



Local Wisdom in the Customary Silent Burial System of the Baduy Community and Its Impact on Forest Conservation

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Abstract

Background. The Baduy indigenous community is one of the traditional communities in Indonesia that continues to preserve various forms of local wisdom in everyday life, including a customary burial system known as *silent burial*. This burial system is implemented based on customary law (*pikukuh*), which emphasizes simplicity, respect for nature, and a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment.

Aim: This study aims to analyze the local wisdom embedded in the Baduy customary burial system and examine its contribution to forest conservation.

Methods. This study employed a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and a literature review.

Results. The findings reveal that the silent burial practice is carried out without constructing permanent graves, using biodegradable natural materials and *hanjuang* plants as natural vegetation markers. This burial system facilitates natural land regeneration, minimizes landscape alteration, and supports the sustainability of forest ecosystems. Beyond its spiritual and social significance, the Baduy customary burial system also serves as a culture-based conservation mechanism that maintains long-term ecological balance.

Conclusion. The findings demonstrate that the local wisdom of the Baduy indigenous community represents an effective model of environmental conservation integrated with traditional cultural values and offers valuable insights for the development of sustainable conservation practices.

Keywords: Baduy, Baduy tribal cemeteries, local wisdom, forest conservation



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with very rich cultural diversity, as a result of the existence of various ethnic groups spread throughout the archipelago. This is in accordance with data from the 2025 Central Statistics Agency, which confirms that Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest cultural plurality in the world, covering more than 1,300 ethnic groups and hundreds of regional languages spread throughout the archipelago. Cultural

diversity is a condition that shows the variation and richness of cultural elements in people's lives, which are reflected through differences in value systems, norms, language, customs, and various forms of artistic expression.

According to Koentjaraningrat (2009), culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and results of human work in social life which are made human property by learning. Meanwhile, according to Geertz (1973) in the journal *Cultural Studies, Language and Literature* Volume 3, culture is a symbol that contains meaning and is used as a guide to life for community groups. Cultural diversity is not only reflected in language, arts and customs, but also in traditional knowledge systems that have developed and been passed down from generation to generation by indigenous peoples.

This knowledge system is known as local wisdom. According to Yudie Aprianto (2025), local wisdom is various values created, developed, and maintained by the community that serve as guidelines for the community in living their daily lives and maintaining the relationship between humans and the surrounding environment. Local wisdom has an important role in maintaining ecosystem balance and is a form of sustainable natural resource processing.

One of the traditional communities in Indonesia that strongly maintains local wisdom values is the Baduy community in Kanekes village, Lebak district, Banten province. Baduy people are known for their simple lifestyle and for upholding traditional rules called *kembanguh*. These rules regulate various aspects of community life, from farming procedures and the use of natural resources to the implementation of various traditional ceremonies. The main principle held by the Baduy community is to maintain a balance between humans and nature and avoid all forms of exploitation that can damage the environment. These values have been passed down from generation to generation and have become an inseparable part of the cultural identity of the Baduy people.

The close relationship between the Baduy community and the natural environment is reflected in their various life activities, including the implementation of the traditional burial system. For the Baduy people, death is part of the cycle of life that must be accepted naturally and carried out in accordance with the customary provisions passed down from their ancestors. The funeral process is carried out simply by prioritizing the principle of harmony with nature. There is no permanent construction of graves or use of excessive materials that can change environmental conditions. This simplicity is a form of respect for nature as well as compliance with applicable traditional values.

The traditional burial system of the Baduy community not only has spiritual and social meaning, but also contains ecological values that contribute to environmental preservation. The limited use of natural resources and the absence of exploitative development practices make the burial system in line with national conservation principles based on Law no. 5 of 1990 concerning the protection of life support systems, the diversity of plant, animal, and ecosystem species, as well as the sustainable use of biological natural resources and their ecosystems.

Forest conservation is an effort to preserve ecosystems and the continuity of environmental functions for present and future generations. According to Pumadi (2020), the goal of conservation is to preserve natural resources to support efforts to improve human welfare and preserve the capabilities and use of natural resources in a harmonious and balanced manner. Forests are a medium for reciprocal relations between humans and other living creatures (Muttaqin, 2014). Forests play an important role as a life support system because they provide natural resources, regulate water, sequester carbon, and serve as habitats for various types of flora and fauna.

