



Cultural Genealogy of Sufism in the Rejang Muslim Community: An Anthropological-Historical Study

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Abstract

The persistence of Sufism within local Muslim communities presents an important challenge to institutional-centered perspectives that often reduce Islamic spirituality to formal ṭarīqa structures and doctrinal practices. In the Indonesian context, limited attention has been paid to how Sufi values survive and reproduce themselves through culturally embedded mechanisms within indigenous societies. This study sought to explore the genealogy of Sufism within the Rejang Muslim community in Bengkulu and analyze how Sufi values are transmitted, localized, and maintained through cultural practices and communal life. It employed a qualitative descriptive-exploratory approach using interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community members in Rejang Lebong Regency. Data were analyzed thematically through a genealogical and cultural approach. The findings revealed that Sufism in the Rejang community operated not primarily through formal institutional structures, but through oral traditions, communal rituals, language, and everyday social interaction. Sufi values such as humility, patience, sincerity, and social harmony were continuously reproduced through culturally embedded practices that reinforce collective identity and communal cohesion. This study contributes to broader discussions on cultural Sufism, lived Islam, and the localization of religious traditions within indigenous Muslim societies.



A. Introduction

The persistence of Sufism in contemporary Muslim societies presents a significant paradox in modern religious studies. Amid globalization, digital rationality, and increasingly institutionalized forms of religion, Sufism continues to survive not merely as a mystical doctrine but as a living cultural force embedded in everyday ethics, social relations, and collective identity. This persistence challenges assumptions that modernization inevitably marginalizes spiritual traditions or confines religion to formal institutions (Muchimah et al., 2024; Latif & Ilyas, 2024). In Indonesia, Sufism has historically functioned not only as a doctrinal system but also as a socially embedded mechanism through which moral values, spirituality, and communal harmony are continuously reproduced across generations (Ad-din & Siraj, 1956; el-Aswad, 2006; Fajri, 2023). However, despite its enduring influence, scholarly discussions on Sufism in Indonesia remain largely dominated by institutional and normative perspectives that prioritize *ṭarīqa* organizations, charismatic authorities, and urban religious networks (Afiani, 2025; Azizi et al., 2025; Wahid & Maskhuroh, 2024). As a result, the culturally embedded and lived dimensions of Sufism remain insufficiently explored.

This limitation becomes increasingly important because Sufism has demonstrated remarkable resilience amid modern social transformations characterized by moral fragmentation, rationalization, and weakening communal ethics. Contemporary studies acknowledge that Sufism continues to function as a moral and spiritual resource capable of balancing rationality with ethical reflection (Muttaqin et al., 2023; Robingatun et al., 2024; Rasyad et al., 2021). Nevertheless, existing scholarship rarely explains how this resilience is sustained through everyday cultural practices and intergenerational transmission. Badaruddin and Mahyuddin (2021), for example, emphasize the authority of spiritual lineage (*sanad*) as the basis of *ṭarīqa* legitimacy, while Wahid and Maskhuroh (2024) examine Sufism within the context of digital spirituality in higher education. Feriyanto (2020) further highlights Sufi-oriented approaches in promoting religious moderation. Although these studies provide important insights into institutional and doctrinal aspects of Sufism, they largely conceptualize Sufism as a formal and structured religious phenomenon, leaving limited space for understanding how Sufi values are reproduced within local cultural systems and everyday communal life.

Anthropological and sociological approaches have attempted to broaden this perspective by examining the interaction between Islam, spirituality, and local culture in

Indonesian Muslim communities (Azra, 2004; Howell, 2001; Woodward, 2011). These studies demonstrate that Islam in Indonesia frequently develops through negotiation with local traditions, producing culturally distinctive forms of religious expression. However, most of these discussions focus on dominant ethnic contexts such as Javanese and Sundanese communities, while relatively little attention has been given to peripheral ethnic groups whose cultural systems may reveal different trajectories of Islamization and spiritual reproduction (Hidayat, 2023; Sunaryo & Ardhana, 2025). This imbalance is theoretically problematic because it risks generalizing Indonesian Islam through major cultural centers while overlooking localized forms of religious experience operating in smaller ethnic communities.

