

## Customary Leadership and Ecological Preservation: Insights from the Kajang Indigenous Community, Indonesia

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### Abstract

*Customary leadership plays a vital role in preserving ecological systems through the integration of local values and traditional wisdom. However, this phenomenon remains underexplored in existing literature. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the contributions of customary leaders within the Kajang Indigenous Community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, to ecological preservation. The findings highlight three key roles of customary leadership in fostering sustainable ecological practices. First, the influence of customary leaders is pivotal in shaping community attitudes toward environmental stewardship and safeguarding natural resources. Second, the spiritual, moral, and cultural guidance provided by these leaders instills a sense of responsibility and collective action within the community, fostering sustainable ecological behavior. Third, the Kajang tribe's values of harmony, religiosity, and adaptability are deeply embedded in their ecological preservation practices, serving as a model of sustainable living. The study underscores the importance of exploring diverse perspectives on the role of customary leadership in ecological preservation, offering valuable insights for future research and conservation efforts. These findings illuminate the potential of indigenous leadership in promoting sustainable ecological management and enriching global conservation strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Customary authority, Ecological system, Indigenous people, Kajang tribe, case study.*

### Introduction

The role of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment among indigenous peoples is a topic of significant importance, as it draws on local wisdom and plays a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and behavior of Indigenous peoples. Van Engelenhoven (2021) emphasizes that the influence of customary authorities extends beyond local cultural resilience to potentially impact the management of the ecological environment by Indigenous peoples. Syahrul et al. (2024) further demonstrate that the role of Indigenous peoples in ecological preservation is characterized by adaptive behavior, countering exploitative attitudes. Leveraging their social capital, customary authorities can shape the attitudes and behavior of Indigenous peoples in utilizing natural resources based on local wisdom. Dahwal and Fernando (2024) asserted that the role of customary authorities holds immense potential in shaping the attitudes and behavior of Indigenous peoples based on ecological values, highlighting the need to reflect on this as a valuable lesson.

Despite extensive research on the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their ecological environment, most studies have focused on three main aspects. First, studies have examined the utilization of natural resources by Indigenous peoples in the context of the domestic economy (Urzedo & Chatterjee, 2021; Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020; Kirsanova et al., 2020). Second, research has explored the use of natural resources by Indigenous peoples in the context of normative law violations (Fahmi & Siddiq Armia, 2022; MacPherson et al., 2020; Schapper & Urban, 2021). Third, studies have discussed the politicization of natural resources by Indigenous peoples (Young, 2021; Nikhil et al., 2023; Adam et al., 2021). However,

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there remains a lack of comprehensive studies on the methods employed by Indigenous peoples to preserve their natural environment.

In the context of preserving the ecological environment, the role of customary authorities among Indigenous peoples is a crucial area that warrants further exploration and reflection. Dahwal and Fernando (2024) noted the importance of conducting studies on the role of customary authorities in the process of preserving the ecological environment, emphasizing the need to reflect on the local intelligence possessed by Indigenous peoples in this regard. Nevertheless, insufficient attention has been given to the role of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment based on local wisdom. Addressing this significant gap, the present research embarks on a novel exploration and reflection of the role of customary authorities in shaping the attitudes and behavior of Indigenous peoples in preserving their ecological environment based on local wisdom.

This study aims to shed light on the role of customary authorities within the Kajang Tribe as a pivotal case study, seeking to answer three fundamental research questions. First, it seeks to understand how the characteristics of the attitude of the customary authority of the Kajang tribe contribute to preserving its ecological environment. Second, it aims to identify the factors that underlie the ability of the customary authority in the Kajang tribe to preserve its ecological environment. Third, it seeks to explore how the ecological attitude is formed in the Kajang tribe community in preserving its environment. The study is based on the argument that the social capital owned by customary authorities in the Kajang tribe can not only cultivate non-exploitative knowledge in managing natural resources but also has the potential to shape the attitudes of Indigenous peoples to be more adaptive in preserving their ecological environment based on local wisdom.

