

## The Meaning of the Dudu Meja Tradition in the Land of Kings: A Geographical Study

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### Abstract

*The Dudu Meja tradition in Wakal Village is a cultural practice rooted in local customs, aiming to unite all female descendants of the Nakul clan to strengthen family bonds and pass down genealogy to future generations. This study examines: (1) The geographical analysis of the tradition's implementation, (2) Its meaning for the people of Wakal, and (3) The values it holds for the community. A descriptive qualitative method with Spradley's ethnographic approach was used, involving domain, taxonomic, componential, and cultural theme analysis. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Key informants included the village head, the head of craftsmen, and traditional elders, while supporting informants were community members who practice the tradition. The findings reveal: (1) The geographical aspects of the tradition are shaped by the surrounding socio-cultural conditions. (2) Its meanings for the community include honoring ancestors, expressing gratitude, strengthening social ties, and preserving cultural heritage. (3) The tradition's values include cultural values honoring ancestors, preserving heritage, and safeguarding heirlooms; social values family bonds, mutual cooperation, respect, responsibility, and consensus-building; and religious values collective prayers as an expression of gratitude and seeking Allah SWT's blessings for a smooth implementation.*

## Introduction

Traditions play a crucial role in shaping societal identity and culture. They not only reflect the history and values embraced by a community but also serve to strengthen inter-individual and inter-generational relationships (Yusepa et al., 2022). Over time, traditions evolve, adapting to the progress of human civilization. Consequently, traditions once rigid and bound by strict rules are now undergoing adaptation to rapid social dynamics and technological advancements. While inevitable, these changes pose significant challenges to preserving traditions, ensuring their continued relevance and transmission to future generations (Wattimena & Latuihamallo, 2024).

Indonesia boasts a rich diversity of local cultures and traditions, with each region possessing unique and vital traditions that warrant preservation. One such example is the Dudu meja tradition, observed in Wakal Village, Leihitu District, Maluku. This customary tradition holds profound meaning in the lives of the local community. Despite its continued practice, numerous changes have occurred in its execution, affecting aspects such as location, equipment, and participants' attire. These shifts indicate the influence of modernization and globalization on the community's perspective, particularly among the younger generation, towards this tradition. The Dudu meja tradition, formerly performed with participants sharing meals on mats or ilel, now utilizes long tables. Furthermore, women serving as mahina ulu (female elders/leaders)

now wear modern kebaya, a departure from the simple traditional attire worn in the past (Al Fiqriansyah et al., 2025; Chua et al., 2019).

The "Dudu meja" tradition is more than just a communal feast, it's a significant cultural practice that includes the recitation of family genealogies. This act serves to remind each family member of their origins and the importance of maintaining kinship ties. The ceremony is enlivened by reciprocal pantun (traditional Malay poetic verses) exchanges between the mahina ulu (male descendants) and upu ana (female descendants), which further strengthens familial bonds. Extensive preparations, including several days spent preparing a whole cow as the main dish, highlight the tradition's importance in solidifying family relationships, involving both male and female family lines (Deni & Rkmawati, 2025; Marhayati, 2021).

However, the "Dudu meja" tradition is increasingly neglected by the younger generation. They are losing their understanding of its true meaning and essence, now often viewing it merely as a casual shared meal. This decline is primarily attributed to modernization and globalization, which have altered the younger generation's perspective on tradition, coupled with their preference for a more practical lifestyle. This situation underscores the significant challenges in preserving the tradition. Therefore, in-depth research is necessary to fully comprehend the inherent meaning of the "Dudu meja" tradition and to explore strategies for its preservation and adaptation in contemporary times (Arimbawa & Santhyasa, 2010; Mendra & Wiriantari, 2016).

The Dudu meja tradition should be continuously preserved as an integral part of the cultural identity of the Wakal Village community. On the other hand, despite shifts in its execution, this tradition still holds significant social and cultural values that strengthen familial bonds and introduce family lineages. Ideally, the younger generation should not only participate in this tradition in a formal manner but also understand the meaning embedded within it and commit to preserving it as a valuable cultural heritage. Therefore, the preservation of this tradition is essential, considering the rapid pace of societal change. This tradition must transform without losing its core meaning and the values it embodies.

