

Ngalaksa as a Narrative of Life in the Midst of Environmental Threats

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze Ngalaksa as a living narrative within the ecotheological study of Sundanese society, focusing on how this ritual can serve as a spiritual response to environmental threats, including deforestation in Priangan and the climate crisis that disrupts traditional farming patterns. The benefits of the research include strengthening local wisdom as a model of ecological sustainability, contributing to the preservation of Sundanese cultural identity, and providing inspiration for religion-based environmental policies in Indonesia. The method used is a qualitative approach based on participant ethnography, including direct observation of the 2025 Ngalaksa ritual in Rancakalong Village, Sumedang. Narrative analysis of the elements of tritunggal (harmony of heaven, earth, and humans), and interviews with ritual participants. The results of the study conclude that Ngalaksa is not merely a ceremony of gratitude for the harvest, but a dynamic narrative that integrates the ethics of stewardship through offerings and mutual cooperation. Ngalaksa offers an adaptive ecotheological framework for mitigating environmental risks. Ngalaksa is a key element of the balance of salty, sweet, sour, and spicy flavors that contribute significantly to building communal resilience. This is in line with QS. Al-A'raf (7:6), which emphasizes human spiritual responsibility towards preserving nature. "And do not cause damage to the earth after (Allah) has repaired it, and pray to Him with fear and hope."

Keywords: ecological threats; ngalaksa resilience; spiritual sustainability; Sundanese ecotheology; wisdom narrative.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, environmental issues have become a crucial global issue, marked by the climate crisis that increasingly threatens the sustainability of human life and the balance

of the Earth's ecosystem as a whole. Climate change is no longer viewed as a future threat but has already demonstrated a real impact on various aspects of social, economic, and ecological life. According to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), increased greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the primary factor in the rise in global average temperatures. This condition triggers various serious consequences, such as an increased frequency of natural disasters, changes in extreme weather patterns, damage to biodiversity, and disruption of food systems and water resources. Therefore, the climate crisis demands a collective response that is not only technological but also involves a shift in paradigms, values, and human behavior in interacting with nature in a sustainable manner (Hasan, 2008). If there is no radical intervention, it will lead to catastrophic floods, droughts, and biodiversity loss in tropical regions. This phenomenon is not only a scientific problem, but also an ethical crisis that demands a holistic response. Religion and spirituality play a crucial role as sources of narratives of transformation.

Ecotheology is a theological approach that connects religious teachings with the principles of environmental ethics, thus serving as a conceptual foundation for integrating faith with concrete ecological action. In the context of the global environmental crisis, ecotheology exists as a reflective framework that is not only normative but also transformative in shaping the ecological awareness of religious communities. Aye asserts that ecotheology offers a decolonial perspective that critically challenges the typical Western anthropocentric perspective that places humans as the center and ruler of nature. Instead, ecotheology emphasizes the interdependent and continuous relationship between humans, nature, and God as a cosmological unity. This approach encourages the birth of an ethics of ecological responsibility rooted in spirituality, so that concern for the environment is not merely understood as a secular moral obligation, but as an integral part of religious practice and devotion to the Divine (Aye, 2025).

The urgency of this global issue is further strengthened by data released by the World Bank, which shows that the climate crisis has caused global economic losses. These economic impacts are not evenly distributed, but are felt most acutely by groups and countries with a relatively high level of dependence on natural resources. Sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and forestry are most vulnerable to extreme climate change, thus increasing the risk of social and economic inequality. This situation emphasizes that the climate crisis is not solely an environmental issue, but also a structural challenge that affects economic stability and the sustainability of community life at large (World Bank, 2024). However, conventional responses such as international policies often fail to integrate the spiritual dimension, making ecotheology an argumentative tool for building cultural resilience to environmental degradation. Environmental degradation is felt in Indonesia, particularly in West Java. The Citarum River, the world's most polluted river according to the BlackSmith Institute, affects 30 million people through flash floods and groundwater contamination (Institute, 2023). This phenomenon reflects the conflict between economic modernization and local wisdom. The Sundanese people are victims of the loss of customary land due to the expansion of monoculture agriculture.

The conditions of the Sundanese community in Sumedang Regency, West Java, also highlight the urgency of these environmental issues. One concrete example is Rancakalong Village, known as the Bali of Sumedang, but which has faced significant ecological pressure since 2015. The conversion of agricultural land, particularly rice paddies, into residential areas has triggered rapid deforestation and the reduction of productive green spaces. The impact of this process not only threatens the balance of the local ecosystem but also affects the

sustainability of the agrarian community's livelihoods and Sundanese local wisdom, which is rooted in a harmonious relationship between humans and nature (BPS Sumedang, 2025). The people of Rancakalong, who practice the harmony of the tritangtu (spiritual harmony) of heaven, earth, and humans, have experienced an erosion of their cultural identity when traditional rituals are disrupted by chemical planting practices that damage soil fertility.

The traditional ritual that was the focus of field observations in this study was Ngalaksa 2025, a thanksgiving ceremony for the annual harvest held in Rancakalong Village from May 13–18 and attended by thousands of participants from various regions. Through a participant observation approach, this study captured the dynamics of the ritual as a meaningful socio-ecological practice. One of the core processes is the making of laksa, which represents the harmony of salty, sweet, sour, and spicy flavors as a symbol of the balance of nature and life. This process is carried out collectively through mutual cooperation, which is both symbolically and practically interpreted as a cultural response to the challenges of increasingly frequent seasonal droughts.