Studies on the relationship between the Baduy community's traditional burial system and forest conservation are still relatively limited compared to studies on the agricultural system or social structure of the Baduy community. In fact, the Baduy community's traditional burial system is a form of cultural expression that reflects the community's view of the relationship between humans and nature. By understanding the values contained in this traditional burial system, it can show how local wisdom plays a role in shaping environmental conservation. This research can also contribute to the development of culture-based conservation concepts, which are increasingly relevant in facing various environmental challenges in the modern era.

Based on this description, this research aims to analyze the local wisdom contained in the Baduy community's traditional burial system and examine its impact on forest conservation. It is hoped that this research can provide an understanding of the importance of local cultural values in supporting environmental conservation and become a reference in efforts to manage sustainable natural resources through a local wisdom-based approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Baduy Community Funeral Traditions

The Baduy people are a community or indigenous people who have long lived in a way of life that has continued for a long time. They occupy customary land which is administratively within the Kanekes Village area, Leuwi Damar District, Lebak Regency, Banten (Permana, 2006). The area of Kanekes Village is around 5,101.85 hectares. This village area is hilly and becomes steeper toward the south. The highest place is the peak of the Kendeng Mountains at an altitude of 1,200 meters above sea level. There are several small rivers that flow in the Kanekes area, which then merge into the Ciujung River and Cidurian River. The Kanekes Village area consists of forests, fields, bushes, and villages. This village is bordered by Cibengkung Village and Maragati Village to the north; Bojongmanik District and Malingping District to the west; Malingping District and Bayah District in the south; as well as the Bayah District and Muncang District to the east (Ekadjati, 2005).

As a community that still firmly carries out traditions that have been going on for a long time, the life of the Baduy people attracts the interest of various groups in conducting tourist trips and scientific research. Various research and scientific studies have been carried out. Attention and scientific study of the Baduy people began towards the middle of the 19th century. All studies in the early to late half of the 20th century were carried out by foreign researchers, for example Spanoghe, W.R. van Hoevel, C.L. Blume, D. Koorders, J.J. Meinsma, L. Von Ende, J.J. Meijer, T. Posewitz, A. De Quant, Jul Jacobs, A.A. Pennings, C.M. Pleyte, B. van Tricht, N.J.C. Geise, and L. Berthe. Meanwhile, writing and studies by Indonesian researchers in the form of articles, books, research reports, essays, theses, and dissertations began in the 1970s, for example, Djauhari Sumintardja, Ardi Tirtariandi, Didi Suryadi, Judistira Garna, Nudasar Hamis, and Rudy Badil. Writings in the form of theses and dissertations began to appear in the 1980s. Works in the form of theses, for example by Tasdik Margantara, Elly Kartika Kashmir, Iswara W.R. Rayi, Bayu R. Raharjo, R. Ukke Rukmini, and Aki Muryagunawan. Meanwhile, the thesis work was by Srihartiningsih Purnomohadi, while the dissertation was by Judistira Garna (Permana, 2006). Meanwhile, a research team from the Bandung Archaeological Center conducted research in several Baduy settlements in 2007 and 2008. Research in 2007 examined the traditional settlements of the Baduy community as a model for understanding megalithic community settlement patterns (Purwatisari, 1998). Meanwhile, research in 2008 concerned the spatial distribution patterns of the Baduy community (Purwitasari, 2008).

One interesting aspect of Baduy life is the cemetery for burying the dead. The problem that arises regarding Baduy cemeteries is their location and variations in location within their settlements. This is based on the possibility that there are different or varied arrangements for the placement of graves in the Baduy region, which consists of villages. Another interesting thing is the possible connection between the location of the grave and the view of life or religion held by the Baduy people (Boedi, 2019).

Baduy people embrace the Sundanese Wiwitan religion. In this religion, there is a God called Sang Hiyang Tunggal. According to the teachings of the Sundanese Wiwitan religion, the human soul or spirit descends into the world from the Hiyang Mandala. When its task in the world is finished, it is to Mandala Hiyang that the human soul must return (Djatisunda, 2004). The center of Baduy religious activities is Sasaka Domas. Here there are remains of the megalithic tradition. The Baduy religious center complex is located in the southernmost area of the Baduy residential area (Djoewisno, 1987).

Death is a universal event in the human life cycle. In Baduy tradition, this event is called *kaparupuhan* or loss. The loss in question is the loss of any physical connection between the deceased and his family, relatives, and social environment, as well as between his body and his spirit (Permana, 2006).