Although the Wakal Village community still practices the Dudu meja tradition, there is a gap between the execution of the tradition and the younger generation's understanding of the values contained within it. Many young people now view this tradition as a mere communal meal without grasping its deeper significance. Furthermore, changes in the way it is practiced, such as the use of a long table and modern clothing, indicate an adaptation to the times. However, these changes sometimes obscure the essence and meaning of the tradition. Therefore, further research is needed to understand how this tradition can endure and adapt to the changing times without losing the core cultural values it represents..

This study aims to explore the deeper meaning of the Dudu meja tradition, from geographical, social, religious and cultural perspectives. By employing an ethnographic approach, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of this tradition, as well as the physical and social factors influencing its practice. This study also seeks to uncover the values embedded in the Dudu meja tradition, which may offer positive contributions to the social life of the Wakal Village community. Additionally, through a geographical analysis, the research will examine the influence of environmental factors on the execution of this tradition, including accessibility, the location of old houses, and the social dynamics within the local community. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for both the community and future generations in preserving the Dudu meja tradition in a way that remains relevant to the times.

## Methods

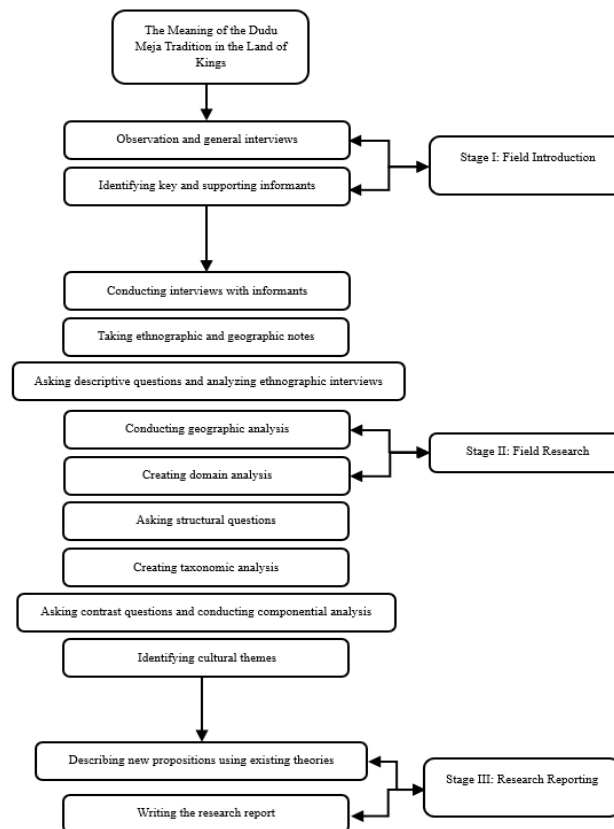


Figure 1. Research Stages

This study uses a qualitative research design with a geographical and ethnographic approach to understand the meaning and implementation of the *Dudu meja* tradition in Wakal Village. A qualitative design was chosen to describe and interpret patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language within the community, while a geographical approach was employed to analyze spatial and territorial phenomena related to this tradition (Spradley, 1997). An ethnographic approach was used to explore the patterns of community activities in carrying out the tradition, focusing on behaviors, rituals, and customs that form the cultural phenomenon. The aim of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the *Dudu meja* tradition in the life of Wakal Village's community (Mahendra et al., 2024).

The research site is located in Wakal Village, Central Maluku Regency, Maluku Province, which still preserves the *Dudu meja* tradition as part of their customary practices. The research subjects consist of key informants such as village elders, customary leaders, and members of the community who are directly involved in the implementation of this tradition. The presence of the researcher is crucial in this qualitative study, as the researcher acts as the main instrument in collecting data through observation, interviews, and documentation. The researcher is directly involved in community activities, which allows for the acquisition of more authentic and in-depth information.

Data were collected through three main methods: observation, interviews, and document studies. Observation was conducted to directly observe the community's activities in performing the *Dudu meja* tradition, both in general and participatory observation forms. Interviews were conducted with informants to gather information about the history, meaning, and values contained in the tradition. Document studies were used to collect relevant archives,

photos, and documents that could enrich the understanding of this tradition. All collected data were analyzed continuously and systematically to obtain significant findings.