The Ngalaksa ritual also serves as a medium for internalizing the Tri Silas values of *silih asah* (grooming), *silih asih* (compassion), and *silih asuh* (caregiving), which strengthen social solidarity and collective responsibility for environmental protection. From an economic perspective, this ritual contributes to the development of relatively sustainable culture-based tourism and provides additional income for local communities. However, this sustainability remains overshadowed by ecological threats such as flooding and land degradation, which have the potential to damage agricultural systems and farmers' livelihoods. From a religious perspective, Ngalaksa emerges as a living narrative that strengthens the relationship between Sang Hyang Kersa (God Almighty), humans, and nature through the concept of earth stewardship. This narrative also serves as a cultural critique of the tendency towards commercialization of customs, which risks eroding the spiritual values and ecological ethics inherent in these traditions.

Morally, this degradation creates an ethical dilemma. On the one hand, Ngalaksa mutual cooperation builds solidarity; on the other, resource exploitation creates a sense of collective guilt. Each individual feels a failure as a guardian of God's creation. A review of previous research demonstrates significant contributions from ecotheology. The Dayak people of West Kalimantan found that implementing ecotheology in teaching prevented environmental crises through traditional narratives, with a focus on communal pedagogy that increased ecological awareness among youth (Panggarra et al., 2025).

Batubara and Ritonga explore theology, highlighting the syncretism of Sunda Wiwitan as a form of resilience to state recognition (Batubara & Ritonga, 2025). The Sérén Taun ritual strengthens identity, although this study focuses more on legal aspects than on ecological ones. Similarly, Kim, in the East Asian context, proposes a contextual ecotheology that integrates social inequality with the climate crisis, finding that a Christian minority approach can be a model for ecological justice, although it focuses less on tropical contexts like Indonesia (Kirkpatrick-Jung & Riches, 2020). Integrating ecofeminism with religious hermeneutics for intergenerational climate ethics, with a focus on Asia, produces a framework for addressing ecological gender injustice, but is more theoretical (Canete et al., 2025).

Although various previous studies have provided a strong theoretical foundation regarding the relationship between local wisdom and environmental sustainability, a fundamental gap remains. Most existing studies tend to be general in nature or focus more on specific indigenous communities, such as the Dayak, while in-depth exploration of the

Ngalaksa ritual as a living narrative of the Sundanese people remains relatively limited. Furthermore, the analytical frameworks used often only highlight normative dimensions, such as customary law or formal pedagogical approaches, thus neglecting the narrative and spiritual ecotheological dimensions that are present in everyday community practices, particularly amidst the escalation of contemporary environmental threats. Another limitation is the lack of argumentative, ethnographic-based qualitative research that explicitly links indigenous rituals to the development of community psychosocial resilience in the face of ecological crises. Yet, rituals function not only as cultural expressions but also as adaptive mechanisms that shape meaning, hope, and social cohesion.

This study aims to fill this gap through a systematic qualitative approach, using Ngalaksa as the primary analytical lens for understanding how customary narratives operate as adaptive responses to environmental crises. The urgency of this study is further heightened by the need to revitalize local wisdom in the context of achieving Indonesia's 2060 Net Zero Emission target, where the integration of an ecotheological perspective has the potential to enrich culture-based environmental policies. The primary objective of this study is to analyze Ngalaksa as a living narrative within an ecotheological framework to uncover its potential as a model of environmental resilience in the Sundanese community of Rancakalong. The benefits of this study include theoretical contributions to the development of ecotheological studies as well as practical benefits in the form of references for customary advocacy in climate change mitigation efforts at the village level. The limitations of this study include its narrow focus on Rancakalong, its lack of claims to cross-ethnic generalization, and its reliance on contextual and subjective ethnographic data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This theoretical study supports the analysis of Ngalaksa as a living narrative within an ecotheological framework, emphasizing how the Sundanese Rancakalong traditional ritual serves as a spiritual instrument to address contemporary environmental threats. This study builds on key concepts such as Sundanese ecotheology, living narrative, and tritungtu harmony, integrated with relevant theories from narrative philosophy and environmental theology. To enrich the syncretic perspective of Sundanese Islam, the author inserts verses from the Quran that align with the themes of nature conservation, gratitude, creation, and responsibility, as outlined in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ecologi (Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ecologi Kemenag) (Munawar-Rachman, 2025). These verses serve as a theological bridge that strengthens the relevance of Ngalaksa as an ecotheological narrative.

The theory used in this study is McFague's ecotheology theory (2015), symbols and metaphors in life narratives (Batubara & Ritonga, 2025). Other supporting theories and verses of the Quran related to ecology on earth (Panggarra et al., 2025). Ecotheology according to McFague is defined as a theological reflection that integrates religious doctrine with environmental ethics, emphasizing human responsibility as God's creation in the midst of crisis (McFague, 2015). In the Indonesian context, Sundanese ecotheology views nature as a manifestation of Sang Hyang Kersa, the Almighty God. Rituals such as Ngalaksa according to Batubara and Ritonga are sacred practices to maintain ecosystem balance, as seen in the offering of laksa which symbolizes the cycle of earth's fertility (Batubara & Ritonga, 2025). This is in line with QS. Ar-Rum (30:41) emphasizes the anthropogenic impact on nature as a call for spiritual introspection and conservation action, "Corruption has appeared on land and sea

because of what the hands of men have earned, that Allah may make them taste a part of their deeds, in order that they may return (to the right path)."

Life narrative, as Ricoeur put it, is a hermeneutic construction that shapes individual and communal identity through dynamic, not static, stories (Ricoeur, 1976). In ecotheological studies, the Ngalaksa life narrative functions as an adaptive story that connects the daily experiences of Sundanese farmers with divine narratives. The mutual cooperation ritual, according to Aye, becomes a metaphor for resistance against environmental degradation such as the deforestation of Priangan. This is integrated with QS. Al-An'am (6:141) which strengthens the ethics of gratitude for the harvest as a form of balance, where excess in nature becomes a spiritual sin, "And it is He who causes to grow gardens with pillars (date palms) and those without pillars (such as grapevines), and olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar. Eat of their fruit when it yields, and pay its due on the day of its harvest, and do not be extravagant. Indeed, He does not love those who are extravagant."

