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Oral Tradition As A Living Cultural Practice: A Study Of Tangis Dilo In The Alas Community

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ABSTRACT

This study examines *Tangis Dilo* as a living oral tradition practiced by the Alas ethnic community of Aceh Tenggara and positions it within the framework of intangible cultural heritage. *Tangis Dilo* is a ritualized oral lament performed by a bride during the ceremonial release from her natal family after marriage, functioning as a medium for emotional expression, moral education, and social legitimization. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, performers, and community members, as well as audio-visual documentation of ritual performances. The findings reveal that *Tangis Dilo* possesses a structured performative form characterized by poetic language, rhythmic vocal delivery, symbolic gestures, and embodied actions that articulate gratitude, emotional attachment, and acceptance of social transition. The tradition reinforces kinship values, filial respect, and communal responsibility while serving as an informal educational mechanism within Alas society. However, its continuity faces challenges such as declining intergenerational transmission, reduced ritual spaces, and shifting cultural preferences among younger generations. The study also identifies sustainability strategies, including community-based transmission, educational integration, digital documentation, and strengthened cultural policy support. Theoretically, this research reinforces the concept of oral tradition as a dynamic cultural practice shaped by performance and social context, while practically contributing to preservation initiatives aimed at sustaining local oral traditions in contemporary society.

KATA KUNCI

tradisi lisan, tangis
dilo, masyarakat
alas, ratapan
ritual, warisan
budaya takbenda

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji *Tangis Dilo* sebagai tradisi lisan yang hidup dalam masyarakat etnik Alas di Aceh Tenggara dan menempatkannya dalam kerangka warisan budaya takbenda. *Tangis Dilo* merupakan ratapan lisan ritual yang dilantunkan oleh pengantin perempuan pada saat pelepasan dari keluarga asal setelah pernikahan, yang berfungsi sebagai media ekspresi emosional, pendidikan moral, dan legitimasi sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif etnografis dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh adat, pelaku tradisi, dan anggota masyarakat, serta dokumentasi audio-visual pertunjukan ritual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Tangis Dilo* memiliki struktur performatif yang khas, ditandai oleh bahasa puitis, irama vokal, simbolisme, dan gerak tubuh yang mengungkapkan rasa syukur, keterikatan emosional, serta penerimaan terhadap transisi sosial. Tradisi ini memperkuat nilai-nilai kekerabatan, penghormatan kepada orang tua, dan tanggung jawab sosial, serta berfungsi sebagai sarana pendidikan informal dalam masyarakat Alas. Namun, keberlanjutannya menghadapi tantangan berupa melemahnya pewarisan antargenerasi, berkurangnya ruang ritual, dan perubahan preferensi budaya generasi muda. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi strategi keberlanjutan melalui penguatan transmisi berbasis komunitas, integrasi dalam pendidikan, dokumentasi digital, dan dukungan kebijakan budaya.

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Introduction

Oral traditions constitute an essential component of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage, serving as a medium through which communities express collective emotions, transmit moral values, and legitimize social structures. Among the diverse forms of oral tradition practiced by local communities is *Tangis Dilo*, a ritual oral lament belonging to the Alas ethnic community in Aceh Tenggara. *Tangis Dilo* is traditionally performed by a bride during the ceremonial moment of separation from her natal family following marriage, marking a critical transition in her social status. As a performative oral genre, *Tangis Dilo* combines poetic language, emotional expression, symbolic gestures, and ritualized actions to articulate feelings of gratitude, sorrow, attachment, and acceptance. This tradition reflects the cultural worldview of the Alas people, in which marriage is understood not merely as a personal union but as a social transformation that involves family, kinship networks, and customary norms. Within the broader context of oral literature studies, *Tangis Dilo* exemplifies how ritual speech functions simultaneously as aesthetic expression, emotional release, and social regulation. Despite its cultural significance, *Tangis Dilo* remains underrepresented in academic discourse, particularly in systematic analyses that examine its structure, functions, and relevance in contemporary society. The limited documentation and scholarly attention given to such traditions increase the risk of cultural marginalization, especially as oral practices depend heavily on performance and intergenerational transmission for their continuity.

