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ON TRANSDISCIPLINARY RELIGIOUS STUDIES (ICONTREES)

"Beyond the Cosmos : Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Ecotheology and Global Sustainability"

Biyung and Rama: An Ecotheological Study of the Relationship between Nature and the Pakeong Ritual in Banyumas

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Abstrak

The socio-ecological crisis in the Anthropocene era demands a deconstruction of the anthropocentric-instrumentalist paradigm that has secularized nature into a mere object of exploitation. As an alternative, this study explores the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the agrarian society of Banyumas through an analysis of the Pakeong rain-calling ritual. Employing a qualitative-ethnographic approach in Bojongsari Village, Kembaran District, Banyumas Regency, this study examines the cosmological relations and spiritual-ecological dimensions led by Kaki Tasun as the seventh-generation maestro. The findings reveal that the Pakeong ritual represents the cosmology of Biyung (Earth/Mother) and Rama (Sky/Father), which positions nature as a subject possessing intrinsic value. Through semiotic and hermeneutic analyses of the mantra texts and the sixteen types of sesajen (ubo rampe), the study identifies the presence of a mystic synthesis between Islamic Kejawen theology and agrarian ecocentric wisdom. Theoretically, this relation converges with the principle of biospherical egalitarianism in Arne Naess's Deep Ecology as well as Seyyed Hossein Nasr's notion of the re-sacralization of the cosmos. This study concludes that amidst the currents of agricultural mechanization and modernization that threaten the extinction of tradition, the revitalization of Pakeong is not only essential as an effort to preserve intangible cultural heritage, but also as a form of environmental ethical orientation that offers solutions in confronting the uncertainties of the current global climate crisis.

Keyword: Pakeong, Ecotheology, Javanese Islam,

Introduction

The degradation of the global ecosystem in the early twenty-first century has reached an alarming level, marked by massive deforestation, the extinction of biodiversity, and extreme climate anomalies (WALHI, 2025; Lako, 2018). Various natural disasters occurring throughout the Nusantara, ranging from landslides and prolonged droughts caused by the El Niño phenomenon to flash floods, can no longer be understood reductively as merely biophysical symptoms (Wardianto, 2026; Lako, 2018; Amien et al., 2011). These phenomena constitute outward projections of the inner deterioration of modern humanity, which has experienced a spiritual dissociation from the cosmos (Lako, 2018; Nasr, 1968). Fundamentally, the contemporary ecological crisis is rooted in the moral and spiritual failure of scientific-industrial civilization



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sustained by an anthropocentric worldview (Brontowiyono, 2019; Lako, 2018).

Anthropocentrism positions human beings as the sole measure of all values (human-centered worldview), while non-human nature is regarded as a mechanistic and soulless entity (*desacralized nature*) possessing merely instrumental value insofar as it serves human material satisfaction (Nasr, 2003; Nasr, 1968; Ohoiwutun, 2019). This ontological separation between subject (humanity) and object (nature) received sharp criticism from historians such as Lynn White Jr., who identified the environmental crisis as originating from Western theology's bias toward exploitative domination over the earth (White Jr., 1967). As an antithesis, the discourse of ecotheology emerges to reconstruct the triadic relationship between God, humanity, and the universe as an interdependent existential unity (Brontowiyono, 2019).

Within the landscape of contemporary ecotheology, the thought of the traditionalist philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a paradigm of the re-sacralization of nature through the lens of *scientia sacra* (Nasr, 2003; Nasr, 1993). Nasr asserts that the universe is a theophany or *tajalli* (manifestation) of the Divine attributes of beauty and majesty; consequently, destroying nature is equivalent to desecrating the sacred signs (*ayat*) of God (Nasr, 2003; Anggraini & Rohmatika, 2021; Mugits, 2026). This ecocentric perspective resonates with the platform of Deep Ecology proposed by Arne Naess, which advocates biospherical egalitarianism and the strengthening of the "ecological self," wherein human beings define themselves as an integral part of the web of life rather than as rulers standing outside it (Naess, 1985; Naess, 2017).

In Indonesia, the search for deep environmental ethics frequently finds its pathway through the revitalization of local wisdom (*indigenous wisdom*) (Sufia et al., 2016; Sedia, 2023). Traditional agrarian communities possess an accumulation of ecological knowledge (*Traditional Ecological Knowledge*) that has been transmitted across generations in order to maintain cosmic harmony (Sufia et al., 2016). In the land of Java, the philosophy of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono* teaches the moral obligation of human beings to beautify, preserve, and safeguard the sustainability of the world (Brontowiyono, 2019; Noorzeha & Lasiyo, 2023; Isnaini, 2021). One particularly distinctive spiritual-ecological expression of agrarian culture, now standing on the brink of extinction, is the *Pakeong* rain-calling ritual in the Banyumas region of Central Java (Wardianto, 2026).

In Indonesia, the search for deep environmental ethics often finds expression through the revitalization of the local wisdom of indigenous and agrarian communities. Various traditional communities throughout the Nusantara possess ecological knowledge systems that have been inherited across generations in order to preserve the balance between humanity and nature. Such knowledge is known as *Traditional Ecological Knowledge*, namely local knowledge that emerges from the long-standing experiences of communities in interacting with their natural environment. According to Fikret Berkes, *Traditional Ecological Knowledge* constitutes a body of knowledge, practices, and beliefs that develops through the adaptive processes of communities toward their environment and is transmitted intergenerationally. Within the context of Indonesian agrarian



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societies, this knowledge is not merely practical in nature but also embodies strong spiritual and moral dimensions.