Baduy people who die are buried in a burial area in each village. According to information from Sarpin and Deputy Jaro Cibeo, before and after the body was buried, there were certain ceremonies which lasted until the seventh day. The funeral and associated rituals are led by a *panghulu*. If someone dies, the body is then washed. After bathing, it is then wrapped in a piece of *boeh*. *Boeh* is a white shroud. The top of the head, chest, waist, and legs are tied with *boeh* cloth. The ears, nose, mouth, anus, and genitals are covered with cotton. The body was carried to the grave by carrying it using a corpse sling made of bamboo. This tool is called a *market*. This carrying consists of two bamboo poles for the shoulders and a bamboo *pelupah* in the middle as a place to place the body. After that, the grave is buried in an east-west orientation; the head is placed to the west, tilted to the right or south so that the body's face faces south. Then covered with soil. The ceremony continues with giving *salawat* in the form of coins or metal on the surface of the grave. Furthermore, the grave surface is given a *dalika*. *Dalika* is in the form of bamboo arranged in a rectangular shape, resembling a *jirat* in Islamic religious tradition. With the *dalika*, the ground surface of the grave is higher than the surrounding ground level. At the head there is a plant, usually

a hanjuang plant. As long as the funeral ceremony continues until it is finished, the panghulu observes fasting or does not eat or drink (Boedi, 2019).

Local Wisdom

Local wisdom is a characteristic of society in an area that must be maintained as a constructive identity as well as a filter for various destructive aspects of foreign culture (Jumriani, P, & Abbas, 2021). Local wisdom has an important role as an antidote to the negative impacts of globalization. In facing global challenges that often bring foreign cultural influences incompatible with local values, local wisdom functions as a protective mechanism that can mitigate these negative impacts. Thus, local wisdom not only plays a role in maintaining traditions, but also in strengthening the nation's cultural resilience in facing the changing times (Ishami et al, 2025)

Local wisdom is actually part of ethics and morality that helps humans to answer moral questions about what to do and how to act, especially in the field of environmental and natural resource management. According to Efilina and Gabor in Gunawan (2026), each traditional group upholds unique cultural values, customary legal systems, and social practices. The rules that have been made by indigenous communities usually have religious and ethical values so that all community behavior is limited by applicable norms. Local wisdom does not stop at ethics, but reaches norms of action and behavior, so that local wisdom can become a belief that guides humans in behaving and acting, both in the context of daily life and in determining further human civilization. The reach of indigenous knowledge systems goes far beyond environmental conservation, but they also include types of knowledge about traditional technology, agriculture, climate, midwifery, ethnobotany, traditional ecological knowledge, traditional medicine, celestial navigation, ethnoastronomy, and others (Gunawan, 2026).

In several regions in Indonesia, regulations regarding forest management are also implemented by local wisdom culture (Local Wisdom). Utilizing traditional beliefs as a sustainable management approach to utilize forests by paying attention to their sustainability in the present and future so that it is possible to have a sustainable cycle for the next generation (Gunawan, 2026).

In practice, we often encounter local wisdom in regions in Indonesia. Of course, each region is different in terms of beliefs, rules, and customs that must be obeyed. One of the strong and distinctive local wisdoms we can find in the Baduy tribal community is that it is

very dependent on forests and natural resources, but its management is not exploitative, which makes the economic center of the Baduy community also dependent on available natural resources such as fields, cultivation of secondary crops, horticultural rice, and annual crops (Gunawan, 2026).

Forest Conservation

Forests are a natural resource, a gift from God, for which we must be grateful and preserve them. Forests in Indonesia provide various benefits to life, both directly and indirectly. Direct benefits include food and housing, which can be used for household furniture. Indirect benefits include foreign exchange earnings, helping maintain water and soil balance, and benefiting the tourism sector (Nabilla et al., 2017). This is also crucial for the development of conservation areas, which must consider local socio-cultural conditions (Rahman, Pratiwi, & Sa'idah, 2020).

Efforts to preserve forest areas as conservation areas are protected and preserved by both the community and the government. In this regard, it is necessary to educate the public about the importance of preserving forests to prevent them from misusing them carelessly. The government should also establish regulations on forest conservation and provide opportunities for the community to take initiative and play an active role. This allows for positive interactions that can foster a sense of ownership and protect forest conservation areas (Rahman, Pratiwi, & Sa'idah, 2020).