### *Customary Authority*

Customary authority, a traditional power structure, stands as a testament to the resilience of indigenous communities. It possesses the jurisdiction to regulate, manage, and enforce rules and norms (Blesia et al., 2023; Marsaban & Said, 2023). Customary authority is not merely a set of regulations but rather a complex system of beliefs, values, and power structures overseen by figures and institutions that act as custodians of local traditions and wisdom (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2023). Arico et al. (2023) further expound those customary institutions, including leaders, councils, and regulations, govern the social, political, and economic aspects of indigenous peoples' lives, passed down from one generation to the next (Arizona et al., 2019; Galuh Larasati et al., 2023). In this context, customary authorities play a crucial role in preserving the sustainability of traditions, upholding norms and values, and resolving conflicts within indigenous communities (Auni et al., 2022). Additionally, they function as a shield, safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples from external threats seeking to control the land, resources, and traditions owned by these communities (Dewi et al., 2024; Sumbo, 2022).

In the Kajang community, customary authority is embodied in a figure known as Ammatoa. Ammatoa plays a pivotal role in organizing the lives of the Kajang indigenous people, ensuring adherence to customary rules, and maintaining the delicate balance between humans and nature through the principle of 'Pasang Ri Kajang' (Marliana et al., 2021). The Ammatoa also oversees the imposition of restrictions related to nature, supervises the conduct of traditional rituals and ceremonies, and resolves disputes among indigenous peoples. Beyond the implementation of the customary system, an Ammatoa also assumes responsibility for the management and protection of customary land (Misbahuddin et al., 2023). This management includes designating specific areas as forbidden forests, safeguarding them from exploitation and the destruction of their ecological systems (Tingey & Webb, 2020). Typically, the authority of the highest traditional leader delegates more power to lower chiefs, enabling them to structure the division of authority to lower levels (Chanakira et al., 2019; Fernando et al., 2023; Mbatha, 2022).

### *Kajang's customary community*

Indigenous peoples are a group of individuals who have a history and origin and have occupied customary territories for generations (Burnett et al., 2020; Camargo et al., 2022; Montasir et al., 2023). Generally, Indigenous peoples are communal and have sovereignty and authority over land, natural resources and socio-cultural life governed by customary laws and institutions (Stavenhagen, 2019). Etchart (2022) also mentions that they 'indigenous peoples' have their own laws that regulate the rights and obligations of each member to interact and behave in their territory. In addition to laws, indigenous peoples have social institutions, leaders, and customary courts that are recognised and accepted by the community group. Therefore, Indigenous peoples have the completeness to be able to stand alone in the unity of law, rulers, environment, and legal systems that influence every action and value of each member in interacting with their environment (Macias Gimenez, 2022; Lingaas, 2022; Tarras-Wahlberg & Southalan, 2021).

A tangible illustration of a community inhabiting customary territories is found in the Kajang indigenous community of South Sulawesi. The Kajang indigenous people are known as 'To Kajang' and live in a customary area called 'Tanah Toa' (Nas et al., 2019). The area is demarcated into two regions, namely inner Kajang (Ilalang Embaya) and outer Kajang (Ipantarang Embaya). The daily lives of the Kajang indigenous people are deeply entrenched in local wisdom, emphasizing simplicity, honesty, and a harmonious relationship with nature (Bahar & Nurjanah, 2021). Their adherence to ancestral customs is evident in their steadfast commitment to maintaining harmony and balance in life. Badewi (2018) articulates the Kajang people's vision of coexisting in harmony with nature, humanity, and their forebears. Their rejection of modern technologies continued use of traditional black attire, and utilization of a head covering known as pasepu further underscores their distinct way of life, setting them apart from mainstream society (Maarif, 2014).