This concept aligns with ecotheological studies that position nature as a sacred part of God's creation. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the modern environmental crisis occurs because humanity has separated the spiritual dimension from its relationship with nature. Nasr emphasizes that nature constitutes *ayat-ayat kauniyah*, or signs of God's greatness, which must be respected and protected. From the perspective of ecotheology, human beings are not the absolute owners of nature, but rather *khalifah* entrusted with the ethical responsibility of maintaining ecological balance. Meanwhile, Leonardo Boff explains that ecotheology emphasizes the interconnected relationship between God, humanity, and the earth as a single community of life. Thus, environmental preservation is understood not merely as an ecological act, but also as a manifestation of spirituality and moral responsibility.

Within the context of Javanese culture, these ecotheological values are reflected in the philosophy of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono*, which teaches humanity's obligation to preserve worldly harmony and beautify universal life. This philosophy positions human beings as an integral part of the cosmos, such that relationships with nature must be grounded in respect, balance, and moral responsibility. These values are manifested in various agrarian rituals of Javanese society, including *sedekah bumi*, *wiwitan*, *bersih desa*, and rain-calling rituals. Such rituals function as cultural mechanisms for maintaining harmonious relations between humanity, nature, and transcendent forces.

One particularly distinctive form of agrarian spiritual-ecological expression is the *Pakeong* ritual in the Banyumas region of Central Java. This ritual constitutes a rain-calling tradition performed by local communities during prolonged dry seasons or threats of drought. The designation "Pak Keong" derives from the symbol of the rice-field snail (*keong sawah*), which in agrarian cosmology is regarded as a bioindicator of fertility and ecological balance within rice-field ecosystems. The ritual integrates elements of mantra, dance, traditional music, natural symbolism, and Javanese Islamic spirituality (*Islam Kejawen*). From the perspective of Arne Naess's Deep Ecology, the *Pakeong* ritual reflects the principle of biospherical egalitarianism, namely the view that all elements of life possess equal intrinsic value within the ecosystem.

akeong is a traditional rain-invoking ritual that uniquely combines the phenological sensitivity of nature with the inward spiritual rites of the agrarian communities living on the slopes of Mount Slamet (Wardianto, 2026). Unlike other rain-calling rituals such as *Cowongan*, which utilizes a *siwur* doll (a coconut-shell dipper) (Hardiyanti & Kurnia, 2025; Supriyanto, 2023), *Pakeong* is grounded in the personification of the earth as *Biyung* (Mother) and the sky as *Rama* (Father). When the prolonged dry season (*Mangsa Katiga*) occurs, the cracked soil is interpreted as the tears of *Biyung*, longing for the outpouring of *Rama's* affection in the form of rain.

Epistemologically, the designation "Pakeong," which employs the honorific title *Pak* for the rice-field snail (*Pila ampullacea*), constitutes an ontological statement that deconstructs the



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hierarchical boundaries between species. The snail is not positioned merely as a pest or a worthless mollusk, but rather as a subject of agency possessing climatological authority and knowledge (Wardianto, 2026).

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the relationship between nature and the *Pakeong* ritual in Banyumas through the lens of ecotheology (Wardianto, 2026). The study examines the structure of the ritual procession, interprets the multiple layers of symbolism embedded within the sixteen forms of *sesajen* (*ubo rampe*), hermeneutically analyzes the mantra verses, and reconstructs the relevance of *Pakeong*'s environmental ethics in the face of the threats posed by modernization and the contemporary global climate crisis (Wardianto, 2026; Ricoeur, 1981; Sudarto, 2022).

Research Methode

Pakeong is a traditional rain-invoking ceremony that uniquely integrates the phenological sensitivity of nature with the inward rituals of the agrarian communities living on the slopes of Mount Slamet (Wardianto, 2026). Unlike other rain-calling rituals such as *Cowongan*, which employs a *siwur* doll (a coconut-shell dipper) (Hardiyanti & Kurnia, 2025; Supriyanto, 2023), *Pakeong* is grounded in the personification of the earth as *Biyung* (Mother) and the sky as *Rama* (Father). When the prolonged dry season (*Mangsa Katiga*) occurs, the cracked earth is interpreted as the tears of *Biyung*, longing for the outpouring of *Rama*'s affection in the form of rain.

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1. Participant Observation: The researcher directly observed the daily activities of the subjects as farmer-cultural practitioners, the preparation process of *ubarampé*, creative dance rehearsals at Sanggar Nawangsari, as well as the reconstruction of the *Pakeong* ritual movements and procession (Wardianto, 2026).
2. In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted repeatedly with Kaki Tasun throughout January 2026 to explore oral history, the genealogy of spiritual



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inheritance, the esoteric meanings of the mantras, and the philosophy of *Biyung Rama* (Wardianto, 2026).

3. Documentation Study: The researcher analyzed handwritten copies of mantra texts personally owned by Kaki Tasun, cultural field notes concerning Banyumas traditions, administrative documents of Sanggar Nawangsari, and secondary literature consisting of accredited scientific journals and books on ecotheology (Wardianto, 2026; Brontowiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis and symbolic hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1981; Setyaji, 2023). The researcher employed data triangulation to verify the validity of information before drawing theoretical conclusions that integrated the field data with the conceptual frameworks of Javanese Islamic ecotheology (*Islam Kejawen*), Arne Naess's Deep Ecology, and the metaphysics of Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Wardianto, 2026; Ricklefs, 2006; Ricoeur, 1981).