Ngalaksa as a thanksgiving ceremony for the annual harvest in Rancakalong Village, reflects the concept of tritangtu according to Panggarra et al., the harmony of the three centers of the universe, namely the sky as spiritual, the earth as ecological, and humans as social beings (Panggarra et al., 2025). This concept is relevant to environmental threats, such as according to the Sumedang Agriculture Service, seasonal droughts that reduce rice yields in Sumedang (BPS Sumedang, 2025). Ngalaksa transforms into a narrative of ecological resistance. QS. Ar-Rahman (55:7-9) emphasizes the principle of balance as a divine command, which is in line with the metaphor of balance of taste in laksa Ngalaksa as a call for harmony in creation, "And the heavens He raised and He created balance, so that you do not transgress in balance."

Environmental threats according to the BlackSmith Institute include ecosystem degradation, such as the pollution of the Citarum River affecting the population of West Java (BPS, 2024), which poses an ethical dilemma for communities, how to maintain traditional life narratives amidst modernization that erodes local wisdom. QS. Al-Baqarah (2:205) serves as a theological warning against post-reform destruction, which is relevant to Ngalaksa's response to deforestation, "And when he turns away, he strives in the earth to make mischief therein and destroy plants and animals. And Allah does not like mischief." This theoretical study reinforces that Ngalaksa is not just a ritual, but a dynamic ecotheological narrative, which can be a model for culture-based environmental policies in Indonesia, in line with the 2060 Net Zero Emission target.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative study with a participant ethnography approach (Creswell & Clark, 2018), designed to explore and interpret the life narratives in the Ngalaksa ritual as an ecotheological response to environmental threats in the Rancakalong Sundanese community. The participant ethnography approach was chosen because it fits the in-depth and contextual nature of the topic. The researcher was directly involved in the annual Ngalaksa ritual. The justification lies in the ability of ethnography to reveal narrative dynamics that cannot be captured through quantitative methods, especially in ecotheological studies that emphasize the interpretation of ritual symbolism such as laksa offerings as a metaphor for natural harmony (Panggarra et al., 2025).

The research design is exploratory descriptive with a single case study focus on the Ngalaksa 2025 ritual in Rancakalong Village, Sumedang Regency, West Java. This design allows for in-depth analysis of one specific context, namely the integration of the tritangtu

narrative of harmony between heaven, earth, and humans with environmental threats such as deforestation and drought. By maintaining flexibility for findings, it aligns with ethnographic principles that emphasize thick description, a qualitative research methodology that provides a detailed explanation of a social phenomenon, including the meaning behind it, rather than simply observing physical behavior (Creswell, 2015).

The research data sources consist of two types, primary and secondary (Sugiyono, 2013). Primary data were obtained from direct participants, including traditional elders, farmers, and youth participants in the Ngalaksa 2025 ritual, who were selected based on the criteria of active involvement in the ceremony and Sundanese ecotheological knowledge of Rancakalong. Secondary data were sourced from literature, such as books, journals, government reports, and ritual video archives, which supported triangulation for validity. This library research (Hasan, 2008), was conducted using literature, in the form of books, notes, and reports of previous research results, to build an ecotheological theoretical framework.

Data analysis was conducted using a narrative thematic approach, incorporating inductive coding to identify key themes such as tritungtu symbiosis and moral resilience to environmental degradation. To maintain research ethics, data was obtained from all participants, with guaranteed anonymity and cultural sensitivity, for example, avoiding disclosure of sacred Wiwitan. This approach aligns with a similar study in Indonesia (Panggarra et al., 2025), which used descriptive qualitative interviews for Dayak ecotheology, proving its effectiveness in uncovering local wisdom in response to environmental crises. Thus, this method not only supports the research objective of analyzing Ngalaksa as an adaptive narrative but also contributes to the development of contextual ecotheological methodologies (Miles et al., 2014; Sugiyono, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a comprehensive discussion and analysis of each aspect of the main problem, namely, Ngalaksa as a living narrative that unfolds amid environmental threats within the framework of ecotheological studies. The analysis is systematically structured by describing each keyword, including ecological threats, Sundanese ecotheology, spiritual sustainability, wisdom narratives, and the concept of resilient Ngalaksa. This analytical approach allows for a structured reading of the relationship between ritual practices, spiritual values, and community responses to environmental crises. This study combines empirical data obtained through ethnographic participant observation during the 2025 Ngalaksa ritual in Rancakalong Village, Sumedang Regency, with argumentative and critical theoretical discussions. Thus, the analysis not only describes cultural practices descriptively but also interprets the ecotheological meaning contained therein as a form of community adaptation and resilience to ecological change.

Ecological Threats

In this study, ecological threats refer to environmental degradation that threatens the sustainability of the Ngalaksa ritual in Rancakalong Village, Sumedang, West Java. This threat is not only a natural phenomenon, but the result of the interaction between modernization, such as urbanization, monoculture agriculture, and extractives, with climate change, which erodes local wisdom such as tritungtu harmony. This threat disrupts the narrative of Ngalaksa life from reforestation mutual cooperation to laksa offerings, so that the ritual evolves into an ecotheological adaptive response, where gratitude for the harvest becomes a call for climate

mitigation towards Net Zero Emission 2060. This connects Ngalaksa as a model of mutual cooperation against degradation. Below is a table regarding ecological threats.

Table 1
Ecological Threats

Enforcement Elements	Theological-Ecological Meaning	Ecological Threats
Offering to Dewi Sri	Gratitude for the fertility of the earth as a divine creation that emphasizes responsible management	The response to seasonal drought in Sumedang due to climate change, encourages traditional irrigation to reduce flooding.
Mutual Aid Ritual	Natural social harmony through one of the Tri Silas values, namely the value of mutual care as a communal ethic.	Combating deforestation with community reforestation, such as the Wiwitan-inspired Baduy initiative.
Traditional Dances and Arts	Oral narrative about tritangtu balance, moral education through stories.	Adaptation to the urbanization of young people, so that the 2025 Ngalaksa Festival, Ngalaksa Ritual becomes a promotion of sustainable tourism, which reduces carbon emissions
Annual Cycle	Maintaining a sustainable living narrative, making Ngalaksa adapted from a monthly ritual into an annual one since 1998.	In the face of rising global temperatures, the Ngalaksa ritual has become an advocacy platform for the preservation of the Priangan forest.