### *Ecological system*

The ecological system can be defined as a living system comprising a community of living organisms and various non-living elements that interact and influence each other (Rathore et al., 2022). This system is responsible for maintaining a reciprocal relationship between living organisms, such as humans, animals, and plants, and the environment in which they reside. Understanding the ecological elements of nature is crucial for the conservation, restoration, and management of natural resources (Rehage et al., 2022), and it also shapes traditional values, attitudes, and behaviors that are ecologically sound (Utina, 2015; Yohana, 2023). The sustainability of both human life and the environment hinges on the maintenance of ecological systems. Failure to maintain this balance often stems from a perspective that places humans at the center of life, leading to a disregard for the sustainability of the ecological system (Holilah, 2016).

In the societal context, ecology is known as social ecology, a framework that integrates ecosystems and social systems (Marlianingrum et al., 2021). This integration encompasses various aspects such as the economy, tourism, culture, beliefs, and nature conservation efforts (Hafsaridewi et al., 2019; Hazran, 2024; Poceratu, 2021; Riady, 2021). For example, within the Kajang community, maintaining the ecological system is not merely a practice but an ancestral legacy deeply rooted in local wisdom values. The principle of 'Pasang Ri Kajang', which advocates for balance with nature, prohibition, and preservation, serves as a testament to this (Talib et al., 2023). Similarly, in the local community of Pangururan, Samosir, the ecological conditions are not only preserved but also processed in accordance with Batak culture, thereby becoming a local cultural heritage and an economic asset. This area has emerged as one of the ecological tourism destinations (eco-tourism) (Rizky et al., 2019). Hence, it is evident that maintaining the stability of the ecological system is not only about preserving nature but also about fostering community welfare and preserving cultural heritage.

## Methodology

This study was conducted during a time of widespread ecological exploitation that is not commonly seen in modern society. The focus of this study is specifically on highlighting the unique and often overlooked role of traditional authorities in safeguarding the environment through their distinct local knowledge. According to Dahwal and Fernando (2024), it is crucial to examine this role within the context of modernity. In line with this, the study is also based on three fundamental considerations. First, the role of traditional authorities in preserving their environment is a central issue that has not been thoroughly addressed in previous research. Second, traditional authority plays a crucial role in shaping the community's environmental attitudes, making it vital to elucidate. Third, understanding the role of traditional authority in preserving the environment is an important context to reflect upon as a valuable lesson. These fundamentals consideration underpin the methodological choices of this study, ensuring that the research is grounded in contemporary best practices (Hazran, 2023).

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach, employing a case study methodology to investigate the preservation of the ecological environment within the Kajang tribe community in the South Sulawesi region of Indonesia. Salleh et al. (2023) emphasize that the scientific process in research offers a systematic framework, enabling researchers to organize and execute specific tasks efficiently to achieve study objectives, particularly in case study methodologies. Primary data was gathered through direct observations and interviews, focusing on three key contexts. In-depth interviews were utilized to obtain detailed responses to complex questions and to observe nonverbal cues, offering deeper insights into participants' perspectives (Salleh et al., 2016). These included understanding the attitudes of customary authorities towards ecological preservation, exploring the role and factors influencing community attitudes, and examining the attitudes of the community itself. Additionally, secondary data was obtained through relevant literature such as web sources, books, and journals.

**Figure 1: The Kajang Tribe community in the South Sulawesi region of Indonesia**



The houses of the Kajang tribe.



The people of the Kajang tribe.

In the context of present study, data analysis involves a comprehensive process as outlined by Miles and Huberman (2014). This process encompasses three key stages. Firstly, data reduction is employed to systematically reorganize the collected data based on its inherent characteristics, factors, and implications. Secondly, data verification is undertaken to thematically conclude the reduced data. Finally, data description involves presenting the obtained data in tables containing photos and quotations from interviews, all verified in accordance with the study's focus. These processes allow for an inductive analysis of the data, forming the basis for data interpretation (Fernando, Larasati, et al., 2023).