Result and Discussion

General Overview and the Socio-Agrarian Conditions of Banyumas Society

Geographically, Banyumas Regency occupies a strategic position in the southwestern part of Central Java Province, flanked by the North Serayu Mountain Range with Mount Slamet (3,428 meters above sea level) as its highest peak in the north, and bordered by the Indian Ocean in the south (Wardianto, 2026). This topographical structure creates a hydrological network of rivers flowing into the agricultural valleys below, rendering water availability a determining factor for the sociological survival of the local communities (Wardianto, 2026). Administratively, Banyumas directly borders Cilacap Regency to the south, Banjarnegara to the east, Purbalingga to the northeast, and Brebes and Tegal to the northwest (Wardianto, 2026).

Historically, Banyumas constituted a cultural crossroads between two major civilizations of the Nusantara, namely the Javanese and Sundanese civilizations (Wardianto, 2026). Historical genealogy records that this relationship began during the era of the Majapahit Kingdom, when Raden Baribin (the younger brother of Prabu Brawijaya IV) married a princess from the Pajajaran Kingdom. This cultural intersection gave rise to an autonomous Banyumasan identity that was neither fully oriented toward the northern coastal traditions nor toward the feudal interiority of Javanese court culture. In 1582, Adipati Mrapat (Joko Kaiman) divided the territory of Wirasaba into four regions (Banjar Pertambakan, Merden, Wirasaba, and Kejawar), among which the Kejawar region later developed into the forerunner of Banyumas Regency under the influence of the Mataram Sultanate.



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The Islamization process that unfolded in Banyumas did not eradicate the layers of pre-Islamic culture. On the contrary, a harmonious acculturation emerged, referred to by Ricklefs (2006) as *mystic synthesis*: a dynamic fusion in which Islamic identity coexisted alongside spiritual practices and reverence toward local cosmic entities (Wardianto, 2026; Ricklefs, 2006; Ricklefs, 2008). This religious character is reflected in the *Panginyongan* culture, which linguistically employs the first-person pronoun *inyong*. This linguistic choice reflects an egalitarian attitude that rejects the hierarchical feudal structure of the royal courts (*krama inggil*). The principle of egalitarianism also shapes communal decision-making mechanisms; the implementation of *Pakeong* is never driven by unilateral commands from authorities, but rather begins with a *kumpulan* (a deliberative community assembly), in which all ritual expenses are collectively borne through voluntary mutual contributions (*patungan*) (Wardianto, 2026).



Documentation of *Pakeong* Ritual
(Wardianto, 2026)

The primary function of the *Pakeong* ritual is as a spiritual technology for invoking rain when communal food security is threatened by extreme prolonged drought. According to oral history, the ritual has been inherited through a highly rigorous line of spiritual succession. Kaki Tasun inherited this tradition at the age of thirteen (around 1975) during the New Order era. Interestingly, there are two intertwined oral genealogical lineages preserved within the family's collective memory:

1. Spiritual Genealogy (*Garis Kebatinan*): Jaya Gothang → Nini Lestari → Kaki Tawin & Nini Dawen → several intermediary generations → Kaki Tasun's elder sibling → Kaki Tasun.
2. Pamong Genealogy (*Garis Biologis-Struktural*): Karyasemita (great-grandparent) → Rajimin (grandfather, village official) → Sukaji (father, village official and farmer) → Kaki Tasun

These two genealogical lineages demonstrate that *Pakeong* integrates the cultural authority of agrarian *pamong* leadership with inward spiritual qualifications that are trans-gender in nature, involving female spiritual figures such as Nini Lestari and Nini Dawen.



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Technically, the structure of the *Pakeong* ritual procession centers upon the movement of a sacred *beruk* (a green coconut shell) filled with fragments of patterned ceramics, ancient metal coins, and thirty-nine varieties of *sambetan* materials. The *beruk* is shaken up and down by three principal performers above the embers of white incense ignited by the *dukun*. This rhythmic movement is accompanied by the communal chanting of the *Pakeong* mantra verses without the accompaniment of gamelan musical instruments.

The following are the complete mantra verses in the ancient Banyumas dialect of Javanese along with their semantic translation:

Sulasih-sulasih, Sulandono

Menyan putih ngundang dewa

Ana dewa ndaning sukma, widadari temurunan

Runtun-runtun jejer sanga mburimu kari lima

Aja suwe-suwe ndalan, padha dolan latar amba

Nini Riwuk mbok keru jogedan

Nini Juplem mbok keru entreg-entregan

Ana manuk sewiya-wiya

Turun-turun, widadari temurunan

Nemu kembang neng ayunan

Kembange si Jaya Endra

Kamijara, Kopi Rayun

Manjinge Nini Riwuk

Sapa bisa sing ngemban-ngemban aku

Aku kiye sing ngguling-ngguling kembang

Sagodrag-godrag luar

Selatar-latar luluh-luluh lunthang

Andul antheke anu landung ndung

Segodrag-godrag ndung

Pakeong-pakeong patang puluh kurang siji

Segondal-segandil jagone masang kori

Sapa bisa sing ngemban-ngemban aku

Aku kiye sing ngguling-ngguling kembang

Sagodrag-godrag luar

Selatar-latar luluh-luluh lunthang



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Andul antheK anu landung ndung