Data analysis was carried out using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing approaches. The analysis process was done continuously until saturation was reached, where the collected data were sufficient to answer the research questions. Data validity was tested using data triangulation, member checking, and audit trials to ensure the authenticity of the information gathered. This research was conducted in three stages: field introduction, field research, and reporting the research results. Each stage was carried out systematically to ensure valid and accountable results (Ratnapalan, 2008; Schmitt, 2019). The following is a detailed breakdown of these stages.

## Results and Discussion

### Geographical Analysis of the *Dudu meja* Tradition in Wakal Village, Leihitu District

The *Dudu meja* tradition is a cultural heritage aimed at strengthening family ties among members of a specific clan. This tradition is carried out periodically in each generation within the clan, with the hope of preserving and continuing the cultural values inherited from ancestors. The implementation of this tradition also involves mutual agreements among the parties concerned to ensure its continuity within the local social and cultural context.

In geographical studies, the *Dudu meja* tradition can be analyzed using a spatial approach, which focuses on the relationship between humans and space, as well as how social events interact with the surrounding physical environment. According to Nursanty et al. (2023), spatial analysis is important because it provides a deep understanding of the relationship between social phenomena and geography, which can be clearly seen in the use of space. In this context, space in geography is divided into two aspects: physical space and social space. Human presence in a social space influences their social and cultural behaviors (Al Fiqriansyah et al., 2025; Forshee, 2006)

In general, Central Maluku Regency utilizes its land for plantation and agricultural activities, with Leihitu District being one of the areas that rely on natural resources for the livelihood of its people. The plantations in this area include crops such as nutmeg, cloves, cocoa, durian, and coconut. Historically, plantation products were among the reasons Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch and Japanese (Saputri et al., 2021). Additionally, the community also manages agriculture to grow vegetables and fruits. This is reflected in the land use map of Wakal Village, which shows the extent of forests and agricultural land (Arimbawa & Santhyasa, 2010; Asnia et al., 2023).

The spatial context in the *Dudu meja* tradition explains how the surrounding environment influences the implementation of a tradition. Space, in this case, becomes more than just a place; it is a location that unites various social interactions in community life, where individuals connect and interact with one another. In Wakal Village, the physical space in question is the customary forest, which serves as the primary location for the community to engage in farming and gardening activities. The existence of this forest is not only a source of livelihood but also an inseparable part of the social and cultural identity of the local community (Floyd et al., 2018; Setiawan et al., 2023)

The geographical conditions of Wakal Village, which are still dominated by customary forests, plantations, and agricultural land, influence how the community interacts with its surroundings. The diversity of community activities, such as farming, gardening, and animal husbandry, plays a role in shaping the *Dudu meja* tradition. The connection between these activities and the implementation of this tradition demonstrates how a supportive natural environment can

directly influence cultural practices within the community. Additionally, the proximity of Wakal Village to the sea means that some members of the community work as fishermen, enriching the economic dimension of the local population (Sitanela et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2022)

Despite the relatively favorable natural conditions for survival, many people choose to migrate to cities or other regions in search of a better life. This migration often leads to physical and social distances between family members, which is a significant reason for the implementation of the *Dudu meja* tradition. In this context, the tradition functions as a means to maintain family bonds, even amidst the busy lives and physical separation. The *Dudu meja* tradition allows families who have been away for a long time to reunite and strengthen relationships, both emotionally and socially, while also preserving the continuity of the existing cultural heritage (Sukroyanti et al., 2024; Suyitno, 2022).

### **The Process of Implementing the *Dudu meja* Tradition in Wakal Village, Leihitu District**

The implementation of the *Dudu meja* tradition by the community is inseparable from a sense of gratitude for the blessings granted by Allah SWT and the belief in ancestors who continuously protect and safeguard the descendants of their lineage. The research conducted by the author has revealed that the *Dudu meja* tradition performed by the community is a form of respect for the ancestors and the descendants of the Nakul family, aiming to strengthen familial ties that have existed since ancient times. The *Dudu meja* tradition is conducted once every generation, at a minimum, to ensure that the relationships between descendants are preserved and that each generation is aware of their family lineage.