Sundanese Ecotheology

Sundanese ecotheology is a branch of theological thought that integrates the teachings of the Sundanese Wiwitan traditional belief system, or syncretism, with Islam through an environmental ethics framework, emphasizing the harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and the divine. Unlike Western ecotheology, which is often anthropocentric, Sundanese ecotheology is holistic and decolonial. Nature is viewed as a manifestation of Sang Hyang Kersa, the One and Only God, not merely an exploitative resource. This concept stems from the local wisdom of the Sundanese people of West Java, such as the Baduy, Cikondang, and Rancakalong communities, who view environmental preservation as a form of worship and gratitude. Sundanese ecotheology is relevant in the era of climate crisis, where deforestation in Priangan has peaked since 2015, and serves as a model for the sustainability of spiritual culture in Indonesia (Indrawardana, 2012).

The key concepts of Sundanese ecotheology are tritangtu, local wisdom, and gratitude. Tritangtu is the philosophical foundation of Sunda Wiwitan, which views the universe as consisting of three interrelated centers: heaven as spiritual, earth as ecological, and humans as social beings. Tritangtu emphasizes balance to prevent degradation, as in the practice of zigzag rice terraces for sustainable irrigation and erosion prevention. This concept aligns with Islamic teachings on *hablum minallah* (a relationship with God), *hablum minannas* (a social

relationship), and *hablum minal alam* (a relationship with nature), which are adapted in traditional rituals (Haq et al., 2025).

Sundanese people traditionally implement a structured ecological space management system through the division of clean residential zones, dirty areas, buffer zones, and forbidden forest areas. Spatial classifications such as *leuweung kolot* (old settlements), *leuweung titipan* (titipan), and *leuweung melarang* (forbidden forest) serve as ecological mechanisms to maintain natural balance and resource sustainability. This system reflects a cosmological understanding that positions humans as part of the natural order, not as free masters exploiting the environment. Within this framework, taboos serve as sacred prohibitions that embody local wisdom. The prohibition against cutting down trees in sacred forest areas or altering river courses is not simply understood as a cultural taboo, but as an ethical-theological principle aimed at preventing ecological damage and maintaining the earth's fertility cycle. *Pamali* serves as a medium for internalizing religious values that teach moral boundaries in interacting with nature (Halim et al., 2023).

Efforts to maintain the earth's fertility are also manifested through ritual practices as expressions of gratitude and ecological responses of the community. The *Ngalaksa* ritual, for example, is performed as an expression of gratitude for the harvest. From an ecotheological perspective, this ritual contains profound symbolism, where offerings such as *laksa* or *bubur suro* represent the balance of salty, sweet, sour, and spicy flavors as a metaphor for ecosystem harmony. Beyond its symbolic aspect, *Ngalaksa* also encourages concrete ecological practices, such as mutual cooperation in reforestation activities and reducing pesticide use, in response to environmental threats such as pollution and drought (Afifudin & S, 2023). Sundanese ecotheology developed through a process of syncretism with Islamic teachings, where efforts to protect and preserve nature are understood as part of environmental jihad. From this perspective, concern for the environment is not merely ecological but also a manifestation of human spiritual responsibility as caliphs on earth. Conservation of nature is seen as a form of worship with ethical and transcendental dimensions (Ibadulloh & Mutaqin, 2023).

Various studies on religious approaches to environmental issues emphasize that the problem of ecological damage cannot be solved solely through technology, science, or modern scientific methods. Although scientific advances provide technical solutions, these approaches often fail to address the root causes of the problem, which relate to values, morals, and human perspectives on nature. Therefore, religious and spiritual dimensions are crucial as ethical foundations that encourage deeper and more sustainable changes in human attitudes and behaviors in maintaining environmental balance (Maridi, 2015). However, this must also be accompanied by a religious, belief-based, and ethical approach to environmental and natural preservation.

Local wisdom related to natural resource management as a locally based regulatory system has developed and been practiced by communities since ancient times. This knowledge stems from long human experience interacting with the surrounding environment, thus forming management patterns that are adaptive to local natural conditions. This wisdom not only serves as a technical guideline for resource utilization but also contains social, cultural, and spiritual values that govern the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Through customary rules, norms, and cultural symbols, traditional communities are able to maintain ecosystem balance and prevent overexploitation. Thus, local wisdom plays a crucial role as a sustainable and relevant ecological mechanism in addressing current environmental challenges (Suyatman, 2018). This long history and adaptation can be implemented in certain

communities in Indonesia, for example, the Sundanese indigenous people of West Java. This illustrates how Sundanese ecotheology is based on historical adaptation, such as the drought buffer zone in Rancakalong. Sunda Wiwitan is an example of resilient syncretism, where the Ngalaksa ritual strengthens ecological identity against deforestation (Batubara & Ritonga, 2025). Comparing Dayak with Sundanese traditional narratives, emphasizing communal pedagogy for ecological awareness is analogous to Sundanese tritangtu for crisis prevention (Panggarra et al., 2025).

Sundanese ecotheology cannot be understood merely as a conceptual construct, but rather as a practical impetus that demands real involvement in maintaining ecological sovereignty. Within this framework, faith serves as a driving force for environmental conservation, particularly amidst the escalating global climate crisis that increasingly threatens the sustainability of life (Ibadulloh & Mutaqin, 2023). The ecotheological approach offers a direction for transformation from the alienation of modern humans from nature to a more complete and interconnected relationship with the surrounding environment. Through the integration of spiritual values and ecological ethics, humans are invited to interpret nature not as an object of exploitation, but as a trust that must be safeguarded. This view aligns with the understanding that caring for and preserving the earth is an integral part of religious practice, thus positioning ecological action as a meaningful and sustainable form of worship (Munawar-Rachman, 2025).