Data interpretation in this study involved a thorough examination of forms, patterns, and socio-cultural contexts to generate meaningful insights aligned with the research objectives. The data collection process was enriched through in-depth interviews, a qualitative method chosen for its ability to uncover nuanced information. These interviews were conducted for two primary reasons: a) to elicit detailed and elaborative responses to complex questions that could not be adequately addressed through simple surveys, and b) to observe nonverbal behaviours, providing valuable insights into participants' emotions, attitudes, and perspectives on the issues discussed. The in-depth interviews allowed for an interactive and flexible approach, enabling the interviewer to adapt questions in response to the participant's context and expand on points of interest (Muda et al., 2016). This method not only captured the verbal content but also contextualized the responses within the participants' socio-cultural settings, thereby enriching the depth and relevance of the data. The comprehensive approach to data collection and interpretation ensured a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, allowing the study to draw well-founded and contextually meaningful conclusions.

## Result and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate the positive impact of local authorities in preserving the ecological environment of the Kajang tribal community. The study provides important insights and explanations within this context.

### *Characteristics of the attitude of the customary authority of the Kajang tribe in preserving the ecological system*

The customary authorities in the Kajang tribe are not passive observers, but active participants in the preservation of values, culture, and the social environment. As Ye et al. (2021) have pointed out, these authorities exert a significant influence in the process of maintaining and preserving their ecologically based social environment through their demonstrated attitudes. The distinct characteristics of these attitudes, as exemplified by the Kajang tribe's customary authorities in preserving their ecological environment, are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1 Attitudinal characteristics of the Kajang tribe's customary authorities in ecological preservation**

<b>Attitudes of authority</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
<b>Avoiding exploitation</b>	The fundamental value of the tide remains unchanged and is enforced by customary authorities to address the local Kajang people's needs, with the goal of reducing the emergence of exploitative attitudes (Source: Kajang, 2024, Informant, 4).
<b>Maintaining the spirit</b>	Ecological values and spirit have become inherited through oral traditions from customary authorities so as to shape Indigenous peoples' attitudes regarding awareness in maintaining their ecological environment (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 5).
<b>Forming a philosophy</b>	The concept of <i>Pasang</i> embodies the sanctions and norms that shape the cultural and social life of the Kajang people. This philosophy significantly impacts the Kajang community's approach to natural resource management, as noted by a local informant (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 6).
<b>Applying sanctions</b>	In managing natural resources, the customary authorities within the Kajang tribe community are instrumental in enforcing regulations. Consequently, the customary authorities of the Kajang tribe impose various sanctions on individuals who contravene ecological principles in the management of natural resources (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 5).
<b>Maintaining the environment</b>	The customary authorities of the Kajang tribe have established regulations dictating that all residents within the tribe's territory must demonstrate awareness of their environment. For instance, individuals

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are prohibited from felling trees without obtaining prior permission from the customary authorities (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 6).

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*Source: Field interview*

Table 1 presents an analysis of the attitudes of authority within the Kajang tribe in their efforts to preserve the ecological environment. This analysis reveals three significant contexts pertaining to the characteristics of the attitude of authority within the Kajang tribe in the preservation of their ecological environment. Firstly, the customary authorities of the Kajang tribe demonstrate the establishment of an attitude and life philosophy rooted in environmental interests, as articulated by Informants 4 and 5. Secondly, the protection and conservation of the environment are attitudes prominently displayed by the customary authorities of the Kajang tribe, as expressed by Informants 5 and 6. Thirdly, the consistent application of social oversight is also a prevalent attitude among customary authorities in their endeavors to preserve the ecological environment, as reported by Informants 5 and 4. These findings underscore the pivotal role of customary authorities within the Kajang tribe community in shaping attitudes aimed at the maintenance and preservation of their environment.

The study highlights the significant role of customary authority in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of the Kajang community and its positive implications for the resilience of the ecological environment. Marlianingrum et al. (2021) emphasize that the role of customary authorities in upholding social values and norms is crucial in influencing the ecological behavior of Indigenous communities. This viewpoint supported by Fernando et al. (2021) who suggest that the social capital held by customary authorities greatly influences the management of natural resources within indigenous communities. This hegemony of customary authorities has contributed to the development of a more ecologically conscious society, where the management of natural resources not aligned with cultural values and norms is viewed as an anomaly by Indigenous communities. Consequently, customary authorities are not only responsible for upholding cultural values and norms but are also expected to set an example for the community in the sustainable utilization of natural resources, discouraging exploitative practices.