In recent years, the sustainability of *Tangis Dilo* has been increasingly challenged by social change, modernization, and shifting cultural orientations among younger generations. Formal education systems that prioritize written texts, along with the growing dominance of popular and digital culture, have contributed to a gradual decline in interest toward ritual oral practices. Consequently, opportunities for young members of the Alas community to learn and internalize *Tangis Dilo* both linguistically and culturally have become more limited. Furthermore, changes in wedding practices and the decreasing frequency of traditional ceremonies have reduced the ritual spaces in which *Tangis Dilo* is traditionally performed. These conditions raise concerns regarding the continuity of the tradition as a living cultural practice rather than a symbolic remnant of the past. From an academic perspective, studying *Tangis Dilo* is important not only for documenting its performative and linguistic features but also for understanding its socio-cultural functions in shaping emotional awareness, moral consciousness, and social legitimacy within the community. This study therefore positions *Tangis Dilo* within the framework of intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing the need for adaptive preservation strategies that maintain its relevance amid contemporary transformations. By analyzing *Tangis Dilo* as a ritual oral tradition, this research contributes to broader discussions on oral literature, ritual performance, and cultural sustainability, highlighting the importance of community participation, educational integration, and digital documentation in safeguarding local traditions for future generations.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach to investigate *Tangis Dilo* as a ritual oral tradition within the Alas ethnic community of Aceh Tenggara. A qualitative approach was selected because the object of this research involves cultural expressions, emotional meanings, symbolic actions, and social practices that cannot be adequately measured using quantitative instruments. Ethnography was applied to obtain an in-depth understanding of *Tangis Dilo* as a living tradition that is performed, interpreted, and transmitted within its natural cultural context. The research was conducted in several Alas villages in Aceh Tenggara where *Tangis Dilo* is still practiced during traditional wedding ceremonies. The participants consisted of traditional leaders, elder women, *Tangis Dilo* performers, brides who had experienced the ritual, and community members who possess knowledge of local customs. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement, experience, and cultural authority related to *Tangis Dilo*. Data collection techniques included participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Participant observation allowed the researcher to directly observe the ritual performance, including vocal delivery, poetic language, emotional expressions, gestures, and interaction between performers and the audience. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives on the meaning, function, transmission process, and cultural significance of *Tangis Dilo*. Documentation involved audio and video recordings of ritual performances, field notes, photographs, and the collection of relevant written and archival materials to support data triangulation.

The data analysis followed a qualitative thematic analysis procedure. The process began with data reduction, in which interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation materials were carefully reviewed, organized, and selected according to the research focus. This stage was followed by coding, where recurring themes such as ritual structure, emotional expression, moral values, kinship relations, gender roles, and sustainability challenges were identified and categorized. The coded data were then interpreted to identify patterns and relationships among themes, enabling a comprehensive understanding of *Tangis Dilo* as a ritualized oral tradition and cultural practice. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed, including source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participant groups, such as traditional leaders, performers, and community members. Method triangulation involved cross-checking findings from observation, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was carried out by discussing preliminary interpretations with key informants to confirm the accuracy of the data and interpretations. Ethical considerations were also addressed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and cultural norms governing ritual performance and community interaction were strictly respected. Participants' identities were protected when necessary, and the documentation of *Tangis Dilo* was conducted with sensitivity to its sacred and emotional dimensions. Through this methodological framework, the study aimed to produce a valid, contextual, and ethically grounded

analysis of *Tangis Dilo* as a form of intangible cultural heritage that continues to evolve amid social and cultural change.

Results

This section presents the research findings on *Tangis Dilo* as a ritual oral tradition practiced by the Alas ethnic community in Aceh Tenggara. The results are organized into four main categories: (1) the ritual form and structural characteristics of *Tangis Dilo*, (2) its socio-cultural and ritual functions, (3) the emotional, moral, and educational values embedded in the performance, and (4) contemporary challenges affecting its continuity. These findings are based on participant observation of wedding rituals, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, performers, brides, and community members, as well as documentation of *Tangis Dilo* performances.

Ritual Form and Structural Characteristics of *Tangis Dilo*

The findings indicate that *Tangis Dilo* is a highly structured ritual oral performance rather than a spontaneous emotional outburst. Although it is performed in a deeply emotional context, the tradition follows established conventions recognized by the Alas community. The performance generally occurs during the ceremonial moment when the bride prepares to leave her parental home, symbolizing the transition from daughterhood to married life. The ritual is initiated after customary procedures are completed and is witnessed by family members, elders, and community representatives.

Structurally, *Tangis Dilo* consists of three main stages: an opening, a core lament, and a closing. The opening stage functions as an invocation, where the bride addresses her parents, ancestors, and family members using respectful and poetic expressions. This stage signals the beginning of the ritual and establishes its solemn atmosphere. The core lament forms the emotional and narrative center of *Tangis Dilo*, containing expressions of gratitude, sadness, longing, and acceptance. Linguistically, this section is characterized by metaphorical language, repetition, rhythmic intonation, and symbolic references to family bonds, nature, and life journeys. The closing stage marks the acceptance of the bride's new social role and often includes prayers or expressions of hope for harmony, prosperity, and marital stability.