Keberlanjutan Spiritual

Spiritual sustainability can be interpreted as an effort to preserve and revitalize Sundanese traditional faith, which serves as a long-term ethical foundation in community life. Spirituality in this context does not exist separately from the ecological and social dimensions, but rather is closely intertwined as a source of collective resilience in facing various environmental threats, such as deforestation, land degradation, and the climate crisis. Traditional faith serves as a moral framework that shapes people's perspectives on nature, not as a commodity to be freely exploited, but as a sacred living space whose balance must be maintained. This spiritual sustainability is clearly manifested in the Ngalaksa ritual, which functions as a living narrative and a medium for transmitting ecological and spiritual values across generations (Wani et al., 2017).

In practice, the Ngalaksa ritual is not simply understood as a celebration of thanksgiving for the harvest, but as a spiritual event that brings together theological, social, and ecological dimensions. The prayers of thanksgiving offered during the ritual procession function as a symbolic marriage contract between humans, nature, and the Divine. Meanwhile, the mutual cooperation in the making and offering of laksa strengthens communal identity and fosters a sense of collective gratitude. The values of tritangtu—harmony between heaven, earth, and humans—are transmitted through this ritual practice, thus forming an ecological awareness that is not merely instructive but experienced directly and emotionally by the ritual participants (Hill et al., 2020).

Amidst the dynamics of social change, such as spiritual fragmentation due to urbanization and the dominance of the majority religion, the sustainability of the Ngalaksa ritual has undergone a process of adaptation. The decline in ritual participation has been responded to by transforming Ngalaksa into a space for ecological advocacy relevant to contemporary challenges. The integration of reforestation activities into the ritual series, for example, demonstrates how indigenous practices have evolved into disaster mitigation strategies, such as floods and droughts. From an ecotheological perspective, this spiritual sustainability

affirms the interconnectedness of humans with nature, where the climate crisis is understood not merely as a material threat but as a call to worship that demands moral responsibility (Lerario, 2020).

The spiritual sustainability built through Ngalaksa contributes to strengthening community moral cohesion. Ancestral narratives about the origins of rice seeds, passed down since the 17th century, serve as decolonial instruments that challenge the logic of exploitative development. These narratives instill an awareness that ecological justice is inseparable from historical and cultural justice. Thus, Ngalaksa not only reduces the eco-anxiety arising from the climate crisis but also strengthens the community's psychosocial resilience through collective meanings rooted in tradition. Ngalaksa's spiritual sustainability also has significant economic implications, particularly in the development of sustainable cultural tourism. These rituals open up economic opportunities for local communities without sacrificing their sacred values. The existence of taboos (pamali) as customary prohibitions serves as a control mechanism to prevent commercialization from exceeding ethical boundaries (Roy, 2021). Thus, customary spirituality is not positioned as an obstacle to development, but rather as a guide to ensure economic activity remains aligned with the principles of ecological sustainability.

Ultimately, Ngalaksa can be understood as a spiritual bridge connecting Sundanese harvest myths—such as the narrative of Dewi Sri—with concrete ecological action for future generations. The taboo of guarding forbidden forests, for example, serves as an effective habitat preservation strategy based on religious awareness. More broadly, Ngalaksa's spiritual sustainability offers a local ecotheological model relevant to climate change mitigation efforts and supports Indonesia's Net Zero Emissions agenda by 2060. This ritual affirms that cultural heritage is not merely a relic of the past, but a source of adaptive ethics capable of addressing global ecological challenges in a contextual and sustainable manner (Mackay & Schmitt, 2019).

Narrative of Wisdom

Wisdom narratives can be understood as a collection of oral stories, ritual practices, and Sundanese cultural symbols that contain local knowledge to maintain the relational balance between humans, nature, and the Divine. In this context, the Ngalaksa ritual occupies a central position as a medium for articulating ecological values passed down through generations. Wisdom narratives cannot be reduced to traditional tales or static ceremonies, but rather as dynamic and contextual cultural constructions. They function as a living, informal pedagogy that continuously adapts to social and ecological realities, particularly in response to environmental threats such as deforestation, land degradation, and seasonal drought (Jimenez et al., 2021). In the Ngalaksa ritual, the wisdom narrative is symbolically manifested through the offering of laksa, a dish that combines salty, sweet, sour, and spicy flavors. This balance of flavors represents the concept of tritangtu, the harmony between heaven, earth, and humans, which is the foundation of Sundanese cosmology. Laksa serves not only as a ritual food but also as an ecological metaphor, teaching the importance of balance in environmental management. Furthermore, the narrative of the rice seed's origins, said to originate from Mataram in the 17th century—symbolically conveyed through the strains of Tarawangsa—serves as a historical reminder of humanity's dependence on nature and the importance of maintaining food sustainability as a source of life.

These narratives are retold by traditional elders as "life stories" that go beyond the symbolic realm and directly impact community ecological practices. Through stories and

rituals, communities are encouraged to understand collective environmental management, such as the practice of mutual cooperation in reforestation activities in response to the threat of flooding and land degradation. Thus, wisdom narratives serve as a mechanism for fostering communal resilience, where ecological knowledge is not taught formally or technocratically, but internalized through ritual experiences, affection, and social togetherness. From a Sundanese ecotheological perspective, wisdom narratives serve as decolonial bridges connecting local traditions to the challenges of modernity. These narratives challenge exploitative development logics by presenting a worldview that positions nature as a relational subject, not merely an economic object. Amidst the tide of urbanization and youth migration in the Sumedang region, the Ngalaksa narrative serves as a marker of cultural identity capable of countering the erosion of local values due to globalization and the climate crisis. It provides a space for collective reflection that allows communities to renegotiate their relationship with nature and ancestral traditions.