The Rejang Muslim community in Bengkulu represents one such overlooked context. As one of the indigenous ethnic groups in Sumatra, the Rejang maintain a cultural system in which religious values are deeply embedded in oral traditions, proverbs, customary norms, and communal rituals such as *ngarak* (Jaspan & King, 2007). In this context, religion is not experienced solely through formal theological instruction but through lived cultural practices reproduced within everyday social interactions. Yet existing studies on Islamization in Bengkulu remain dominated by political histories and transregional scholarly networks, framing Islam primarily as a historical process rather than as an ongoing cultural transformation (Seno, 2012; Latif & Hussain Bhatti, 2024). Consequently, the processes through which Sufi values are transmitted, localized, and sustained across generations within the Rejang cultural system remain insufficiently examined. This reveals a significant gap in understanding Sufism as a genealogical and culturally embedded process of meaning-making rather than merely an institutional religious tradition (Foucault, 1977; Azra, 2004; Karim et al., 2025).

This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing Sufism within the Rejang Muslim community as a form of cultural genealogy, namely a dynamic process through which spiritual values are transmitted, localized, and transformed through embedded cultural practices. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize institutional structures and formal religious authority, this study positions Sufism as a lived cultural mechanism operating through language, ritual, oral memory, and communal interaction. By integrating anthropological, historical, and cultural perspectives, this study offers a new analytical approach for understanding how Islamic spirituality survives and reproduces itself within local cultural ecologies. The novelty of this study therefore lies not merely in its focus on the Rejang community, but in its repositioning of

Sufism as a genealogical cultural process that shapes collective identity, ethical orientation, and social cohesion beyond formal religious institutions.

Based on this perspective, this study aims to trace the genealogical transmission of Sufi values within the Rejang Muslim community, identify the cultural forms through which these values are embedded and reproduced, and analyze their role in shaping collective identity and ethical orientation. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute not only to Islamic anthropology and studies of Indonesian Islam, but also to broader international discussions on the localization, continuity, and transformation of religious traditions within diverse cultural contexts.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design to examine the genealogy of Sufism and its contribution to the cultural identity of the Rejang Muslim community (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding meanings, lived experiences, and social interpretations embedded in Sufi practices within their sociocultural context (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The study also drew on perspectives from the anthropology of religion and cultural studies to interpret ritual practices, oral narratives, and symbolic expressions as culturally embedded systems of meaning. Through this approach, the research sought to trace how Sufi values are transmitted, interpreted, and transformed across generations within the local cultural structure of the Rejang community.

The research was conducted in Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu, Indonesia, because the region represents a socio-cultural setting in which religious traditions, local customs, and communal rituals remain strongly interconnected. Participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in religious activities, cultural practices, and the transmission of communal knowledge. A total of 15 participants were involved in the study, consisting of five religious leaders, four traditional leaders, and six community members actively engaged in religious and socio-cultural activities. These participants were selected to capture both institutional and non-institutional dimensions of Sufi transmission within the community and to ensure sufficient depth and variation of perspectives.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences,

interpretations, and understandings of Sufi values in everyday life. Participant observation focused on religious gatherings, communal rituals, and cultural practices such as *ngarak*, while document analysis examined local manuscripts, religious texts, and cultural records related to the Rejang community. These multiple sources of data enabled the researcher to capture both historical and contemporary expressions of Sufism within the local context.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2021). The process began with verbatim transcription of interviews and field notes, followed by inductive coding to identify recurring meanings related to Sufi values, ritual practices, and cultural expressions. Codes with similar patterns were subsequently grouped into sub-themes and broader themes representing the transmission, transformation, and embedding of Sufi values within community life. To strengthen analytical validity, triangulation was applied by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documents, while peer review was used to ensure consistency of interpretation. The identified themes were then interpreted genealogically to examine how spiritual values are socially reproduced and culturally maintained across generations.

All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and their identities were protected to ensure confidentiality and ethical integrity. Given the interpretive and culturally sensitive nature of the study, the researcher also maintained a reflexive stance throughout the research process by critically reflecting on personal assumptions, positionality, and interactions with participants in order to preserve analytical rigor and respectful engagement with local values and meanings.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses how Sufi values are transmitted, interpreted, and reproduced within the cultural life of the Rejang Muslim community. The results are organized thematically based on field data obtained through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The discussion subsequently interprets these findings within broader anthropological, historical, and cultural perspectives to explain how Sufism operates not merely as a formal religious doctrine, but as a lived cultural mechanism that shapes morality, collective identity, and social cohesion within the Rejang community.

1. Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that Sufism within the Rejang Muslim community functions not only as a spiritual tradition but also as a cultural mechanism embedded in everyday social life. Based on interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the findings reveal how Sufi values are transmitted through oral traditions, communal rituals, language, and social interaction. The results are organized into four interconnected themes: historical traces of Sufism in the Rejang region, Islamization processes in Bengkulu, the origins and cultural formation of the Rejang community, and the empirical manifestations of Sufi values in daily life. Overall, the findings indicate that Sufism survives and reproduces itself primarily through culturally embedded practices continuously maintained across generations. The major findings identified during fieldwork are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of research findings on sufism in the Rejang Community

No.	Theme	Key Findings	Empirical Evidence	Interpretation
1.	Historical Context of Sufism	Sufism is understood through oral tradition and collective memory rather than written history	Narratives about Islamic teachers from Aceh and Palembang; interviews with religious leaders	Sufism functions as a lived historical consciousness embedded in memory
2.	Islamization Process	Islam spread through social relations such as trade, marriage, and kinship	Interview data emphasizing non-coercive Islamization; community acceptance patterns	Islamization is relational, adaptive, and culturally negotiated
3.	Origins of the Rejang Tribe	Identity is preserved through tambo (oral history), petulai system, and language	Statements from traditional leaders; observations of storytelling practices	Cultural identity is constructed and maintained through symbolic systems
4.	Manifestation of Sufi Values	Sufi teachings are practiced both formally and informally in daily life	Observations of ngarak, communal dhikr, and religious practices	Sufism operates as an embedded ethical and social system

As shown in Table 1, the findings consistently demonstrate that Sufi values within the Rejang community are preserved through oral transmission, collective memory, communal rituals, and social interaction. These patterns indicate that spirituality is deeply integrated into cultural and everyday communal life.



a. Historical traces of sufism in the Rejang Region

Field data reveal that the historical presence of Sufism in the Rejang region is primarily preserved through oral narratives, inherited memory, and local interpretations of Islamization. Interviews with religious leaders indicate that early Islamic teachings were closely associated with moral values such as humility, patience, and remembrance (*dhikr*). One religious leader explained: *“Islam came here not in a rigid way. The early teachers adapted to our customs. They taught remembrance (dhikr), patience, and humility, which are still practiced today.”* (Interview with RL, 2024).

This statement indicates that local people perceive Islamization and Sufi-oriented teachings as part of a unified spiritual and ethical process. Similar findings emerged from interviews with community elders who associated the arrival of Islam with figures from Aceh and Palembang. One participant stated: *“We hear from our elders that the first teachers came from Aceh and Palembang. They didn’t just teach religion, but also how to live properly with others.”* (Interview with AH, 2024).

Participant observation further showed that these narratives continue to be reproduced during religious gatherings, customary ceremonies, and informal communal discussions. Elders frequently shared stories concerning the arrival of Islam and the behavior of early religious teachers in the presence of younger generations. In addition, document analysis of local manuscripts and cultural records revealed traces of Islamic influence linked to broader regional networks, although participants interpreted these influences more through collective memory than institutional religious history.

b. Islamization processes in Bengkulu

The findings further indicate that Islamization in Bengkulu is remembered as a relational and adaptive process shaped through social interaction, trade, marriage, and kinship. Participants consistently emphasized that Islam spread through peaceful engagement rather than coercive conversion. One community elder explained: *“Islam did not come here through force. It came through relationships – marriage, trade, and mutual respect. That is why it was easily accepted by our ancestors.”* (Interview with MN, 2024).

Another participant similarly highlighted the adaptive approach of early religious teachers toward local customs and traditions: *“The teachers who came here did not reject our customs. They adjusted, and slowly people followed their teachings because they felt it was not foreign.”* (Interview with DS, 2024).

Observations conducted during traditional ceremonies and communal gatherings further confirmed the persistence of narratives linking Islamization with harmony and adaptation. Community members frequently referred to figures associated with Aceh, Minangkabau, and Palembang not only as transmitters of religion but also as individuals who established social and kinship relationships within the region.

Document analysis additionally revealed references to broader Islamic networks connected to Bengkulu. However, participants generally interpreted these connections through ancestral narratives and genealogical memory rather than through formal political or institutional history. Another important finding concerns the coexistence of different Islamic orientations within the community. Although participants acknowledged differences between traditional and reform-oriented practices, these differences were generally understood as complementary rather than conflictual. One participant stated: *"There are different ways of practicing Islam here, but we still respect each other. What is important is the intention and maintaining harmony."* (Interview with ZK, 2024).