The formation of the *Dudu meja* tradition is closely tied to spatial elements and events that occur within the community. This tradition also involves the interaction between humans and the environment to support its implementation. The tradition's practice consists of a series of stages that have been carefully arranged to ensure that the tradition remains in line with the teachings of the ancestors. The explanation of each stage of the *Dudu meja* tradition in the village of Wakal is outlined as follows.

#### ***Tahlil: Spiritual Reverence and Strengthening of Social Relations.***

In the initial stage of the *Dudu meja* tradition, known as *Tahlil*, the community gathers for a collective prayer as a form of gratitude to Allah SWT and respect for their ancestors. According to Hollowell & Nicholas (2009) theory of ritual, *Tahlil* represents a part of the process of *communitas*, a condition in which individuals within a community feel deeply connected to each other through a strong spiritual bond. This process symbolizes a transition from the ordinary state to a more sacred and blessed condition. *Tahlil* not only serves to celebrate life or honor the contributions of ancestors, but also plays a crucial role in strengthening social ties among community members. In this context, the *communitas* created through the ritual of prayer acts as a reinforcement of collective identity, providing meaning to both social and spiritual relationships.

#### ***Pahmusu.***

The *Pahmusu*, carried out long before the implementation of the *Dudu meja* tradition, represents a cleansing ritual that involves both physical and spiritual aspects. This act of purification reflects Ratnapalan (2008) theory of purity and pollution, where a space or place is considered sacred and must be prepared to receive higher spiritual energy. *Pahmusu* is not just a physical act, it is also a gesture to harmonize the relationship between humans and the surrounding space. In this context, the ancestral house and sacred objects that are cleaned are not merely physical items, but symbols that connect humans to the past. By maintaining

cleanliness, the community demonstrates its respect for the space as a meeting point between the physical and spiritual worlds. This emphasizes the importance of space in fostering cultural understanding and practices.

### ***Meeting or Deliberation***

Meetings or deliberations are a stage where decisions about the implementation of the *Dudu meja* tradition are made collectively. In this regard, the theory of deliberative democracy developed by Neeganagwedgin (2013) is highly relevant. According to Habermas, deliberation is a process that allows for open discussion among members of a community to reach consensus through the exchange of rational arguments. This meeting is not merely a gathering for decision-making, it also reflects participatory democracy, where all parties involved whether traditional leaders, elders, or other family members can contribute to determining the direction of the tradition's implementation.

This process reflects the values of egalitarianism in the culture of the Wakal Village, where every voice has a place in shaping collective decisions. In this tradition, the deliberation is not only aimed at making practical decisions but also at strengthening social cohesion within the community.

### ***Table Making: Connection to Nature and Utilization of Natural Resources***

The crafting of the table, which involves cutting trees from the ancestral forest, symbolizes the connection between humans and nature. The theory of sustainable resource management, as developed by Wessing (2006) in his concept of The Tragedy of the Commons, highlights the importance of managing natural resources sustainably for the survival of a community. In this context, the creation of the table serves as an example of how the community of Wakal Village uses natural resources wisely and with full consideration, paying attention to the sustainability of the ancestral forest that has been passed down by their ancestors

This practice teaches the importance of maintaining a balance between utilizing nature and conserving it, which is reflected in how they seek permission from the village head to cut down the trees. This process shows respect for authority and environmental sustainability, emphasizing the value placed on preserving both cultural traditions and ecological harmony.

### ***Taking the Buffalo: A Symbol of Honor and Social Engagement***

The act of taking a buffalo represents a symbol of honor and social engagement. According to the social capital theory proposed by Boli (2005), such communal activities contribute to the formation of stronger social networks. This process emphasizes the importance of collaboration in achieving common goals, where the taking of a buffalo by the entire family and community is not merely about food preparation but also demonstrates solidarity and collaboration in maintaining cultural values. Here, the buffalo becomes not just a physical object, but a symbol of collective strength built through shared activities in this tradition. Additionally, social exchange theory this action can also be understood as a form of social exchange that strengthens reciprocal relationships among individuals within the community.

### ***Welcoming Upu Ana: Social Honor and Symbolic Interaction***

The welcoming of Upu Ana with flower garlands represents a strong symbolic interaction within the community. According to symbolic interactionism, as outlined by Hardin (1968) and further explored in recent studies, social interactions involving symbols, such as flowers, play a crucial role in shaping social identity. The act of draping flowers is not only a symbol of respect for the social status of the Upu Ana but also serves as a way to introduce cultural values to the younger generation. This process demonstrates that honoring ancestors is not only

done physically but also in the form of symbolic communication that strengthens intergenerational bonds.