Segodrag-godrag ndung (Wardianto, 2026)

Translation of the *Pakeong* Mantra Verses into Indonesian Language:

Sulasih-sulasih, Sulandana (perlambangan dewi). / Kemenyan putih mengundang dewa. / Ada dewa menjelma sukma, bidadari turun. / Beriring-iringan sejajar sembilan, di belakangmu tinggal lima. / Jangan lama-lama di jalan, mari bermain di halaman luas. / Nenek Riwuk takut ketinggalan menari. / Nenek Juplem takut ketinggalan menari bersama. / Ada burung sewiya-wiya. / Turun-turunlah, bidadari turunlah. / Menemukan bunga di ayunan. / Bunganya milik si Jaya Endra. / Kamijara, Kopi Rayun. / Masuknya Nenek Riwuk. / Siapa yang bisa menggendong aku? / Aku ini yang mengguling-gulingkan bunga. / Melompat-lompat di luar. / Di luar halaman menghentak-hentak lumpang. / Andul antheK anu landung ndung (bunyi suara lumpang). / Segodrag-godrag ndung (bunyi suara lumpang). / Pakeong-pakeong empat puluh kurang satu (39). / Menggantung dan bergoyang, jagonya memasang pintu. / Siapa yang bisa menggendong aku? / Aku ini yang mengguling-gulingkan bunga. / Melompat-lompat di luar. / Di luar halaman menghentak-hentak lumpang. / Andul antheK anu landung ndung (bunyi suara lumpang). / Segodrag-godrag ndung (bunyi suara lumpang).

The *Pakeong* mantra verses contain highly significant symbolic, religious, and cultural elements within the traditions of Javanese society. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, a mantra is not merely a sequence of ordinary words, but rather a medium of symbolic communication between human beings and the spiritual world. This perspective aligns with Clifford Geertz's view that culture constitutes a system of symbols through which humans construct meaning in life (Geertz, 1973). In the verses "*Sulasih-sulasih, Sulandana*" and "*kemenyan putih mengundang dewa*," one can observe symbolic invocations of supernatural forces through sacred elements such as incense and references to deities or celestial maidens. These symbols reflect the community's belief in the interconnected relationship between the human realm and the unseen world.

Furthermore, the presence of figures such as "*Nenek Riwuk*" and "*Nenek Juplem*" reflects the transmission of oral traditions from older generations to younger ones. In Alan Dundes's theory of folklore, oral tradition functions as a medium of cultural education, entertainment, and the transmission of social values within society (Dundes, 1980). Through the repetition of sounds, rhythms, and character names within the mantra, the community not only preserves traditional entertainment but also safeguards its local cultural identity amidst the transformations of modernity.

Sound expressions such as "*Andul antheK anu landung ndung*" and "*Segodrag-godrag ndung*" demonstrate the element of musicality within the mantra. In cultural semiotic studies, such sounds may be understood as forms of onomatopoeia or imitations of the sounds produced by the *lumpang* (wooden mortar), employed to intensify the ritual atmosphere. According to Roland



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Barthes, symbols and sounds within a tradition possess connotative meanings that construct the emotional experiences of society (Barthes, 1972). The striking sounds of the *lumpang* in the *Pakeong* mantra are therefore not merely auditory phenomena, but symbols of togetherness, the rhythm of agrarian life, and magical forces believed to invoke particular spiritual energies.

The depiction of celestial maidens descending, playing, gazing into mirrors, and moving from place to place may also be analyzed through Mircea Eliade's theory of myth, which explains that myths and rituals constitute humanity's effort to reintroduce the sacred world into everyday life (Eliade, 1959). Within these verses, the celestial maidens symbolize purity, beauty, and supernatural power manifested through ritual performances and mantras. Their presence carries not only religious significance but also reflects the community's aspirations for safety, blessing, and harmonious living.

On the other hand, the playful and performative elements embedded within the *Pakeong* mantra indicate that traditional Javanese rituals frequently integrate spirituality with forms of collective entertainment. This observation corresponds to Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist theory, which posits that every cultural element fulfills a particular function within society (Malinowski, 1948). The *Pakeong* mantra functions as a medium of social solidarity, popular entertainment, and a means of reinforcing collective belief in traditional and spiritual values inherited across generations.

The Cosmology of *Biyung Rama* and Cosmic Relations

Javanese agrarian cosmology conceptualizes the universe through the harmonious polarity of masculine and feminine dualities: the sky as *Rama* and the earth as *Biyung*. The relationship between the two is understood as a productive bond of love that gives birth to agricultural prosperity. Drought is interpreted as a condition in which *Biyung Bumi* suffers from affliction, symbolized by cracked and dust-covered soil.

Human beings do not position themselves as neutral observers standing outside this crisis; rather, they are regarded as ethical agents responsible for mediating the reunification of the masculine element (the outpouring of rain from the sky/*Rama*) with the feminine element (the womb of the earth/*Biyung*). The metaphorical language embedded within the mantra portrays the earth and the human body as a profoundly intimate unity (Badrudin, 2014).

Agricultural activities and these inward ritual practices are precisely guided by the traditional ecological calendar known as *Pranata Mangsa* (Badrudin, 2014). This calendrical system divides the annual cycle into twelve *mangsa* based on the physical and biological signs of nature (Badrudin, 2014).