Observation data show that vocal modulation and bodily gestures are integral to the performance. The bride's tone shifts between soft lamentation and controlled articulation, while gestures such as bowing, touching the parents' hands, or lowering the gaze reinforce the emotional meaning of the words. These elements demonstrate that *Tangis Dilo* is a performative act combining verbal, vocal, and physical expressions.

Table 1 presents the structural stages of *Tangis Dilo* identified in this study.

Table 1
Structural Stages of Tangis Dilo

Stage	Description
Opening	Invocation and respectful address to parents and family

Core Lament	Expression of emotions, gratitude, sadness, and transition
Closing	Acceptance of new social role and prayers for the future

Socio-Cultural and Ritual Functions of *Tangis Dilo*

The findings reveal that *Tangis Dilo* serves multiple socio-cultural and ritual functions within Alas society. One primary function is ritual legitimization. Through *Tangis Dilo*, the bride's transition into marriage is publicly acknowledged and symbolically sanctioned by family and community members. The ritual affirms that the bride leaves her parental household with respect, consent, and cultural propriety, thus legitimizing her new social status.

Another important function is emotional mediation. *Tangis Dilo* provides a culturally accepted space for expressing intense emotions related to separation, responsibility, and change. Rather than suppressing emotion, the tradition channels personal feelings into a shared ritual form, allowing emotional expression to occur within socially regulated boundaries. This function helps maintain emotional balance for both the bride and her family during a significant life transition.

The data also indicate that *Tangis Dilo* functions as a mechanism for reinforcing kinship ties. By verbally acknowledging parents, siblings, and extended family, the bride reaffirms familial bonds even as she prepares to enter a new household. The ritual thus emphasizes continuity rather than rupture, reminding participants that marriage extends social networks rather than dissolving existing relationships. Additionally, *Tangis Dilo* strengthens communal solidarity, as its performance involves collective witnessing and shared emotional engagement.

Table 2 summarizes the socio-cultural and ritual functions of *Tangis Dilo*.

Table 2
Socio-Cultural Functions of Tangis Dilo

Function	Description
Ritual Legitimization	Public validation of marital transition
Emotional Mediation	Regulated expression of personal emotions
Kinship Reinforcement	Affirmation of family bonds
Social Integration	Strengthening communal solidarity

Emotional, Moral, and Educational Values in *Tangis Dilo*

The findings demonstrate that *Tangis Dilo* contains rich emotional, moral, and educational values that function as informal learning mechanisms within the Alas community. Emotionally, the ritual articulates feelings of gratitude toward parents, sadness over separation, humility, and readiness to assume new responsibilities. These emotions are not portrayed as individual weaknesses but as culturally valued expressions of sincerity and respect.

Morally, *Tangis Dilo* emphasizes values such as filial piety, obedience, responsibility, and self-control. The bride's lament frequently includes acknowledgment of parental sacrifices and advice received during upbringing, reinforcing the moral obligation to honor parents even after marriage. The acceptance of marriage is framed

as a moral duty that requires maturity, patience, and respect toward both the new family and the broader community.

From an educational perspective, *Tangis Dilo* serves as a form of experiential learning. Younger community members who observe the ritual learn about appropriate emotional expression, gender roles, and social expectations associated with marriage. Learning occurs implicitly through performance and participation rather than formal instruction. The repetition of *Tangis Dilo* across generations ensures the continuity of these values, embedding them within cultural memory.

Table 3 presents the key emotional, moral, and educational values identified in *Tangis Dilo*.

Table 3
Values Embedded in Tangis Dilo

Value	Description
Gratitude	Appreciation for parental care and upbringing
Respect	Filial piety and obedience to elders
Responsibility	Readiness to assume marital and social duties
Emotional Balance	Regulated expression of sadness and acceptance
Cultural Awareness	Understanding of marital and kinship norms

Challenges to the Continuity of *Tangis Dilo*

Despite its cultural significance, the findings reveal several challenges threatening the continuity of *Tangis Dilo*. One major challenge is the declining participation of younger generations. Many young women lack the linguistic competence and cultural knowledge required to perform *Tangis Dilo*, as exposure to the tradition has decreased. Modern wedding practices that prioritize efficiency and contemporary aesthetics often reduce or eliminate ritual elements, limiting opportunities for performance.

Another challenge is the reduction of ritual spaces. Traditional wedding ceremonies that once involved extended rituals are increasingly shortened, resulting in fewer contexts where *Tangis Dilo* can be performed. In addition, institutional support for preserving *Tangis Dilo* remains limited. Although recognized as a cultural tradition, systematic documentation, educational integration, and policy-based preservation efforts are still insufficient.