### ***Genealogy Reading: Collective Memory and Intergenerational Learning***

Genealogy reading is at the heart of the Dudu Meja tradition, where the family history is revealed to introduce new members to their roots. The concept of collective memory, introduced by Afdhal (2023), emphasizes the importance of collective memory in maintaining social and cultural identity. Genealogy reading is not just about providing information on ancestry but also serves as a means to engage the younger generation in preserving and understanding the values of their ancestors. This is also connected to cultural transmission, as explained by Afriandi et al. (2018), where cultural knowledge is passed down through families and communities to ensure the continuity of traditions.

### ***Bapantun: Cultural Expression and Symbolic Communication***

The back-and-forth exchange of pantun (traditional rhymed verses) between the upu ana and mahina ulu is a form of cultural expression rich in meaning. The theory of performance studies Ardianto & Mataram (2021) explains that performances such as pantun are not only for entertainment but also serve to communicate social and cultural values. Pantun becomes a way to express respect and admiration for ancestors, as well as to showcase verbal skills that are highly valued within the culture. This process illustrates how symbolic communication can strengthen solidarity and a sense of togetherness within the community.

### ***Shared Meal: Social Celebration and Strengthening Family Bonds***

A shared meal is the culmination of the entire tradition, symbolizing togetherness and family solidarity. Mary Douglas's theory of commensality (2002) asserts that eating together is not merely a physical activity but also a social act that strengthens bonds within the community. In the Dudu Meja tradition, the shared meal is not only meant to celebrate food but also to celebrate togetherness as an extended family. In this context, the shared meal serves to reinforce intergenerational relationships and maintain solidarity within the community.

### ***Dudu Meja Wate-Wate: Continuing Tradition and Cultural Transformation***

The Dudu Meja Wate-Wate stage is a continuation of the tradition for the husband of a woman from the Nakul clan, highlighting the importance of cultural transformation. The theory of cultural evolution, developed by Meyer et al. (1997), reveals that culture continuously evolves and changes over time. Dudu Meja Wate-Wate demonstrates how traditions can adapt to new social needs without losing their original meaning and identity. By involving the husband of a woman from the Nakul clan in this tradition, the community of Wakal Village showcases flexibility in maintaining the essence of their culture while responding to the evolving social dynamics.

Overall, the Dudu Meja tradition in Wakal Village illustrates how cultural rituals and activities serve not only to maintain a connection with ancestors but also play a crucial role in building social solidarity, strengthening collective identity, and ensuring the continuity of culture from one generation to the next. An analysis based on contemporary theories reveals that this tradition is not merely a cultural celebration but also a form of deep and complex social interaction that influences various aspects of community life.

## **The Meaning of Dudu Meja Tradition for the People of Wakal Village, Leihitu District**

### **Philosophical Meaning.**

The Dudu Meja tradition is one of the cultural heritage practices preserved and passed down through generations by the people of Wakal Village. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is held only once every fifteen to twenty years, depending on the agreement of the clan. This long interval creates a distinct appeal and makes the tradition eagerly awaited by each generation. The preparation process involves careful planning by village heads and customary leaders from each clan to determine the appropriate time for its implementation. Although it requires substantial funds and a long preparation period, this tradition is maintained because it carries profound meaning. The need to provide food for around 500 guests over three days and set up an extremely long table illustrates the scale and dedication of the community in preserving this tradition.

According to Geertz (1973), the meaning within a tradition represents the objects, conditions, or events that express the community's way of thinking. In the context of the Dudu Meja tradition, this meaning is conveyed through various symbols, actions, language, tools, materials, and attributes used during the ceremony. Each element in the tradition plays a vital role in delivering messages and values held by the community. This shows that a tradition is not merely a ritual but also a medium for transmitting social, spiritual, and cultural values passed from generation to generation. Below are some philosophical meanings embedded within the Dudu Meja tradition:

#### ***The Dudu Meja Tradition as a Form of Respect to Ancestors.***

The Dudu Meja tradition is a small but significant expression of respect to the ancestors within the community life of Wakal Village. The community believes that by honoring the ancestors, the life they lead will be more blessed and always protected. The Dudu Meja tradition is performed to introduce the genealogical lineage to the younger generation, which indirectly means that the younger generation must know and respect their family members. Through this, they will understand the importance of knowing their family history.