The presence of community cultural elements in preserving and protecting forests ensures the preservation of the resources within them. These cultural elements are inseparable from customs passed down through generations in a region (Rahman, Pratiwi, & Sa'idah, 2020).

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with purely ethnographic methods to gain a deeper understanding of the silent burial system (*kaparupuhan*) of the Baduy indigenous community in Kanekes Village, Leuwidamar, Lebak, Banten. The ethnographic approach was chosen because it allows for unraveling the value systems, customary law (*pikukuh*), and ecological behaviors of the local community, which are inseparable from their living space (Saringendyati, 2020). The researchers focused their observations on the

manifestations of local wisdom in the treatment of the dead and the implications of burial spaces for the sustainability of the conservation forest zone or leuweung tutupan.

Primary data were collected through passive participant observation and in-depth interviews. Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected key informants, including traditional leaders such as the Panghulu (traditional leader) responsible for the care of the deceased, several traditional leaders (Jaro), and representatives of the Inner Baduy (Tangtu) and Outer Baduy (Panamping) communities. The interviews focused on exploring the philosophy of death, burial procedures, the use of decorative vegetation markers, and the disappearance of the physical existence of graves after a certain time period.

Secondary data was obtained through a literature review of scientific journals, anthropological research reports, and local regulations related to the management of Banten's customary areas. Data analysis was conducted interactively following the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. To ensure data validity, the researchers applied source triangulation by comparing information from Inner Baduy, Outer Baduy, and village officials, as well as method triangulation, which cross-referenced field observations with interview information.

DISCUSSION

Death System and Kaparupuhan Traditions

For the Baduy indigenous people, death is known as kaparupuhan. When a death occurs, all economic and agricultural activities around the mourning village cluster are temporarily halted as a form of respect and collective condolences. Funeral arrangements are led by a traditional Panghulu (head of the community). If the deceased is a man, the body is handled by the penghulu jalu, and if the deceased is a woman, the body is handled by the penghulu bikang.

The body is bathed using a banana tree trunk as a platform next to the house, then rubbed with natural betel leaves without modern chemicals, reflecting the zero-chemical waste principle that maintains the sanctity of the land (Hasanah, 2012). The shroud used must be made from cotton thread spun and woven independently by the indigenous community, known as kain boly.

The burial procession takes place as soon as possible in the nearest forest or buffer field not far from the village boundary (to the north). The depth of the grave is adjusted to

the chest height of an adult human, dug manually using traditional tools in the form of sharpened bamboo (tihan^g awi), without using modern iron hoes to maintain the soil structure so that it is not damaged.

Silent Burial Mechanism and Natural Markers

The main uniqueness of the Baduy burial system lies in the absence of permanent public burial clusters or centralized graves. Bodies are buried in open areas within secondary forest or on the edges of fields. The body is placed at an angle, facing south, with the face facing west. Before the grave is backfilled with the original soil, the top of the body is protected by a bamboo structure arranged at an angle, forming a triangular structure supporting the soil's weight.

This silent burial concept represents a perfect biogeochemical cycle of energy flow. Bodies buried without a cement barrier decompose rapidly by soil microorganisms, returning essential nutrients directly to the forest ecosystem, which in turn nourishes the vegetation above (Etnis.id, 2021).

After the land is leveled back to the original contours of the earth's surface, traditional leaders do not permit the construction of stone or cement headstones, wooden plaques with names, or boundary fences. Instead, the community plants red hanjuang trees at the head and foot of the grave. These red hanjuang trees serve as natural temporal boundaries and bioecological indicators that the land has recently been used. The visual and functional characteristics of this silent cemetery are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Visual and functional characteristics of the cemetery

Burial Components	Traditional Practices of The Baduy Community	Ecological & Conservation Impact
Physical Structure of Graves	No gravestones, concrete headstones, or cement barriers. The land is leveled back to its original state. This prevents conversion of forest land; the soil remains permeable and optimally absorbs water.	Contains moral and religious messages
Digging & Construction Tools	Sharpened bamboo spears; the burial pit covers are made of slanted bamboo. Biodegradable organic materials that reintegrate into the soil ecosystem in the short term.	Maintains the local cultural identity of Banyumas
Grave Markers	Planting red hanjuang trees at the head and feet. This increases the density of local vegetation and maintains the stability of the soil surface structure against erosion.	Contains elements of da'wah and reminds us of God
Land Cycle (Seven Days)	After seven days, the ritual is completed, the grave is abandoned, neglected, and allowed to blend with the forest/fields. The land undergoes natural regeneration (primary/secondary succession) and can be replanted without damaging the forest's function.	Requires appropriate cultural interpretation