Theoretically, the function of this wisdom narrative aligns with Paul Ricoeur's thinking, who views narrative as a means of adaptive identity formation. Through narrative, communities not only reconstruct the past but also envision an ethical and sustainable future. In this regard, Ngalaksa functions as a performative narrative that enables Sundanese people to respond creatively and meaningfully to ecological change. Thus, the wisdom narrative not only preserves tradition but also serves as a strategic cultural resource in building socio-ecological resilience amidst global environmental uncertainty (Ricoeur, 1976). This wisdom narrative is intergenerational, conveyed through the Ngalaksa 2025 art performance, which educated 1,000 visitors about the preservation of the forbidden forest (*leuweung larangan*) and the sacred taboos against the exploitation of nature. The impact was an increase in gratitude and social cohesion, which reduced intergenerational conflict and supported the tourism economy. Argumentatively, the Ngalaksa wisdom narrative offers an ecotheological model for Indonesia. Ancestral stories serve as a means of transformation from crisis to ecological spiritual symbiosis.

According to Hurip, Sundanese local wisdom, like taboos and noble philosophy, is a narrative that invites people to re-understand the importance of preserving art and nature for future generations, so that they are not lost in modernization. The narrative of taboos in Sundanese rituals as environmental lessons aligns with the metaphor of *laksa Ngalaksa*. Ngalaksa also becomes a customary and ecological narrative, namely Sundanese local wisdom to protect river basins, where this narrative is stated in the *Galunggung Mandate Manuscript*, integrating water management with ancestral sites connecting ancient narratives with modern practices such as Ngalaksa reforestation. Ngalaksa is a narrative as an educational medium that emphasizes the pedagogical function of narratives, such as in art performances. Ngalaksa also represents narrative resilience in the modern era, as an evolution of Ngalaksa post-pandemic for sustainable tourism. Most importantly, Ngalaksa is an ancestral ecological narrative. Sundanese ancestors have possessed ecological wisdom in narratives, such as Ngaraksa Sasaka Pusaka Buana, which means preserving sacred heritage on earth, highlighting the *tritangtu* narrative as the basis of ecotheology.

Making Resilient

Ngalaksa is one of the most important traditional ceremonies in the Sundanese tradition that lives and is preserved in Rancakalong Village, Rancakalong District, Sumedang Regency, West Java. This ritual not only functions as a harvest celebration, but also as a spiritual,

historical, and ecological expression that represents the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the Divine. Theologically, Ngalaksa is understood as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty, known in Sundanese cosmology as Sang Hyang Kersa, as well as a form of respect for Dewi Sri or Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri, a sacred figure positioned as the goddess of fertility and protector of rice crops. Thus, Ngalaksa becomes a syncretic medium that combines local Sundanese beliefs with transcendent spiritual values.

The Ngalaksa ritual involves a series of symbolic processes. One of the ritual's core elements is the procession of carrying rice to the traditional barn or leuit, symbolizing efforts to maintain food sustainability and respect for the source of life. Furthermore, the preparation of laksa—a traditional rice flour dish—is a key symbol in this ritual. Laksa is made from rice flour wrapped in congkok leaves, then processed with a mixture of salt, coconut, and lime. This combination of elements represents a balance of salty, sweet, sour, and spicy flavors, interpreted as a cosmic metaphor for the harmony of the universe. This balance of flavors teaches the ecological principle that sustainability can only be achieved when each element is in harmonious proportion.

The Ngalaksa ritual does not take place in a single moment, but rather over seven days and seven nights, performed in rotation across five rurukan (community units), namely Rancakalong, Cibunar, Cijere, Legok Picung, and Pasir Biru. This rotating implementation pattern demonstrates the strong principles of togetherness and social solidarity within the Sundanese community structure. Each rurukan has an equal role and responsibility in maintaining the ritual's continuity, so that Ngalaksa is not monopolized by any one group, but rather belongs to the collective community.

The ritual aspect is further enriched by the presence of traditional Tarawangsa music, a Sundanese string instrument played by bowing. Tarawangsa, along with supporting instruments such as the jentreng and ngek-ngek, creates a deeply sacred atmosphere. This music serves not only as entertainment but also as a spiritual medium connecting humans with the ancestral world and cosmic powers. In this context, Tarawangsa is understood as the sound of nature manifested in sound, making music an integral part of Sundanese ecotheological practices. The Ngalaksa ritual also includes other spiritual elements such as the ijab kabul prayer, the practice of mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and traditional dances performed collectively. This entire series strengthens communal bonds, builds cultural identity, and emphasizes the value of togetherness as the foundation of Sundanese social life. Gotong royong in Ngalaksa is not simply a collective effort, but an ethical expression that instills collective responsibility towards nature and one another.

Historically, Ngalaksa has deep roots and is closely linked to the ecological and social crises of the 17th century. This tradition is thought to have begun around the 1620s, during the reign of Suryadiwangsa, when the Sumedang region was under the political influence of the Mataram Kingdom. During this period, Rancakalong and the surrounding area experienced a severe food crisis due to an outbreak of rice disease. The disease caused empty rice grains, crop failure, and ultimately triggered mass starvation among the community. This situation was exacerbated by prolonged drought and political pressure in the form of the obligation to pay rice tribute to the Mataram Kingdom for the war against Cirebon. This situation left the Sumedang community extremely vulnerable. Shifting cultivation practices became increasingly difficult, while food demand continued to rise. It was in this context of crisis that a collective initiative emerged to find a solution. Several community leaders then sent a group of thirteen people, led by Jatikusumah, to travel to the Mataram Kingdom, known as a center

of superior rice production. The group's primary mission was to obtain quality rice seeds to save the community from starvation.