The meaning of respect to the ancestors presented in the Dudu Meja tradition includes: 1) the preparation of offerings to the ancestors during the tradition; 2) the cleaning and placement of heirlooms in a special place before performing the tradition; 3) special procedures when entering the room where the heirlooms are stored, which must not be violated and can only be entered by certain individuals; 4) a song performance dedicated to the ancestors, sung by the children of the clan during the welcoming ceremony before the tradition begins. These practices illustrate that Dudu Meja is viewed as a tradition of honoring ancestors, as reflected in the sequence of ceremonies carried out during its performance.

The Dudu Meja tradition has symbolic actions that reflect respect to the ancestors. As James P. Spradley explained, meaning does not exist in isolation but is formed through various symbols and activities of the community Durkheim (2001). The offerings made by the community symbolize respect to the ancestors and represent the community's relationship with their surrounding nature. According to a study by (Tahira, n.d.), involving ancestors in traditions makes the community more aware of the importance of maintaining the natural cycle and preserving a harmonious relationship with the land they cultivate. In line with research by (Hermenglid, n.d.), it is stated that life is always influenced by the forces of nature and the spirits of ancestors. Nature and ancestral spirits are seen as sources of power that affect their lives. This suggests that the Dudu Meja tradition serves not only to strengthen relationships within the Wakal Village community but also to show respect to the ancestors. By continuing to perform this tradition, the community believes that their relationships with family members

will remain harmonious and always protected by the ancestors, and they will be safeguarded from any misfortunes in the future.

### ***As an expression of gratitude***

Traditions performed in various places serve as expressions of gratitude from the community to the Almighty. As noted in the research by Susanti & Lestari (2021), the presence of a customary ceremony is a cultural practice passed down by ancestors as a way of offering thanks to the Creator for what has been received. Such ceremonies are generally very interesting because they possess uniqueness, sacredness, and contain moral values. The Dudu Meja tradition is grounded in the community's belief in God, who has granted them sustenance and health, enabling them to live to this day. The journey to this point has not been easy, as it has involved differences of opinion, misunderstandings, and even estrangement among family members, all of which require the tradition to be carried out.

The community expresses their gratitude through prayer, which is conducted at the beginning of the tradition's preparations to ask for smoothness and divine help in the course of the ceremony. Prayer is also performed at the end of the tradition to express thanks for successfully completing the ritual and ensuring that it went smoothly. In line with the research Hasanah & Wisri (2021) every form of gratitude expressed by the community is believed to strengthen the relationship between humans and God, between humans and their ancestors, and between humans and nature, which is considered to support the community's welfare. According to Wattimena & Latuihamallo (2024), the ceremony is based on the belief that God has provided natural resources that the community can enjoy. This means that the gratitude the community expresses is ultimately for the Almighty, who has provided all the blessings, and the community shows this gratitude through prayers in the tradition.

### ***Strengthening Community Relationships***

In community life, there are inevitably various shortcomings and disagreements that often arise. Traditions serve as a means to strengthen and bring people closer together, fostering more intimate and harmonious relationships within the community. Life in a community involves close interactions, with various customs influencing daily life (Sayed et al., 2021). During the tradition's preparation, community members frequently communicate with one another to ensure that all necessities are taken care of, which naturally fosters closer bonds. In the Dudu Meja tradition, families who have been away from the village for a long time are invited to return to join the community in performing the ritual together.

The Dudu Meja tradition is also conducted so that the younger generation can learn about their family lineage, as it is held only once in a generation, meaning some family members may not be familiar with one another. This tradition aims to improve the relationships within the community. According to Boli, n.d., good relationships among individuals can be formed because there is a shared habit or custom that serves as the foundation for actions that bring purpose and meaning to the community. In line with research by Nursanty et al. (2023), the close relationships formed during the ceremony show that the diversity within a community can promote harmony. Through traditions and collective activities, it is hoped that the bonds between community members will grow stronger, and misunderstandings will be resolved, as carrying out the tradition requires effective collaboration. From preparation to execution, community members are reminded to set aside personal issues. The Dudu Meja tradition is consistently performed to maintain the good relationships that have been established within the community.