These findings demonstrate that Islamization within the Rejang context continues to be understood as a culturally negotiated and socially integrated process.

c. Origins and cultural formation of the Rejang Community

The findings also reveal that the origins and identity of the Rejang community are strongly preserved through oral traditions, customary structures, language, and ritual practices. Interviews with traditional leaders indicate that community members associate their ancestry with the Lebong region and maintain historical knowledge through *tambo* or oral history. One traditional leader explained: *"We believe our ancestors came from Lebong, especially from the area around Hulu Tapus. That is what has been told from generation to generation."* (Interview with SR, 2024).

Another participant emphasized the role of oral narratives in preserving collective identity and moral orientation within the community: *"Our history is not written in books, but in stories told by elders. Through tambo, we know where we come from and how we should live."* (Interview with HY, 2024).

Participant observation further showed that storytelling practices remain active during customary gatherings and religious ceremonies. These activities function not only as recollections of the past but also as mechanisms for transmitting communal values and identity. Participants additionally highlighted the importance of *petulai* as a customary structure regulating social relationships and communal balance. One



participant explained: *“Petulai is not just about lineage; it is about how we organize ourselves, respect each other, and maintain balance in the community.”* (Interview with AR, 2024).

Language also emerged as an important medium for transmitting moral values. Interviews revealed that traditional Rejang expressions and proverbs continue to function as guidance in everyday social interaction. One participant stated: *“In our language, there are many sayings that teach patience and respect. These are not just words, but lessons for life.”* (Interview with FK, 2024).

Observations additionally indicated that rituals such as *ngarak*, marriage ceremonies, and funeral traditions combine symbolic acts, communal participation, and collective prayer. These rituals function as important spaces for reinforcing both cultural identity and communal values across generations.

d. Empirical manifestations of sufi values in Rejang social life

Field data indicate that Sufi values are deeply embedded in both formal and informal dimensions of Rejang social life. Interviews revealed an ambivalent perception toward formal Sufi practices such as *suluk* and *tarekat*-based gatherings. Some participants perceived these practices as relatively exclusive because of *bai'at* requirements. One participant explained: *“Suluk is usually for those who have taken bai'at. Not everyone joins, because there are certain commitments that must be fulfilled.”* (Interview with TM, 2024).

Despite this perception, participants consistently emphasized that core Sufi practices, particularly *dhikr*, are widely practiced beyond formal institutional membership. One community member stated: *“Even if we are not part of the tarekat, we still practice the dhikr. It brings calmness and strengthens our faith.”* (Interview with AL, 2024).

Participant observation confirmed that collective prayer, *dhikr* gatherings, and informal religious discussions are integrated into routine social activities within the community. Similarly, customary rituals such as *ngarak* involve collective prayer, symbolic respect toward ancestors, and expressions of gratitude attended by multiple generations. One participant explained: *“Through ngarak, we remember our ancestors and ask for blessings. It is also a way to teach younger people about respect and togetherness.”* (Interview with BR, 2024).

The findings additionally reveal that Sufi values are transmitted through informal educational processes such as storytelling, advice from elders, and everyday interaction. Participants repeatedly associated these teachings with patience, sincerity, humility, and mutual respect. One participant explained: *“What we learn from our elders is not just religion, but how to behave – be patient, sincere, and respect others.”* (Interview with NK, 2024).

The forms of Sufi value internalization identified during fieldwork are summarized in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Forms of sufi value internalization in Rejang society

Domain	Practices	Form of Value	Social Function
Spiritual Practice	Dhikr, prayer gatherings	Inner purification	Strengthening spirituality
Social Interaction	Respect, patience	Ethical conduct	Social harmony
Cultural Rituals	Ngarak, ceremonies	Symbolic religiosity	Collective identity
Informal Education	Storytelling, advice	Moral values	Intergenerational transmission

Table 2 demonstrates that Sufi values are internalized through spiritual practices, social interaction, cultural rituals, and informal educational processes. These findings indicate that spirituality within the Rejang context is closely integrated with communal ethics and cultural continuity.

Further findings also reveal distinctions between institutional forms of Sufism and culturally embedded Sufi practices within the community.