The preservation of the ecological environment through the role of customary authorities is an organic expression of the prevailing values and norms within Indigenous communities. Misbahuddin et al. (2023) argue that the optimization of customary authority has the potential to regulate social behavior and minimize deviations within the community. Moreover, Tingey and Webb (2020) suggest that the consistent enforcement of social sanctions by customary authorities influences the attitudes and behaviors of indigenous communities in resource management to prevent exploitation. Despite this, the pivotal role of customary authorities is often disregarded in development concepts, leading to potential conflicts and normalization of ecologically detrimental practices. Therefore, the involvement of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment serves to mitigate conflicts and prevent escalating exploitation within the community.

*Factors underlying how customary authorities can preserve ecological systems*

Ecological conservation can be effectively achieved through the engagement of customary authorities within local communities. As noted by Hosen et al. (2020), the preservation of the ecological environment is significantly influenced by the factors underlying customary authorities, as they are shaped by the capital they possess. Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the factors underlying customary authorities that play a crucial role in the preservation of their ecological environment.

**Table 2 Factors underlying why indigenous authorities can preserve their ecological environment**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
<b>Spirituality</b>	The customary authorities within the Kajang community are revered as holy figures due to their possession of spiritual values. As a result, their attitudes and behavior serve as the foundation and reference point for local

	communities, particularly in the management of natural resources (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 1).
<b>Power relations</b>	The influence of customary authorities on the attitudes and behaviors of the Kajang community is widely acknowledged. This is attributed to the perceived power of customary authorities in shaping and directing societal norms and conduct (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 2).
<b>Morality</b>	The morality possessed by traditional leaders serves as a guiding principle for the Kajang community in the management of natural resources. Consequently, this ethical stance becomes the community's benchmark for environmental preservation (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 3).
<b>Culture</b>	Local wisdom-based knowledge, as held by customary authorities within the Kajang tribe, plays a crucial role in shaping and influencing the responses and approaches of local communities towards ecological issues (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 4).
<b>Structurally</b>	In the context of social structure, customary authorities hold a prominent position within a Kajang community. Apart from the preservation of cultural norms, they are also expected to demonstrate compassionate approach toward environmental concerns (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 6).

*Source: Field interview*

The following excerpt from Table 2 outlines the fundamental factors contributing to the significant role played by customary authorities in the preservation of their ecological environment. Three key contexts emerge from Table 2, shedding light on the underlying factors that enable customary authorities to fulfill this role. Firstly, the spiritual beliefs upheld by customary authorities exert a dominant influence on and contribute to the shaping of local communities' attitudes towards ecological preservation, as articulated by Informant 1. Secondly, the moral principles embraced by customary authorities wield a dominant influence and play a pivotal role in shaping local communities' attitudes towards ecological preservation, as expressed by Informant 3. Thirdly, the cultural values inherent to the authority exert a dominant influence and contribute to shaping the attitudes of local communities towards ecological preservation, as elucidated by Informant 4. These contexts collectively illustrate how the spiritual, moral, and cultural factors possessed by customary authorities can influence and shape the attitudes of local communities, such as the Kajang tribe, in their efforts to preserve the ecological environment.

#### *Ecological attitudes formed in the Kajang tribal community*

The influence of customary authority on the attitudes of the Kajang community towards the preservation of their ecological environment has been found to have a positive impact. According to Das et al. (2022), the enduring influence of customary authorities on ecological attitudes has significant implications for the community's stance on preserving its ecological environment. The attitudes that manifest within the community are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3 Ecological attitudes formed in the Kajang community**

<b>Community attitudes</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
<b>Harmonious</b>	The community has the potential to coexist in harmony with nature by adjusting its lifestyle to the local conditions and natural resources available, as exemplified by the Kajang tribe community in their traditional dress (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 1).
<b>Religious</b>	The Kajang community has demonstrated an increased emphasis on religious principles in its approach to natural resource management. The act of caring for the environment is viewed as a tangible expression of individual religious beliefs (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 2).