## ***As Cultural Heritage***

Traditions are all forms of cultural heritage passed down by ancestors to the new generations. According to Raga, humans are the creators of culture, and culture itself is a manifestation of humanity's continuity in the world (Al Fiqriansyah et al., 2025). A tradition within a community represents the cultural legacy that has been carried out by newer generations while preserving the meanings and values embedded within it. The Dudu Meja tradition is considered a cultural heritage for several reasons: 1) it is an ancient tradition that has been passed down and taught to new generations; 2) it involves heirlooms from ancestors that serve as proof of its historical significance and are carefully preserved by the community's customary leaders; 3) the use of the local language during the tradition acts as a symbol and conveys meaning, a practice passed down from elders to the younger generation.

In line with Tahira's research (2025), preserving traditions not only aims to protect their existence in the community's life but also ensures that cultural practices continue for future generations. The Dudu Meja tradition serves to inform the younger generation about their ancestral heritage that they must preserve and protect. The Dudu Meja tradition is a cultural heritage that deserves to be maintained because it holds meaningful values for the community and plays a role in shaping the character of today's younger generation

## **Cultural Meaning and Values**

The meaning and cultural values in the *Dudu meja* tradition are of great importance and have long been embedded in the community of Desa Wakal. These cultural values are durable and not easily replaced by other cultures. According to Deni & Rkmawati (2025), cultural values serve as a framework that integrates various societal elements, which influence the attitudes manifested by individuals or groups. The *Dudu meja* tradition is led by clan leaders, such as the head of the marga and the head of the tukang, accompanied by elder adat leaders who possess knowledge of the supernatural and strong historical understanding. This demonstrates that the tradition serves as a framework that unites different community elements and influences the attitudes of both individuals and groups.

As a guide to life, the cultural values within *Dudu meja* shape the identity of the community. The belief in the truth of these values forms the foundation for behavior within the society. This aligns with the research by Asnia et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of educating cultural values to preserve local cultural heritage in Indonesia. The *Dudu meja* tradition is a cultural legacy that must be preserved because it contains positive values for future generations.

These cultural values also encourage efforts made by individuals, leaders, communities, and educational institutions to develop the values within each person through activities aimed at achieving positive change. The cultural values contained within *Dudu meja* have great potential to strengthen the identity and character of the nation's youth. Culture endures because it upholds beliefs in cultural values such as togetherness, negotiation, and compromise. These values are viewed as components for building cultural relationships or connections based on the values of local culture (Nashuddin, 2020). Therefore, it is hoped that the younger generation can use these values as a foundation for their knowledge in life.

## **Social Meaning and Value**

The social values embedded in every aspect of the *Dudu meja* tradition play a crucial role as guidelines and sources of knowledge for the younger generation. These values not only help shape a more organized and directed societal order but are also expected to be implemented in daily life. In this way, the younger generation can understand and appreciate the cultural values

as a reference in their lives. One of the most profound values is familial bonds, which are reflected in the effort to gather all descendants of the female *nakul* to come together and strengthen familial ties. This tradition serves as a venue for mutual acquaintance and the strengthening of relationships, which becomes even more apparent when relatives share jokes during the preparations for the tradition (Permatasari & Fauzi, 2024).

Additionally, the *Dudu meja* tradition instills the value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). The spirit of *gotong royong* is evident in every stage of the tradition, where the community shares the burden to ensure the smooth execution of the ritual. Cooperation between various parties is essential, such as in the construction of the table used for the event, which cannot be accomplished by just one individual. This value of mutual assistance adds meaning to each step of the tradition's implementation. Similarly, the value of mutual respect, which is fundamental to communal life, is upheld in the *Dudu meja* tradition through the welcoming of guests with songs as a form of honor. Deliberation is also highly valued, with decisions made after in-depth discussions, respecting each member's opinions (Hindaryatiningsih, 2017).