Tabel 3. Characteristics of sufism in the Rejang context

Aspect	Formal Sufism (Tarekat)	Cultural Sufism
Membership	Limited (bai'at)	Open
Practice	Suluk, structured dhikr	Daily dhikr, rituals
Transmission	Murshid-based	Community-based
Orientation	Institutional	Cultural
Function	Spiritual discipline	Social cohesion

As shown in Table 3, formal Sufism tends to operate through structured institutional mechanisms such as *tarekat* membership and *suluk*, whereas cultural Sufism functions through open communal participation, oral traditions, and everyday practices. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Sufism within the Rejang Muslim community survives and reproduces itself primarily through culturally embedded practices that continuously reinforce social cohesion, moral orientation, and collective identity across generations.

2. Discussion

The persistence of Sufism within the Rejang Muslim community reveals an important dimension of Islamic spirituality that is often overlooked in institution-centered



explanations of religion. While many studies associate the continuity of Sufism with the survival of *ṭarīqa* organizations, religious authority, and formal spiritual networks (Azizi et al., 2025; Latif & Ilyas, 2024; Wahid & Maskhuroh, 2024), the findings of this study suggest a different pattern. Sufi values endure because they have become embedded within the cultural practices that shape everyday communal life. Oral traditions, ritual participation, collective memory, and social interaction continuously reproduce ethical teachings across generations. This observation remains consistent with classical understandings of Sufism that emphasize moral refinement and spiritual cultivation as the essence of religious life (Curry & Ohlander, 2012; Knysh, 2019; Nasr, 2019). The Rejang case therefore demonstrates that the continuity of Sufism depends not only on institutions but also on the cultural environments through which spirituality is lived and transmitted.

The findings concerning Islamization help explain why Sufism became deeply rooted within Rejang society. Participants consistently described Islam as entering the region through kinship relations, marriage, trade, and everyday social interaction rather than through coercive conversion. Such memories contrast with dominant historical narratives emphasizing migration, commercial expansion, political authority, and transregional scholarly networks as the primary drivers of Islamization (Azra, 2006; Japarudin, 2016; Musofa, 2016; Suradi & Surahman, 2020). Although these structural processes were undoubtedly important, they do not fully explain how religious change gained legitimacy at the local level. The Rejang experience suggests that Islam was accepted because it was perceived as compatible with existing communal values and cultural norms. Religious transformation therefore occurred through accommodation and negotiation rather than cultural replacement (Arodha et al., 2025). This adaptive process created the conditions through which Sufi-oriented ethics could become integrated into local life.

The accommodative character of Islamization also explains the enduring influence of Sufism within the community. Values frequently associated with Sufi teachings, including humility, patience, sincerity, self-restraint, and social harmony, closely correspond with ethical ideals already respected within Rejang society. Rather than introducing an entirely new moral order, Sufism reinforced and refined values that were culturally meaningful. Similar patterns have been identified in studies examining cultural Sufism in Southeast Asian Muslim societies (Wijaya et al., 2025; Howell, 2001; Woodward, 2010). The findings of this study nevertheless indicate a deeper relationship between spirituality and cultural reproduction than is commonly

acknowledged. Sufism survived not merely because it adapted to local culture but because its ethical principles became embedded within the routines, symbols, and social relationships through which culture itself is reproduced. Spirituality consequently became part of the moral structure of everyday communal life.

A central finding of this study is that the transmission of Sufi values operates through a genealogical process embedded within cultural institutions. Existing studies frequently emphasize spiritual lineage, religious authority, and formal transmission in explaining the continuity of Sufi traditions (Badaruddin & Mahyuddin, 2021; Azizi et al., 2025; Hidayat et al., 2025). The Rejang experience points to an additional mechanism. Participants repeatedly associated spiritual teachings with family traditions, communal rituals, inherited narratives, and customary practices rather than with structured religious instruction alone. These findings indicate that religious knowledge is reproduced through a wider social ecosystem than institution-centered perspectives typically acknowledge. Values are gradually learned through participation in communal life and become integrated into collective understandings of proper conduct. The continuity of spirituality therefore depends not only on formal authority but also on the cultural processes through which ethical values are reproduced across generations.