<b>Tolerant</b>	The tolerant attitude observed within the Kajang community can be attributed to their profound ecological knowledge. This understanding enables them to navigate potential conflicts arising from competition for natural resources, ultimately fostering a more harmonious coexistence (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 3).
<b>Mutual aid</b>	For the Kajang tribe, being united in protecting the environment is an attitude that is formed, so preserving the environment is often done through mutual cooperation and assistance within the community (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 2).
<b>Adaptive</b>	Preservation of the environment is not only contingent upon adopting a non-exploitative approach, but also on cultivating a generation with an adaptive attitude towards the natural environment, in order to ensure sustainable environmental preservation (Kajang, 2024, Informant, 1).

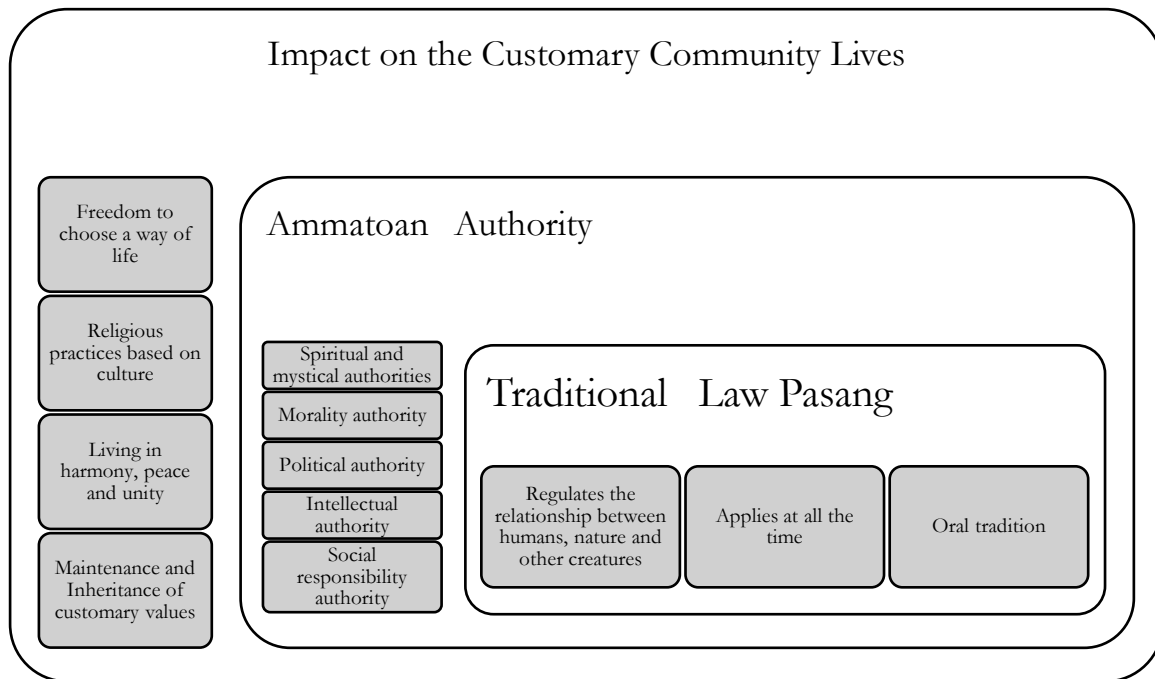
*Source: Field interview*

Table 3 reveals the attitude of the Kajang community toward preserving their ecological environment. The table reveals three significant contexts pertaining to the attitudes of the Kajang tribe community in their efforts to preserve their ecological environment. Firstly, a harmonious attitude emerges as a prevalent behavior within the Kajang tribal community, as indicated by Informant 1. Secondly, a religious attitude also features prominently within the Kajang tribal community, as reported by Informant 2. Lastly, an adaptive attitude is observed as a behavior that is not insignificantly present within the Kajang tribe community, as conveyed by Informant 1. These findings suggest that a harmonious, religious, and adaptive attitude is firmly established within the Kajang tribe in their endeavors to preserve their ecological environment.

