in creating this diversity. In addition, the local values of tolerance and pluralism help maintain interfaith harmony in Cigugur. With mutual respect and strong cooperation, the community in Cigugur manages to coexist peacefully despite significant differences in beliefs.

This diversity includes Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, traditional belief systems, and those who revere the Almighty God. Notably harmonious, the community sees family units composed of members from various religious backgrounds cohabiting and practising their respective faiths in peaceful coexistence. This societal fabric is characterised by robust tolerance and mutual support, embedding the ethos of collective solidarity, or '*gotong royong*', transcending religious affiliations and fostering an environment of customary harmony and tolerance.

In this diverse setting, the foundational role of the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) is crucial. Prominent figures like Madrais have underscored the importance of harmonising diverse religious beliefs while preserving indigenous culture. ADS, grounded in the stewardship of nature and its denizens, conceptualises God as a formless presence permeating all creation, particularly emphasising the human connection. This anthropocentric perspective of ADS highlights the intricate relationship between humans and the cosmos, positioning humans as the epitome of God's creation. In Cigugur, religious diversity does not hinder social cohesion or communal engagement. Celebrations like Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, or *Seren Taun*—a traditional ADS festivity—see inclusive participation, transcending religious lines. The involvement of various religious figures in these events is a testament to the community's resilience in maintaining unity amidst diversity. For instance, the adaptation of Protestant worship schedules to accommodate *Seren Taun* exemplifies the minority's integration within a predominantly cultural milieu (Komarudin, 2017; Qodim, 2017).

The *Seren Taun* tradition is one of the most important traditions in the context of preserving traditional traditions and beliefs in the ADS community in Cigugur. *Seren Taun* is a communal festival that brings together the entire community, regardless of religious or ethnic boundaries, to celebrate the fertility of the land and the harvest, symbolising gratitude to God. The role played by the *Seren Taun* tradition in maintaining traditional traditions and beliefs is significant. (1) the strengthening of cultural identity, *Seren Taun* symbolises togetherness and solidarity among the community in maintaining their cultural identity and traditional beliefs. Through active participation in this festival, the people of Cigugur strengthen their sense of community and pride in their cultural heritage. (2) Maintenance of traditional values, *Seren Taun* is not just a festival event, but also a platform to maintain and pass on traditional values passed down from generation to generation. Through the rituals and ceremonies performed in *Seren Taun*, values such as gratitude, mutual cooperation, and respect for the universe are maintained and passed on. (3) Building community solidarity, *Seren Taun* traditions play an important role in strengthening solidarity and cooperation between people in the community. Through the involvement of all levels of society in the preparation and execution of the festival, harmonious and mutually supportive social relations can be well established. (4) Respect for nature, as a festival that celebrates the fertility of the land and the harvest, *Seren Taun* also emphasises the importance of respecting nature and the environment. Through the rituals and prayers performed during the festival, the people of Cigugur demonstrate an awareness of their dependence on nature and the need to maintain a balanced ecosystem.

Cigugur's religious multiplicity is perceived as an integral element of community life, underpinned by the belief in a singular, universal God. This ethos of tolerance and collaborative spirit

amidst religious heterogeneity engenders a communal peace and camaraderie anchored in familial and local cultural values. This peaceful coexistence is the outcome of a deliberate social adaptation process, where conformity is esteemed, and behaviours that might lead to discord are eschewed, thus perpetuating a harmonious social order.

The comprehension of the Cigugur community, especially those practising the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS), necessitates an understanding of the dynamics of internalisation and institutionalisation. The assimilation of specific values by individuals within the community leads to the integration of behaviorally motivated actions that are consistent with societal role expectations. This phenomenon suggests that the internalised values and their manifestations become institutionalised within the social framework. Within this societal structure, four principal institutional arrangements are deemed essential: kinship systems, structures of instrumental achievement and stratification, territoriality and the exercise of power, and the integration of religion with value systems (Koentjaraningrat, 2000; Peursen, 1988).

In a social system, interactions among individual actors, motivated by their own goals and functioning within a culturally structured physical and symbolic environment, establish social order. This order is achieved through social control mechanisms, an ability to acknowledge and tolerate differences and minor deviations, and by offering diverse role opportunities that enable individuals to express themselves without jeopardising the system's coherence. Socialisation and social control are pivotal in maintaining the equilibrium of the social system, facilitating the integration of individuality, and managing more pronounced deviations. A society, viewed as a social system, necessitates the ability to recalibrate extreme forms of deviation to sustain its continuity and stability (Peursen, 1988).

Social interactions, which occur when individuals or groups engage, cooperate, compete, or confront each other, are fundamental to human existence. These interactions serve as a conduit for conveying intentions, goals, and desires, requiring reciprocal actions for realisation. In the Cigugur community's context, these interactions exemplify their aspiration to coexist harmoniously, respect differences, and preserve their cultural and societal values within an overarching social framework.