This cultural genealogy becomes particularly visible in the role of *tambo*, *petulai*, oral tradition, and collective memory. Earlier studies have primarily examined these institutions as mechanisms for preserving ancestry, territorial identity, and social organization (Arios, 2011; Jaspan, 1964; Jaspan & King, 2007; Marsden, 1784). The present findings reveal a broader function. Through stories about ancestors, communal responsibilities, and historical experiences, these institutions simultaneously communicate ethical expectations and spiritual values. Similar observations regarding the educational role of oral traditions have been reported within Indonesian Muslim communities (Azra, 2004; Hamzah, 2010; Fajri, 2023; Arodha et al., 2025). However, the evidence presented here suggests that oral narratives do more than preserve cultural knowledge. They normalize values such as humility, patience, sincerity, and respect, transforming collective memory into a medium of moral formation. Identity preservation and spiritual transmission therefore occur through the same cultural channels.

Language constitutes another important mechanism through which spirituality remains present within everyday life. Proverbs, expressions, advice, and ordinary conversations repeatedly reinforce moral values that shape social behavior. Although language has long been recognized as an important component of cultural identity

(Hamzah, 2010), its role in sustaining spirituality is often overlooked. The findings indicate that linguistic practices function as repositories of ethical knowledge, continuously reproducing values associated with Sufi teachings. Because these values are communicated through everyday speech, they remain active even outside explicitly religious settings. Spirituality is therefore not confined to mosques, rituals, or formal instruction but is woven into ordinary communication. This finding demonstrates how cultural practices enable ethical teachings to remain socially relevant across generations and highlights the subtle ways in which spirituality becomes embedded within communal life.

The findings further demonstrate that Sufi values are manifested through both formal and informal dimensions of social life. While practices such as *suluk* and organized *ṭarīqa* activities remain visible within the community, many participants regarded them as only one expression of spirituality (Mustapha, 2024). Ethical teachings associated with these practices continue to influence individuals who have never formally joined a *ṭarīqa*. Community members regularly participate in *dhikr*, communal prayer, ritual gatherings, and other activities that embody Sufi values without necessarily identifying themselves as members of a formal spiritual order. Similar observations have emerged in studies examining the contemporary social role of Sufism (Azizi et al., 2025; Muttaqin et al., 2023; Robingatun et al., 2024). The Rejang case suggests that the influence of Sufism cannot be measured solely through organizational participation because its ethical dimensions circulate more broadly than its institutional structures.

This distinction between institutional and cultural Sufism carries important theoretical implications. Much of the existing literature explains the continuity of Sufism through religious authority, institutional networks, and organized transmission. Although such explanations remain valuable, the findings indicate that they do not fully account for how spiritual values survive within local communities. In the Rejang context, the social influence of Sufism depends less on institutional uniformity than on shared ethical commitments. Despite differences in religious practice and varying levels of participation in formal spiritual organizations, community members consistently emphasized values such as sincerity, humility, patience, and social harmony. Similar arguments regarding adaptive religious practice and local wisdom have been advanced by Zulkarnain et al. (2024), Elfia et al. (2024), and Sunaryo and Ardhana (2025). These findings suggest that cultural Sufism represents an important analytical category for understanding the lived dimensions of contemporary Muslim societies.

At a broader level, the evidence positions Sufism as a form of cultural capital that contributes to social cohesion, moral legitimacy, and communal continuity. Sufi values are not confined to personal spirituality but become integrated into identity formation, social relationships, and collective understandings of appropriate behavior (Mustapha, 2024). Comparable processes have been identified in studies examining family systems, marriage governance, and local traditions across Southeast Asian Muslim communities (Saiin et al., 2023; Saiin et al., 2024; Asman & Bin Muda, 2023; Rasyid et al., 2024; Setyawan et al., 2023). Although these studies focus on different domains, they collectively demonstrate that Islamic values frequently operate through engagement with local cultural structures. The Rejang experience strengthens this argument by showing that spirituality itself survives through processes of adaptation, negotiation, and cultural continuity. Religion thus functions not as a force that displaces local culture but as one that reinforces communal solidarity.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its effort to reposition Sufism as a genealogical cultural process rather than solely as an institutional religious tradition. Existing scholarship has frequently emphasized formal organizations, spiritual lineages, and religious authority when explaining the persistence of Sufism. The findings presented here reveal that oral memory, symbolic practices, communal interaction, and everyday ethics are equally important mechanisms through which spirituality is reproduced. This perspective contributes to wider discussions on cultural Sufism, *lived Islam*, and vernacular religion by illustrating how religious values become localized within specific cultural ecologies (Geertz, 1966; Howell, 2001; Woodward, 2010). More importantly, it highlights dimensions of religious continuity that often remain invisible when analysis focuses exclusively on formal institutions. The concept of cultural genealogy therefore offers a useful framework for understanding how spiritual traditions are maintained within indigenous Muslim communities.