Furthermore, responsibility is another vital social value. Each individual involved in the tradition's implementation is fully aware of their tasks, such as ensuring the presence of all parties in the procurement of the buffalo two days before the event. This sense of responsibility guarantees the smooth running of the event, with each role whether that of the treasurer, secretary, or chief laborer being performed effectively. These roles complement each other and support the success of the tradition (Ardianto & Mataram, 2021). Finally, deliberation becomes an integral part of the entire process, where the community gathers to discuss key decisions, such as setting the date of the event and allocating the necessary funds. These deliberations are conducted repeatedly to ensure all preparations are thoroughly organized, reflecting the value of togetherness in decision-making (Hidayat, 2020). All of these values from familial bonds to deliberation work harmoniously to preserve and maintain the *Dudu meja* tradition as a valuable part of cultural heritage.

### **Meaning and Value of Religion or Belief**

Religious or belief values are an essential aspect of community life as they form the moral and spiritual foundation for various social activities. Religious values are rooted in religious teachings, encompassing elements of worship, discipline, exemplarity, and the effort to draw closer to God. In the context of the *Dudu meja* tradition, religious values are clearly evident in the practice of communal prayers before the tradition begins, as a form of gratitude for the blessings received and a request for the smooth execution of the ritual to Allah SWT. This practice underscores that the execution of the tradition is inseparable from religious elements, making religious values a key component in preserving the sacred meaning of the tradition.

Geertz, in his work *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), suggests that religion and tradition are closely intertwined as systems of meaning that provide direction and significance in society's life. Geertz emphasized that religion is not merely a set of rituals but also a system of symbols that shapes the way society views the world and their lives. Therefore, religious values in traditions such as *Dudu meja* not only reinforce the collective identity of the people of *Desa Wakal* but also serve as a means of preserving cultural and spiritual heritage to be passed down to future generations. Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2001), also argued that religion and belief values function as a social glue that strengthens solidarity and cohesion within a community. The *Dudu meja* tradition, with its elements of communal prayer and gratitude, reflects this function as it fosters closer relationships among community members and maintains social harmony.

By understanding and preserving the cultural, social, and religious meanings and values embedded in the tradition, the community can safeguard the rich heritage of their ancestors for future generations, as emphasized in the studies of anthropology and the sociology of religion.

## Conclusion

The Dudu meja tradition in Wakal Village, Leihitu District, is deeply intertwined with the local geographical and social conditions. Geographically, Wakal Village is surrounded by customary forests, plantations, and agricultural lands, all of which influence the execution of this tradition. In this context, space functions not merely as a location but as a crucial medium for social and cultural interaction. The Dudu meja tradition, involving the community, especially those living abroad, serves as a means of maintaining familial bonds despite physical distance. Therefore, this tradition plays a significant role in preserving the social integrity of Wakal Village.

The ritual of this tradition comprises various stages imbued with profound symbolic meaning and cultural values. Stages such as tahlil (recitation of prayers), pahmusu, musyawarah (deliberation), table construction, buffalo acquisition, welcoming of upu ana (returning migrants/relatives), lineage recitation, bapantun (poetic exchange), communal eating, and dudu meja wate-wate (the core Dudu meja ritual) function not only as social and spiritual rites but also reflect intergenerational solidarity. Each step in this procession demonstrates principles of democracy and environmental sustainability, alongside a deep respect for ancestral heritage that has shaped the history of Wakal Village.

The significance of the Dudu meja tradition for the people of Wakal Village extends beyond social aspects to encompass philosophical, cultural, and religious dimensions. Philosophically, this tradition embodies respect for ancestors, gratitude to God, and the strengthening of kinship ties. Cultural values such as togetherness, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), deliberation, and responsibility are reflected in every stage. Religious values are also evident through communal prayers accompanied by a belief in ancestral blessings. Consequently, the Dudu meja tradition is vital not only for the preservation of local culture but also as a heritage that must be safeguarded to maintain the community's identity across generations.

Overall, the dudu meja tradition in Wakal Village illustrates a harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and ancestors. Through geographical analysis, examination of the ritual process, and its philosophical and social meanings, this tradition demonstrably plays a vital role in sustaining social cohesion, cultural values, and the spirituality of the community. Therefore, the preservation of this tradition is of paramount importance, not only for the community of Wakal Village but also as an integral part of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage that must be continuously protected and passed on to future generations.

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