Social interaction forms the bedrock of all social existence and is crucial in comprehending the dynamics of the Cigugur community, including the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) adherents. Without such interactions, social engagement within a group would be unattainable. These involve cooperation, communication, and collaborative efforts towards shared objectives, encompassing competition, conflict, and more. In Cigugur, social interactions frequently occur among individuals with similar professions or through communal '*gotong royong*' activities. Social initiatives like community service, environmental clean-up campaigns, and construction of religious facilities often involve the entire community, showcasing strong interrelations among residents, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds and faiths. Wedding and funeral ceremonies are also significant for fostering social interaction in the community. Religious leaders and village heads are often viewed as charismatic figures, serving as role models and problem-solvers within the community.

The Cigugur community, including the followers of ADS, demonstrates an openness to change, including embracing advancements in science and technology, and exhibits a forward-thinking approach. They maintain a strong commitment to tolerance and harmonious relations among residents, ensuring that religious and social activities are conducted in a peaceful coexistence. The worship facilities in Cigugur are comprehensive, mirroring the peaceful cohabitation of various religious groups. The followers of ADS deeply value their cultural heritage and ancestral traditions. This value system is manifest in traditional ceremonies like *Seren Taun*, where the entire Cigugur community, regardless of religious or ethnic background, participates. The *Seren Taun* ceremony, transcending the confines of ADS adherence, serves as a platform for communal gratitude towards the Almighty God (Tramontane, 2017; Waluyajati, 2017)

In the culturally diverse and religiously rich community of Cigugur, Kuningan, the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) significantly contributes to the preservation and nurturing of traditional practices. The community's harmonious coexistence and remarkable tolerance exemplify the core tenets of ADS, which prioritise respect for the universe and the acknowledgement of God as an omnipresent, formless

entity within all creations. ADS adopts an anthropocentric perspective, emphasising the profound connection between humans and the cosmos and highlighting the responsibility entrusted to humans as the epitome of divine creation.

The evident openness and interfaith collaboration in Cigugur reflect the successful internalisation of ADS values. Tolerance and cooperation form the essential pillars for maintaining social equilibrium and community coherence. As theorised by Talcott Parsons, the institutionalisation of these values manifests in various social structures, including kinship systems, stratification based on instrumental achievements, and the integration of religious values. The social interactions within Cigugur, marked by cooperative endeavours, effective communication, and shared activities, illustrate the seamless integration of ADS's theological and cosmological principles into the broader social fabric.

The ADS doctrine of "*silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh*" – signifying mutual love, teaching, and caregiving – is profoundly actualised in Cigugur's daily life. Communal ceremonies, such as the *Seren Taun* festival, which unites the entire community beyond religious or ethnic boundaries, serve as concrete examples of the pervasive influence and integration of ADS values into social practices. This phenomenon not only demonstrates the adaptability and evolution of local traditions but also their steadfast adherence to foundational values and beliefs (Indrawardana, 2012).

The theological and cosmological viewpoints of ADS, conceptualising God as an intrinsic part of the universe, significantly shape the Cigugur community's attitude towards nature and interpersonal relationships. Their respect for diverse religious, cultural, and traditional practices, coupled with a commitment to environmental conservation, reflects the practical application of their belief system. In their day-to-day existence, the people of Cigugur showcase how reverence for nature and humanity, aligned with ADS teachings, fosters a more prosperous and harmonious communal life.

The Djawa Sunda Religion in Cigugur transcends being merely a belief system; it embodies a lifestyle that advocates for harmony, tolerance, and unity. Through both internalisation and institutionalisation, the Cigugur community's embodiment of ADS values highlights how diversity can be a unifying and strengthening factor. This leads to the creation of a society that not only respects but also collaborates across various spectrums of diversity. Such dynamics present a real-life exemplar of how local traditions and beliefs can play a pivotal role in forging a peaceful, tolerant society and maintaining social and religious balance and harmony.

## 5. Conclusion

This research has revealed some surprising findings regarding the role of the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS) in the Cigugur community, particularly in the context of modernisation and globalisation. It turns out that, despite external pressures, ADS continues to be a crucial force in maintaining cultural identity and religious practices. The community rituals, such as *Seren Taun*, not only serve to preserve cultural traditions but also act as a unifying factor that strengthens social cohesion and fosters religious pluralism. Contrary to the assumption that indigenous religious systems like ADS might diminish in relevance with the rise of global influences, this study highlights how ADS has successfully adapted and even strengthened its cultural significance.

The main contribution of this research lies in its comprehensive analysis of ADS within the framework of Sundanese cosmology. By employing an ethnographic approach, this study has provided a deeper understanding of how indigenous belief systems can function as cultural preservation strategies amidst social and cultural changes. The conceptual framework of *Pikukuh Tilu*, emphasising the harmony between humans, nature, and society, offers a valuable perspective on maintaining cultural identity in an ever-globalising world.

However, this study has its limitations. The scope of the research was limited to the Cigugur community, meaning that the findings may not be fully representative of other regions where ADS is practised. Additionally, the data collection was primarily focused on interviews and observations, which could have been complemented by a broader quantitative survey to capture a wider range of perspectives. Future research could explore similar dynamics in other regions of West Java and compare how different indigenous belief systems navigate cultural preservation in the face of

modernisation. Expanding the research to a comparative analysis with other indigenous communities in Indonesia could further enrich the understanding of how cultural and religious systems adapt to external pressures.

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