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No	Mangsa Name	Days	Traditional Time Range	Description of Ecological–Phenological Signs	Implications for the Banyumas Agricultural Cycle
1	Kasa	41	22 June – 1 August	Trees shed their leaves; the soil begins to dry after the main harvest season.	Farmers burn leftover rice straw and prepare the land for secondary crops (<i>palawija gadu</i>).
2	Karo	23	2 August – 24 August	The soil begins to crack (<i>nela</i>); kapok trees sprout, and mango trees start flowering	Water becomes increasingly scarce; farmers search for springs (<i>belik</i>) or wells to irrigate secondary crops.
3	Katelu	24	25 August – 17 September	Peak drought season (<i>paceklik memuncak</i>); wells dry up and dusty winds intensify.	The principal period for conducting the <i>Pakeong</i> ritual due to the absence of water supplies.



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4	Kapat	25	18 September – 12 Oktober	Transitional season (<i>labuh</i>); <i>kepel</i> trees bloom and sparrows begin nesting.	Preparation for upland rice (<i>padi gaga</i>) seedbeds; irrigation channels begin to be cleaned.
5	Kalima	27	13 October – 8 November	Rain begins to fall irregularly (<i>labuh</i>); reptiles and caterpillars emerge from their nests.	Farmers joyfully prepare the main rice fields and begin sowing upland rice seeds.
6	Kanem	43	9 November – 21 Desember	Rainfall becomes widespread, accompanied by strong thunder; mangoes and durians begin ripening.	The main rice planting season commences; rice seedlings are cultivated on a large scale.



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7	Kapitu	43	22 December – 2 February	Extremely heavy rainfall and strong winds; rivers overflow, causing floods.	Rice transplantation (<i>tandur</i>) takes place, and damaged embankments are repaired after flooding.
8	Kawolu	26	3 Februar – 28 February	Rainfall begins to decrease; cats mate and <i>garengpung</i> insects proliferate.	Rice maintenance activities include weeding (<i>matun</i>), soil loosening, and fertilization.
9	Kasanga	25	1 Maret – 25 March	The rainy season ends; rice grains begin filling and turning yellow.	Farmers install scarecrows (<i>memedi sawah</i>) to repel bird pests.
10	Kasapuluh	24	26 Maret – 18 April	Transition from rainy season to dry season (<i>mareng</i>); cattle and buffaloes become pregnant.	Rice turns yellow and is ready for harvest; farmers focus on drying harvested grain.
11	Dhesta	23	19 April – 11 May	Weaver birds (<i>burung manyar</i>) feed their chicks; upland rice harvest concludes.	Peak rice harvest season ends; root crops in dry fields are harvested.



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12	Sadha	41	12 May – 21 June	The onset of the dry season (<i>bedhidhing</i>); mornings become extremely cold.	Dried rice grains are stored in granaries; the land is left to rest before secondary crop cultivation.
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The rice-field snail (*Pila ampullacea*) occupies a distinctive position within this structure of cosmic relations. For traditional farmers, the snail functions as one of the most precise natural bioindicators. During the peak of the dry season in *Mangsa Katiga*, the snails bury themselves within the dry mud and tightly seal the openings of their shells in order to survive. Conversely, when soil humidity gradually increases as a sign of approaching rainfall, the snails reopen their shells and slowly emerge to the surface (Wardianto, 2026).

The biological capacity of snail estivation is interpreted by the agrarian society of Banyumas not merely as an animal instinct for survival, but rather as an active agency that conveys cosmic signals from *Biyung* to *Rama*. The disappearance of snails from the rice fields is understood as an empirical indication that ecological balance has been disrupted and has reached a critical state of emergency, thereby necessitating human spiritual intervention through the *Pakeong* ritual (Wardianto, 2026).

The Ecotheological Dimension in the *Pakeong* Ritual

The ecotheological perspective embedded within *Pakeong* reflects an ecocentric consciousness that perceives the universe as a sacred subject of God's creation possessing intrinsic moral dignity, rather than merely an exploitative commodity (Brontowiyono, 2019; Nabillah & Yusuf, 2025). The principle of cosmic harmony between the microcosm and macrocosm in Javanese philosophy converges profoundly with the biocentric ethics of Arne Naess's Deep Ecology (Naess, 2017; Noorzeha & Lasiyo, 2023). Within this worldview, ecological harmony is understood as a dynamic interactive equilibrium between the life-force of *Biyung Bumi* (ecological carrying capacity and soil moisture) and the rainfall descending from *Rama Langit* (precipitation and atmospheric energy) (Wardianto, 2026). This cosmic balance is continuously threatened by anthropogenic pressures in the form of human egoism and exploitative modern practices, such as excessive land exploitation, chemical pollution, and uncontrolled industrial mechanization (Lako, 2018).



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The ecotheological dimension of the *Pakeong* ritual may also be understood as a manifestation of the community's religious consciousness regarding the sacred relationship between humanity, nature, and God. The ritual functions not merely as a cultural tradition, but also as a spiritual medium for preserving ecological balance. Within this context, nature is not viewed as an object that may be freely exploited, but rather as part of a cosmic order that must be respected and sustained. This perspective aligns with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ecotheological theory, which emphasizes that environmental crises emerge because humanity has lost the sacred dimension of nature. Nasr explains that nature constitutes a manifestation of divine signs (*ayat kauniyah*), thereby placing upon humanity a moral and spiritual responsibility to preserve its balance.