However, the effort was not easy. Tight security around the Mataram palace compounded the challenge of acquiring rice seeds. In the most popular version of the story, which remains vivid in the collective memory of the Sundanese people, the mission's success was determined by ingenuity and cultural creativity. Two Tarawangsa musicians, carrying sacred Sundanese musical instruments, disguised themselves as entertainment for the envoys. Through this disguise, they managed to enter the palace grounds without arousing suspicion. In the story, the rice seeds were cleverly hidden inside the resonator of the Tarawangsa's sound box. In this way, the seeds evaded inspection by royal soldiers and were secretly transported back to Rancakalong. The return journey was also fraught with the risk of robbery and security breaches, making concealing the seeds in the musical instruments a crucial strategy for ensuring the mission's success.

Upon arrival in Rancakalong, the rice seeds were planted and yielded a bountiful harvest. This success marked the end of the famine and marked a turning point in the history of the local community. As a token of gratitude for this success, the community began processing the surplus rice into laksa, which was then sent to Mataram as tribute. Initially, this practice was carried out incidentally and not yet structured as a standard traditional ritual. Over time, the practice of laksa-making and the harvest thanksgiving celebration became institutionalized. After the first laksa maker died, the tradition was temporarily halted, only to be continued by his successor, who was then only around twelve years old. The ritual was only fully resumed when the successor reached the age of thirty-five. Since then, Ngalaksa has developed into a more established tradition and has been passed down through generations.

Besides being a harvest thanksgiving ritual, Ngalaksa also serves as a historical narrative about the migration and adaptation of the Sundanese people. This ritual records the transition from shifting cultivation to terraced rice paddies, which require more complex management of water, land, and labor. Thus, Ngalaksa reflects not only spirituality but also local ecological knowledge and technology that evolved with environmental changes. Entering the modern era, Ngalaksa underwent transformations in institutional and policy contexts. In 1985, the ritual was officially recognized as a cultural event in Sumedang Regency through a regional regulation. This recognition marked Ngalaksa's entry into the formal cultural preservation framework. Since 1998, Ngalaksa has been held routinely every year, generally in May or July, with adjustments to the Sundanese palintangan calendar. This adjustment was made to avoid performing the ritual during the fasting month, thus respecting the community's religious practices.

The duration of the ritual has also been adjusted, from its original longer and more flexible duration to approximately six to seven days. This change reflects an effort to adapt to the rhythms of modern life without losing the ritual's sacred essence. The evolution of Ngalaksa demonstrates how indigenous traditions can survive through a process of negotiation between old values and the demands of the times. In recent developments, Ngalaksa has also been integrated with cultural tourism to support the local economy. This integration opens up opportunities for communities to gain economic benefits from cultural preservation, but also presents challenges in maintaining the sacredness of the ritual so that it is not reduced to mere spectacle. Therefore, indigenous communities maintain various taboos and customary rules as control mechanisms to ensure commercialization does not exceed ethical boundaries.

Ngalaksa can be understood as a multidimensional ritual that blends history, spirituality, ecology, and cultural identity. It serves as a living narrative that records the collective

experiences of the Sundanese people in facing crises, adapting to change, and maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature. In the contemporary context, Ngalaksa is not only a cultural heritage but also a source of inspiration for developing sustainability models based on local wisdom that are relevant to today's ecological challenges.

Table 2
History of Enforcement

Period	Key Events	Cultural Significance
Abad 17 (1620-an)	Empty rice crisis; Mataram envoys bring seeds via Tarawangsa; successful harvest.	The origin of gratitude; a symbol of agricultural adaptation.
Early 18th Century	Sporadic ritual; temporarily stopped; continued by successor.	Intergenerational transmission.
1985	Arranged as a regular event of Sumedang Regency.	Institutionalization of customs.
1998-Present	Annual in Rancakalong; integration of tourism and reforestation.	Preservation in the modern era.

The Ngalaksa ritual is a traditional Sundanese ceremony rich in meaning. Ngalaksa, literally meaning "making laksa," comes from the word "ngala," meaning "to take or make," and "laksa," a traditional dish. Ngalaksa is an expression of gratitude to God Almighty for a bountiful rice harvest, as well as a tribute to Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri, Dewi Sri, the goddess of fertility and protector of rice plants.

This ritual is not only a religious ceremony, but also a means of strengthening the social, cultural, and ecological bonds of indigenous communities, where elements such as mutual cooperation, traditional arts, and natural symbolism are central. In the context of Sundanese ecotheology, Ngalaksa reflects the harmony of the tritangtu (tritangtu) of heaven, earth, and humans, so that environmental conservation is seen as a form of worship. Ngalaksa is carried out in rotation in five rurukan (traditional community units) – Rancakalong, Cibunar, Cijere, Legok Picung, and Pasir Biru – for 6-7 days, traditionally 7 days and 7 nights. The event begins with spiritual preparation and ends with a feast, involving the entire village from traditional elders to youth. The following is the main sequence of the Ngalaksa Ritual.

First, Opening and Preparation (Day 1). Joint prayer of *ijab kabul* (marriage vows) at the *leuit* rice barn to ask for blessings. Rice is processed into flour, followed by mutual cooperation in making laksa, a symbol of the balance of salty, sweet, sour, and spicy flavors that symbolizes the harmony of the ecosystem. In 2025, the official opening by the Deputy Governor of West Java, Erwan Setiawan, on May 13, with the theme *Nata Budaya, Mupusti Tradisi, Ajen Inajen Adat* Ancestral. Second, Main Procession (Days 2-5). Mass laksa making and serving, accompanied by Tarawangsa music that induces a spiritual trance of *nyumpingkeun keres* Nyai. Includes traditional dances such as *Jaipong*, *Rampak Gendang*, *Wayang Golek*, and the art of *buhun terbang* with bamboo. Ecological elements that emerge are the mutual cooperation of reforestation and *ngaseuk*, symbolic weeding for land preservation. Third, Peak and Closing (Days 6-7). Offerings of *Suro* porridge and laksa to Dewi Sri are followed by a *dadung* dance with plow ropes and a closing prayer. The ceremony concludes with folk entertainment and a commitment to reforestation. The activities above clearly contain elements rich with meaning. Below are the key elements and their significance in the Ngalaksa Ritual.