The implications of these findings extend beyond academic scholarship. Efforts to strengthen social cohesion, religious moderation, and cultural resilience frequently rely on formal educational or institutional interventions. The findings suggest that local cultural traditions can serve as equally important resources for sustaining ethical values and communal solidarity. Storytelling practices, customary rituals, linguistic traditions, and intergenerational interaction continue to function as spaces where moral principles are learned and reinforced. Similar conclusions have been reached by

studies emphasizing the role of local wisdom in promoting social harmony and religious moderation (Feriyanto, 2020; Rasyad et al., 2021; Zulkarnain et al., 2024). Recognizing the importance of these cultural mechanisms may help policymakers, educators, and religious leaders develop approaches that are more responsive to local contexts while strengthening social integration.

The significance of these findings also extends beyond Indonesian Islamic studies. Contemporary debates on religion are often dominated by discussions of formalism, ideological polarization, and identity politics. The Rejang experience offers an alternative perspective by illustrating how religion can operate through accommodation, ethical integration, and communal harmony. Similar concerns have been explored in anthropological discussions of vernacular religion and indigenous spirituality (el-Aswad, 2006; Geertz, 1966; Howell, 2001). The findings contribute to these debates by demonstrating that spirituality frequently survives through informal cultural practices embedded within ordinary social life. Religious continuity therefore cannot always be understood through textual traditions or institutional structures alone. Attention must also be directed toward the cultural environments through which religious values are lived, remembered, and reproduced.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study focuses on a specific indigenous Muslim community in Bengkulu and therefore does not seek to represent the full diversity of Sufi experiences across Indonesia. In addition, the analysis concentrates primarily on cultural and communal dimensions of spirituality while giving less attention to the internal dynamics of formal *ṭarīqa* organizations. These limitations are consistent with the study's anthropological emphasis on contextual depth and lived experience. By focusing on oral traditions, language, ritual participation, and everyday interaction, the research provides a grounded understanding of how Sufi values are sustained within a particular cultural setting. Future comparative studies involving different ethnic and regional Muslim communities would help determine whether similar patterns of cultural transmission, spiritual reproduction, and ethical continuity emerge in other socio-cultural contexts.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Sufism within the Rejang Muslim community functions not merely as a formal spiritual doctrine but as a culturally embedded ethical system sustained through oral traditions, communal rituals, language, and everyday

social interaction. The findings reveal that the continuity of Sufi values is maintained primarily through cultural and intergenerational transmission rather than through formal *ṭarīqa* institutions alone. In the Rejang context, spirituality survives because it has become integrated into collective memory, social relationships, and local cultural practices that continue to shape communal identity, moral orientation, and social cohesion.

The study contributes to the literature on Islamic anthropology, cultural Sufism, and *lived Islam* by extending understandings of how spirituality is reproduced within indigenous Muslim communities. Rather than locating the persistence of Sufism solely within institutional structures and religious authority, the findings demonstrate the importance of cultural genealogy as a mechanism through which religious values are localized, transmitted, and maintained across generations. These findings also highlight the broader role of culturally embedded spirituality in fostering social harmony, ethical continuity, and communal resilience within plural societies.

Given the study's focus on a single indigenous Muslim community and its limited examination of formal *ṭarīqa* organizational dynamics, future research should undertake comparative investigations across different ethnic and regional Muslim communities to examine whether similar patterns of cultural transmission and localized spirituality emerge in other socio-cultural settings. Further studies may also explore the interaction between institutional Sufism and culturally embedded forms of spirituality to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic traditions are maintained and transformed in contemporary societies.

Rather than being sustained solely through institutional authority, Sufism endures within the Rejang community because it has become part of everyday cultural life. It survives because it is lived, remembered, narrated, and practiced collectively as a moral and cultural framework that continues to sustain communal identity and social cohesion across generations.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently without any financial, institutional, or commercial influence that could affect the objectivity, interpretation, or presentation of the findings.



Declaration of Generative AI

The authors declare that generative AI tools were used only to assist language refinement and editing. All interpretations, analyses, and conclusions presented in this article remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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