The Ritual Recitation of the *Pakeong* Mantra
(Wardianto, 2026)

Within the *Pakeong* ritual, the ecotheological dimension is expressed through the use of natural symbols such as flowers, *lumpang* (wooden mortars), soil, striking sounds, chickens, spinach plants, and celestial maidens, all of which represent the interconnectedness between humanity and the agrarian ecosystem. The presence of the elements “*Biyung Bumi*” and “*Rama Langit*” reflects a cosmological belief that soil fertility and rainfall arise from the harmony between the powers of earth and sky. This phenomenon may be analyzed through Arne Naess's theory of Deep Ecology, which is characterized by several principal indicators, namely *biospheric egalitarianism* (the equality of all living beings), the *ecological self*, and *self-realization* (the awareness that humans are integral parts of the ecosystem). In the *Pakeong* ritual, the principle of *biospheric egalitarianism* is evident in the community's reverence toward natural elements as entities possessing intrinsic value, rather than merely instruments for fulfilling human needs. Nature is positioned as a spiritual partner whose balance must be maintained through collective ritual practices.

The indicator of the *ecological self* is reflected in the collective participation of the community in rituals that integrate social, spiritual, and ecological activities. The *Pakeong* ritual is conducted not solely for individual interests, but for the protection of the environment and the



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sustainability of agrarian communal life. The striking sounds of the *lumpang* and the repetitive chanting of mantras symbolize collective communication between humanity and nature. From an ecotheological perspective, these actions demonstrate the community's ecological consciousness that environmental destruction will directly affect human life. Consequently, the ritual functions as a medium for constructing an ethical relationship between humanity and the natural environment.

Furthermore, the ecotheological dimension of *Pakeong* may also be analyzed through Thomas Berry's theory of spiritual ecology, which emphasizes that nature constitutes a sacred community (*sacred community*). Berry explains that humanity must live within a relationship of mutual respect with the earth as a "community of life." Within the *Pakeong* ritual, reverence toward the earth is reflected through the symbolization of fertility, rainfall, vegetation, and ritual supplications for natural balance. The ritual conveys a moral message that human survival is profoundly dependent upon environmental sustainability. Thus, the *Pakeong* ritual is not merely a traditional cultural practice, but also a form of ecological conservation grounded in local spirituality.

The specific findings regarding the ecotheological dimensions of the *Pakeong* ritual may be identified in three principal aspects:

1. The cosmological aspect, namely the community's belief in the harmonious relationship between humanity, nature, and transcendent forces.
2. The ethical-ecological aspect, namely the existence of values emphasizing respect for nature as God's creation that must be preserved and protected.
3. The socio-spiritual aspect, namely the ritual's function in strengthening communal solidarity in maintaining shared environmental balance.

These three aspects demonstrate that the *Pakeong* ritual embodies ecotheological values that remain highly relevant to the contemporary environmental crisis, insofar as spirituality is positioned as the foundation of ecological consciousness within society.

When exploitative anthropocentric actions intensify as a result of human greed and egoism, the harmonious interaction between earth and sky becomes drastically disrupted, resulting in an extreme deficit of cosmic balance (Lako, 2018). At this critical juncture, drought emerges, and the *Pakeong* ritual is performed as a communal-spiritual technology intended to restrain human greed through *puasa tirakat*, restore inward orientation toward theocentrism, and reunite the life-forces of *Biyung* and *Rama* (Wardianto, 2026; Nasr, 1993).

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Components of *Sesajen* (*Ubo Rampe*)
(Wadianto, 2026)

The richest integration of these agrarian spiritual-ecological values is manifested in the use of sixteen types of *sesajen (ubo rampe)*. Contrary to conservative assumptions that regard offerings merely as forms of idolatrous sacrifice, within the ecotheology of *Islam Kejawen*, *sesaji* functions as a symbolic codification of environmental conservation ethics and ecological almsgiving (*sedekah ekologis*) (Sudarto, 2022; Supriyanto, 2023).

No	Nama Sesajen (Ubo Rampe)	Ecological Components	Ecotheological–Philosophical Interpretation and Symbolic Meaning
1	Rakan Sajen	Various complete traditional delicacies	Symbolizes the wholeness and interconnected completeness of the universe.
2	Sajen Garing	Preserved dried food ingredients	Represents the physical earth from which humans derive their worldly sustenance (<i>madya pada</i>).



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3	Nasi dan Lauk-Pauk	Branches from selected local trees	Represents the physical earth from which humans derive their worldly sustenance (<i>madya pada</i>).
4	Potongan Pohon	Branches from selected local trees	Symbolizes forest protection (<i>leuweung</i>) and the ethical prohibition against indiscriminate tree-cutting.
5	Beragam Jenis Bunga	Roses, jasmine, <i>kantil</i> flowers	Symbolizes moral fragrance and the refinement of inner sensibility (<i>olahraga rasa</i>) among agrarian communities.
6	Beragam Jenis Daun	Banyan leaves, moringa leaves, <i>dadap</i> leaves	Represents biodiversity as a remedy for both the physical and spiritual ailments of the earth.
7	Pala Teles / Sawiring	Watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumber	Water-rich creeping plants symbolizing the hope for the arrival of cooling water upon dry land.
8	Pala Gantung	Papaya, banana, coconut	Agricultural products hanging above the ground; symbols of vertical spiritual relations with <i>Rama Langit</i> .
9	Pala Pendem	Cassava, sweet potato, taro, <i>gembili</i>	Crops embedded within the soil; symbols of humility (<i>asor</i>) and unity with <i>Biyung Bumi</i> .
10	Sambetan	39 varieties of seeds, roof-tile fragments, ancient coins	Symbolizes the complexity of natural elements that remain incomplete without the presence of rainfall.