Table 3
Key Elements and Meaning

Key Elements	Meaning
Laksa and Suro Porridge	Sacred food as a metaphor for gratitude and the balance of nature; shared for mutual cooperation
mandarin	A sacred musical instrument that connects the physical and spiritual worlds, a symbol of the origin of the rice seed.
Mutual cooperation	Social core, strengthening the values of Tri Silas, mutual sharpening, mutual compassion, mutual care
Clothing and Symbols	Kebaya, headband, janur leaves, and traditional flag parade

In 2025, the Ngalaksa ritual was designated as one of 42 West Javanese cultural works, affirming its strategic value within the region's cultural heritage. This recognition is inseparable from the central role of traditional elders, who are key actors in the transmission of knowledge, spiritual values, and ecological practices across generations. Substantively, Ngalaksa can be understood as a living narrative with high resilience, namely the ability to transform past experiences of crisis into a source of hope and orientation for the future. This narrative aligns with the principles of Sundanese ecotheology, which places ecological sustainability as an integral part of spiritual and cultural practices.

The concept of Ngalaksa resilience refers to the ritual's capacity to endure and dynamically adapt to various external pressures, such as modernization, urbanization, youth migration, and environmental threats such as deforestation, flooding, drought, and climate change. Resilience in this context is not interpreted as passive resilience, but rather as an active process that continuously builds communal resilience. Through living narratives of ancestral adaptation and ecotheological practices based on the harmony of *tritangtu*—the balanced relationship between heaven, earth, and humans—Ngalaksa functions as a reflective and practical medium for maintaining cultural identity and ecological sustainability amidst changing times. The aspects of Ngalaksa Resilience are as follows.

First, Communal Social Resilience. The ritual involves the entire village from elders to youth, with the Tri Silas values of mutual sharpening, caring, and nurturing. Amidst youth migration and preventing identity erosion, ethnographic informants see Ngalaksa as a life story that unites generations. Second, Ecological Resilience. As part of ecotheology, Ngalaksa teaches management through the metaphor of balance, which encourages environmentally friendly practices such as storing rice in natural caves to maintain soil fertility and reducing pesticides on customary land. Facing threats such as deforestation, reforestation is integrated into the procession, reducing the risk of flooding and drought, and the forbidden forest (*leuweung larangan*) becomes a model for preservation. Third, Cultural Economic Resilience. Modern adaptations such as government assistance for rice replace traditional sources, while maintaining the core of the ritual. Ngalaksa tourism attracts thousands of visitors, thus generating income for reinvestment in preservation. Fourth, Spiritual Resilience. Through *Tarawangsa*, which induces the spiritual trance of *Nyai* (*nyumpingkeun keresa Nyai*), Ngalaksa builds gratitude and connection with the ancestors of Dewi Sri, reducing environmental anxiety due to climate stress. This becomes an adaptive narrative from the crisis of the 1620s to 2025, Ngalaksa transforming threats into opportunities.

The resilient Ngalaksa is understood as a dynamic cultural practice, not merely a museum artifact frozen in the past, but rather a living instrument that continues to evolve without being

uprooted from its traditional roots. The Sundanese local wisdom contained within it represents the results of a long community adaptation to changing social and ecological conditions, while also being implemented concretely in communal life. Through its ritual, symbolic, and ecologically practical dimensions, Ngalaksa serves as a contextual ecotheological model relevant to Indonesia. Within this framework, custom serves not only as a cultural identity but also as an ethical and ecological buffer in responding to the climate crisis. Thus, Ngalaksa contributes to national sustainability transition efforts, in line with the commitment to Net Zero Emissions by 2060 (Suyatman, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Ngalaksa tradition, within the framework of Sundanese ecotheology, serves as an adaptive and resilient living narrative in responding to contemporary ecological challenges in Rancakalong Village, Sumedang Regency. Through a participatory ethnographic approach conducted during the 2025 ritual, this study found that Sundanese ecotheology, based on the concept of tritangtu and harmoniously synergizing with Islamic values, is able to integrate the spiritual dimension with the ethics of environmental management contextually. The practice of offering laksa not only has symbolic meaning as an expression of gratitude for the harvest, but also functions as a metaphor for ecosystem balance that instills collective awareness of the threats of environmental degradation, such as deforestation and pollution. The resilience of Ngalaksa is reflected in the increasing participation of the younger generation in the ritual and their involvement in ecological activities, such as reforestation using local tree seedlings. This indicates that Ngalaksa functions as an effective non-formal pedagogical tool in transmitting the values of ecological wisdom intergenerationally. Furthermore, the spiritual continuity of this ritual helps build a sense of gratitude, social solidarity, and moral cohesion, which play a crucial role in addressing cultural fragmentation caused by modernization. Ngalaksa cannot be understood solely as a traditional post-harvest ritual, but rather as a decolonial ecotheological model relevant to climate change mitigation efforts in Indonesia. This model has the potential to be replicated in environmental policy formulation, including in supporting the 2060 Net Zero Emission agenda through the integration of custom, spirituality, and scientific approaches. This research recommends the development of cross-traditional comparative studies, the strengthening of quantitative data to complement ethnography, collaboration with the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs to develop a Ngalaksa-based ecotheological curriculum in West Javanese madrasas, and further publication in reputable international journals to expand global advocacy. Thus, Ngalaksa is expected to continue to live on as a cultural and spiritual heritage that maintains the sustainability of the earth and humanity.

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