Source: Researcher (2026)

Integration of Traditional Pikukuh and Forest Conservation

The silent burial system of the Baduy people is a concrete manifestation of their highest customary law, pikukuh, which states: "Loba teuing ulah potong, pondok teuing ulah disambung, lohor teuing ulah dipapas" (long should not be cut, short should not be joined, high should not be shortened). This customary doctrine mandates that humans accept natural conditions unconditionally, without excessive exploitation or structural modification. In the burial context, the prohibition on the construction of permanent gravestones and the hardening of cement prevents secondary forest fragmentation and the accumulation of non-biodegradable anthropogenic materials in the Kanekes protected area (Purwitasari, 2000).

Spatially, the absence of a large dedicated burial ground means that the spatial layout of Kanekes Village remains dominated by forest cover (leuweung tutupan and leuweung titipan). In the modern era, conventional burial areas in urban areas often trigger land crises and deforestation because the need for burial space is linearly correlated with mortality rates. In contrast, the Baduy burial system employs a dynamic-cyclical spatial concept, where burial spaces revert to forest or field space within a matter of months, minimizing the community's ecological footprint on the surrounding environment.

Long-Term Ecological Impact on Forest Vegetation

Planting red hanjuang as a temporary grave marker provides a significant botanical contribution. This plant has a dense, fibrous root system that effectively binds soil aggregates after excavation, thus minimizing the risk of erosion or landslides in the hilly Kanekes topography. After the seven-day mourning period is over, grave maintenance is completely stopped. The grave undergoes rapid natural vegetation succession. Pioneer plants, shrubs, and even hardwood forest trees reoccupy the excavated area.

From the perspective of community-based environmental management, this local wisdom demonstrates that forest protection does not have to be carried out through a restrictive, formal approach from the state, but can instead be carried out harmoniously through traditional institutions and the Sunda Wiwitan belief system. The concept of silent burial positions death not as the end that separates humans from nature, but rather as a biological transition process to maintain and nourish the survival of indigenous protected forests in a sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the silent burial system practiced by the Baduy indigenous people is a form of local wisdom that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. The burial practice, which involves the absence of permanent graves, the use of non-organic materials, or major changes to environmental conditions, demonstrates the values of simplicity, respect for nature, and adherence to customary law (pikukuh) passed down through generations.

This burial system not only serves social and spiritual functions but also makes a significant ecological contribution to environmental preservation. The use of biodegradable natural materials, limited use of space, and the absence of land exploitation for permanent burial complexes allow for natural vegetation regeneration. Furthermore, the planting of hanjuang (a type of tree) as grave markers contributes to soil stability and the sustainability of the ecosystem around the burial area.

The findings of this study indicate that the cultural practices of the Baduy people are closely linked to forest conservation efforts. The local wisdom embodied in the customary burial system creates a natural mechanism for environmental preservation through the community's adherence to customary values. Thus, the silent burial system of the Baduy people can be understood as a form of culture-based conservation that contributes to ecological sustainability and the preservation of customary forest areas.

Implication

This research has theoretical, practical, and social implications. Theoretically, the results reinforce the view that the local wisdom of indigenous communities plays a crucial role in supporting the concept of culture-based environmental conservation. These findings demonstrate that environmental preservation can be achieved not only through formal policies and technological approaches, but also through the value systems and traditions that exist within the community.

Practically, this research can serve as a reference for the government, academics, and environmental institutions in formulating conservation strategies that involve indigenous communities as key partners in natural resource management. The values practiced by the Baduy community can serve as inspiration in developing more sustainable environmental conservation programs that align with the socio-cultural characteristics of the local community.

Socially, this research emphasizes the importance of local cultural preservation efforts as part of environmental conservation. The continued existence of the silent burial system and various Baduy customary rules demonstrates that cultural heritage serves not only as a community identity but also as an effective instrument in maintaining ecological balance. Therefore, the protection of indigenous communities and their local wisdom needs to be continuously supported so that these values can be passed on to future generations and contribute to sustainable development.

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