The involvement of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment has positive implications for the attitudes of indigenous communities in managing their natural resources. By emphasizing values and norms based on local wisdom, the preservation of the ecological environment occurs naturally within Indigenous communities. Rathore et al. (2022) also note that the participation of customary authorities in addressing environmental issues has influenced the attitudes and behaviors of indigenous communities, leading to more effective and efficient management of natural resources. Therefore, the role of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment, combined with the reflection on the role of formal authorities, can consistently influence informal authorities in their efforts to sustain the ecological environment based on the experiential knowledge of local communities.

The role of customary authorities within the Kajang tribe is significant in the preservation of their ecological environment, yielding positive outcomes. This situation is evidenced by three key findings in our study. Firstly, customary authorities in the Kajang community play a crucial role in influencing attitudes towards the maintenance and conservation of their ecologically driven surroundings. Secondly, the spiritual, moral, and cultural aspects embodied by customary authorities hold sway over the attitudes of local communities, such as the Kajang tribe, in their efforts to safeguard the ecological environment. Thirdly, the Kajang tribe exhibits an attitude that is more harmonious, religious, and adaptive, which is instrumental in the preservation of its ecological environment. These findings underscore the social capital that customary authorities possess within the Kajang tribe, which not only fosters knowledge in natural resource management but also has the capacity to mold the attitudes of indigenous peoples, encouraging greater adaptability in preserving their ecological environment. The brief illustration of discussion research findings can be seen on figure 2



**Figure 2: The brief illustration of discussion research findings**

These findings diverge from previous research, which often portrays the role of customary authorities in a simplistic and normative manner. Contrary to this, present study reveals the pivotal role of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment based on local wisdom. Arico et al. (2023) argue that the robust social capital and hegemony of customary authorities enable them to influence and shape the attitudes of indigenous communities based on hierarchical values and norms. Similarly, Rizky Annisa Lestari et al. (2019) assert that customary authorities not only manifest and preserve prevailing socio-cultural values but also play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of indigenous communities in natural resource utilization. However, Salleh and Sulaiman (2016) emphasize the need for customary authorities to adapt their paradigms to address cultural issues effectively. Thus, the social capital held by customary authorities can be leveraged, both formally and informally, to preserve the ecological environment within local communities.

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## Conclusion

Present study emphasizes the significant roles of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment based on local wisdom in the Kajang tribe. It highlights three key roles: shaping attitudes to maintain and preserve the ecological-based environment, influencing local communities' attitudes through spiritual, moral, and cultural factors, and fostering a more harmonious, religious, and adaptive attitude. These findings underscore the social capital of customary authority in the Kajang tribe, showcasing their

potential to shape the attitudes of Indigenous peoples and contribute to preserving their ecological environment.

The findings of this study not only contribute to the academic discourse but also have practical implications. These findings challenge the normative and simplistic views often associated with studies on the role of customary authority in a community. Instead, they reveal a more nuanced understanding, showing that customary authorities have a crucial role in preserving the ecological environment based on local wisdom. These findings can serve as a dialogical basis for environmental anthropology studies and as a reference or a lesson for formal and informal institutions in preventing or minimizing the exploitation of ecological systems in the community. The role of customary authority in the Kajang tribe can be used as a valuable lesson in shaping community attitudes and behavior in managing and utilizing natural resources in the future.

This study, like any other, has its limitations. The data collection process, for instance, was limited to observation and interviews conducted solely in the Kajang indigenous community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. As a result, the data obtained are in the form of pictures and interview quotes from the Kajang people in the South Sulawesi region. However, despite these limitations, this study can serve as a solid foundation or reference for future research, particularly for those interested in analyzing and comparing the role of customary authorities in preserving the ecological environment in other Indigenous communities and regions. This way, a comprehensive understanding of the roles and patterns carried out by customary authorities in preserving their ecological environment can be achieved with a larger and more diverse set of informants.

### Ethics statement

There are no conflicts of interest that could affect the results of this study, and all authors involved have approved this manuscript before submission.

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