(Table of *Sesajen* Component)



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Pakeong teaches ecocentric consciousness through the concrete practice of communal *gotong royong* in preparing the *sesaji*, whose materials are sustainably obtained from household gardens and local forests without damaging the ecosystem (Warda & Rahardjanto, 2026). Every remaining organic component of the offerings is returned to the rice fields after the ritual as organic fertilizer, constituting a tangible form of mutualistic symbiosis between human beings and their environment (Warda & Rahardjanto, 2026).

The spiritual discipline practiced by the *dukun* in the form of *puasa Ngebleng*, secluding oneself in a sacred chamber without light and abstaining from food and drink for at least one full day, symbolizes the renunciation of human material desires so that the inner self may attain a state of *suwung* (emptiness from ego) (Wardianto, 2026). Only within such a purified and lucid inward condition can human beings become sincere cosmic mediators in supplicating for divine rainfall from Allah SWT (Supriyanto, 2023).

The *Pakeong* mantra verses contain highly significant symbolic, religious, and cultural elements within the traditions of Javanese society. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, a mantra is not merely a sequence of ordinary words, but rather a medium of symbolic communication between human beings and the spiritual world. This perspective aligns with Clifford Geertz's view that culture constitutes a system of symbols through which humans construct meaning in life. In the verses "*Sulasih-sulasih, Sulandana*" and "*kemenyan putih mengundang dewa,*" one can observe symbolic invocations of supernatural forces through sacred elements such as incense and references to deities or celestial maidens. These symbols reflect the community's belief in the interconnected relationship between the human realm and the unseen world.

Furthermore, the presence of figures such as "*Nenek Riwuk*" and "*Nenek Juplem*" reflects the transmission of oral traditions from older generations to younger ones. In Alan Dundes's theory of folklore, oral tradition functions as a medium of cultural education, entertainment, and the transmission of social values within society. Through the repetition of sounds, rhythms, and character names within the mantra, the community not only preserves traditional entertainment but also safeguards its local cultural identity amidst the transformations of modernity.

Sound expressions such as "*Andul antheke anu landung ndung*" and "*Segodrag-godrag ndung*" demonstrate the element of musicality within the mantra. In cultural semiotic studies, such sounds may be understood as forms of onomatopoeia or imitations of the sounds produced by the *lumpang* (wooden mortar), employed to intensify the ritual atmosphere. According to Roland Barthes, symbols and sounds within a tradition possess connotative meanings that construct the emotional experiences of society. The striking sounds of the *lumpang* in the *Pakeong* mantra are therefore not merely auditory phenomena, but symbols of togetherness, the rhythm of agrarian life, and magical forces believed to invoke particular spiritual energies.

The depiction of celestial maidens descending, playing, gazing into mirrors, and moving from place to place may also be analyzed through Mircea Eliade's theory of myth, which explains



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that myths and rituals constitute humanity's effort to reintroduce the sacred world into everyday life. Within these verses, the celestial maidens symbolize purity, beauty, and supernatural power manifested through ritual performances and mantras. Their presence carries not only religious significance but also reflects the community's aspirations for safety, blessing, and harmonious living.

On the other hand, the playful and performative elements embedded within the *Pakeong* mantra indicate that traditional Javanese rituals frequently integrate spirituality with forms of collective entertainment. This observation corresponds to Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist theory, which posits that every cultural element fulfills a particular function within society. The *Pakeong* mantra functions as a medium of social solidarity, popular entertainment, and a means of reinforcing collective belief in traditional and spiritual values inherited across generations.

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Challenges in the Contemporary Era

Amidst the pressures of modernization, the *Pakeong* ritual is also confronted by a crisis of regeneration due to the stringent inward selection process required for inheritors of the tradition through the mechanism of *titis*. The requirements of *titis* have created a significant divide with the interests of rural Generation Z, who are currently experiencing cultural disorientation as a result of exposure to digital technology and urban migration to major cities (Brontowiyono, 2019; Yuwono et al., 2025). Most young people in Kembaran and Sumbang regard *Pakeong* as an irrational and outdated superstitious practice.

In response to the threat of extinction, Kaki Tasun has pursued a dynamic path of cultural adaptation through Sanggar Nawangsari. The transformation of the *Pakeong* ritual into a form of creative dance performance represents an effort to reconstruct its meaning so that this body of agrarian ecological wisdom may enter the sphere of aesthetic appreciation among modern generations (Rumbiak, 2017). The *Pakeong* creative dance, which achieved second runner-up recognition at the Natculture Festival 2025, demonstrates that environmental consciousness can be effectively communicated through the language of folk performing arts without sacrificing the profound essence of its spirituality.