Technological change also presents a dual challenge. While digital media offer opportunities for documentation, they also contribute to shifting cultural preferences toward globalized forms of expression. Without intentional preservation strategies, *Tangis Dilo* risks being transformed into a symbolic display rather than a living ritual practice.

Table 4 summarizes the main challenges affecting the continuity of *Tangis Dilo*.

Table 4
Challenges to the Continuity of Tangis Dilo

Challenge	Description
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Generational Gap	Declining transmission to younger generations
Ritual Reduction	Decreasing duration and frequency of performances
Institutional Support	Limited documentation and policy backing
Cultural Shift	Influence of modern and digital culture

Summary of Results

Overall, the results show that *Tangis Dilo* is a complex ritual oral tradition with structured forms, significant socio-cultural functions, and deeply embedded emotional and moral values. At the same time, its continuity is challenged by social change, modernization, and limited preservation mechanisms. These findings provide an empirical foundation for understanding *Tangis Dilo* as a living form of intangible cultural heritage that requires adaptive and community-centered preservation strategies.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Tangis Dilo* functions as a ritualized form of oral literature that integrates emotional expression, social legitimacy, and cultural continuity within the Alas ethnic community. Unlike spontaneous lamentation, *Tangis Dilo* operates through structured performative conventions that regulate how emotions are articulated in culturally appropriate ways. This supports theoretical perspectives in oral literature and performance studies that emphasize the role of form, repetition, and symbolism in transforming personal experiences into shared cultural expressions. The use of poetic language, rhythmic vocalization, and embodied gestures in *Tangis Dilo* reinforces its status as a performative text, where meaning is generated not only through words but also through voice, movement, and ritual context. By situating emotional expression within a recognized cultural framework, *Tangis Dilo* allows individual feelings of loss, gratitude, and acceptance to be collectively acknowledged without disrupting social harmony. This finding aligns with broader studies on ritual lament traditions, which highlight their function in mediating emotional transitions during critical life events.

From a socio-cultural perspective, *Tangis Dilo* plays a significant role in legitimizing social transitions and reinforcing kinship values within Alas society. The ritual affirms marriage as a communal rather than solely personal event, emphasizing the interconnectedness of family, kinship, and customary authority. Through verbal acknowledgment of parental care and communal guidance, *Tangis Dilo* reinforces moral values such as filial piety, responsibility, obedience, and self-control. These values are transmitted implicitly through performance rather than explicit instruction, illustrating the role of oral tradition as an informal educational system. This supports the concept of cultural learning, in which social norms and ethical principles are internalized through participation in meaningful cultural practices. Moreover, the collective witnessing of *Tangis Dilo* strengthens social cohesion, as community members share emotional engagement and reaffirm common values. In this sense, *Tangis Dilo* functions as a mechanism for maintaining social order and cultural identity, complementing formal institutions such as family and customary law.

However, the challenges identified in this study reflect broader patterns of cultural change affecting many ritual oral traditions in contemporary society. The declining participation of younger generations, reduced ritual spaces, and shifting cultural preferences toward modern and digital practices indicate a weakening of intergenerational transmission. While modernization has expanded cultural choices and modes of expression, it has also marginalized traditions that rely on sustained communal practice. This study suggests that the sustainability of *Tangis Dilo* depends on adaptive preservation strategies that recognize it as a living tradition rather than a static cultural artifact. Integrating *Tangis Dilo* into educational programs, community-based cultural activities, and digital documentation initiatives may help bridge generational gaps while preserving its cultural integrity. Such approaches align with contemporary frameworks of intangible cultural heritage preservation, which emphasize community participation, contextual practice, and cultural relevance. By highlighting both the cultural significance and the vulnerabilities of *Tangis Dilo*, this study contributes to broader discussions on how ritual oral traditions can remain meaningful and resilient amid ongoing social transformation.

Conclusions

This study concludes that *Tangis Dilo* is a significant ritual oral tradition within the Alas ethnic community that functions as a medium for emotional expression, moral education, and social legitimization during the marital transition of women. The findings demonstrate that *Tangis Dilo* possesses distinctive performative and structural characteristics, including poetic language, rhythmic vocal delivery, symbolic gestures, and ritualized actions, which transform personal emotions into shared cultural expressions. Through its performance, *Tangis Dilo* reinforces core values such as filial respect, responsibility, emotional balance, and communal solidarity, while strengthening kinship ties and affirming customary norms. However, the continuity of *Tangis Dilo* faces challenges related to declining intergenerational transmission, reduced ritual contexts, and shifting cultural preferences influenced by modernization and digital culture. Therefore, adaptive preservation efforts that integrate community participation, educational initiatives, and digital documentation are essential to sustain *Tangis Dilo* as a living form of intangible cultural heritage that remains relevant in contemporary Alas society.

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