Amid the increasingly powerful currents of modernization and digitalization, the *Pakeong* ritual not only faces the threat of cultural regeneration crisis but also risks losing its ecological function within agrarian society. The fading interest of younger generations in traditional rituals indicates the simultaneous occurrence of ecological and spiritual disorientation. From the perspective of Anthony Giddens, modernization produces a process of *disembedding*, namely the detachment of human beings from the roots of tradition and local cultural spaces due to the dominance of modern systems and globalization (Giddens, 1990). This phenomenon is evident among rural Generation Z, who are more closely connected to digital culture than to traditional ecological knowledge transmitted through rituals such as *Pakeong*. Consequently, the human relationship with nature, previously cultivated through symbols, rituals, and spirituality, is



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gradually replaced by consumptive and pragmatic lifestyles.

If this condition persists, society may experience a crisis of cultural ecology, namely the disappearance of local knowledge concerning the preservation of environmental balance. The *Pakeong* ritual embodies ecological values such as reverence toward soil, water, rainfall, seasonal cycles, and the cosmic harmony between humanity and nature. When such rituals are abandoned, it is not merely the tradition itself that disappears, but also the ecological knowledge system of agrarian communities that has long functioned as the foundation of local environmental ethics. This observation resonates with Fritjof Capra's theory of *ecological wisdom*, which emphasizes that traditional societies possess ecological knowledge grounded in lived experience that serves to sustain ecosystem continuity (Capra, 1996). The disappearance of local wisdom will accelerate the emergence of exploitative attitudes toward the environment because human beings will no longer perceive nature as an integral dimension of spiritual life.

Predictions concerning future ecological crises may also be observed through the declining sensitivity of society toward environmental change. Traditions such as *Pakeong* essentially function as collective ecological learning media that cultivate awareness regarding the importance of environmental balance. When such rituals disappear, younger generations will become increasingly detached from ecological values rooted in local culture and more dependent upon the logic of industrialization and modern technology. In Ulrich Beck's theory of the *risk society*, modernity generates new ecological risks such as environmental degradation, climate change, water crises, and the erosion of ecological social solidarity (Beck, 1992). The disappearance of traditional agrarian rituals such as *Pakeong* may accelerate the emergence of ecological alienation, namely a condition in which human beings no longer maintain emotional or spiritual relationships with the natural world surrounding them.

Nevertheless, the transformation of *Pakeong* into a creative dance performance through Sanggar Nawangsari demonstrates an important strategy of cultural adaptation within the context of preserving local traditions. This process may be analyzed through Clifford Geertz's theory of *cultural adaptation*, which explains that culture survives when it is capable of reinterpreting symbols in accordance with contemporary contexts without losing its essential meaning (Geertz, 1973). The transformation of ritual into performing art is therefore not merely an attempt at cultural aestheticization, but rather a strategy for transmitting ecological values to modern generations through a medium that is more readily accepted. In this context, the *Pakeong* creative dance functions as a bridge between traditional spirituality and the cultural sensibilities of the digital generation.

Nevertheless, substantial challenges remain within this process of transformation. When the ritual is excessively directed toward becoming merely an artistic spectacle, there exists the risk of cultural desacralization, namely the loss of the spiritual and ecological meanings embedded within the original ritual. Therefore, the preservation of *Pakeong* cannot rely solely upon cultural festivals or artistic performances, but must also involve the revitalization of its philosophical and



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ecological values through public education. If preservation efforts are confined only to the visual dimension of performance, the tradition may continue to survive physically while losing its ecological spirit.

Conclusion

The theological and ecological study of the *Pakeong* ritual in Banyumas demonstrates that local agrarian belief systems possess strong epistemological capacity to respond to contemporary environmental crises. Through the cosmology of *Biyung Bumi* and *Rama Langit*, nature is understood not as an object of exploitation, but as a sacred part of God's creation possessing intrinsic moral value. Human beings are therefore positioned as guardians of ecological harmony rather than absolute rulers over nature. This worldview aligns with Arne Naess's concept of Deep Ecology, particularly the principle of *biospherical egalitarianism*, which emphasizes the equality of all forms of life within the ecosystem.

The ecotheological dimension of *Pakeong* is reflected in the spiritual synthesis between *Islam Kejawen* and reverence toward natural entities and agrarian symbols such as Dewi Sulasih, celestial maidens, flowers, and *lumpang*. In Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perspective, nature represents a divine *theophany* (*tajalli*) that manifests the signs of Allah SWT and must therefore be respected and preserved. Consequently, *Pakeong* should not merely be understood as a cultural or mystical practice, but rather as an ecological ethical system rooted in the spirituality of Banyumas agrarian society.

The ritual also contributes to the formation of collective ecological consciousness by transmitting values of respect toward land, water, seasons, plants, and environmental balance across generations. Through communal participation, *Pakeong* strengthens social solidarity while reinforcing awareness that environmental destruction directly threatens human survival. At the same time, the ritual functions symbolically to preserve the cultural identity of Banyumas society and maintain its connection with its spiritual and ecological roots.

The principal findings of this study reveal three major ecotheological dimensions within the *Pakeong* ritual: (1) the cosmological dimension, concerning the sacred relationship between humanity, nature, and transcendent forces; (2) the ethical-ecological dimension, concerning the moral obligation to preserve environmental balance as part of devotion to God's creation; and (3) the socio-cultural dimension, through which the ritual strengthens agrarian solidarity and transmits local ecological wisdom. These findings confirm that traditional local knowledge systems remain highly relevant in addressing the challenges of the modern environmental crisis.

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