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Sasak Boda Observed: The Preservation of Tebango Buddhists' Cultural Heritage on Lombok Island, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Although the government issued an accommodative policy protecting and supporting minority communities, statistics has shown a decline in the number of Buddhism followers in modern-day Lombok, Indonesia. This ethnographic study aims to reconsider the existence of a cultural heritage that provides sustainable values to community development. This study seeks to understand how the vernacular Buddhism of Sasak Boda in Tebango manages to strive as the minority and live their belief amid the dominating Sasak Muslim community. Data was collected through literature review, interviews, and observation. Findings indicate that the decline of Boda devotees in Dusun Tebango of Lombok in number has been affected by the public perception of the vernacular Buddhism movement. Despite such a reality becoming an anomaly in the discourses related to cultural heritage preservation, the Tebango Buddhists are capable of maintaining the tradition through customs that are tangible and intangible. This case signifies a premise that quantitative measurement alone is insufficient to study the sustainability of a local belief system such as the Sasak Boda. Consequently, this study argues that the state of maintainability and materiality of any culture act as determinant factors in the empowerment of locality-based communities.

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Introduction

Indigenous belief communities have not yet received adequate rights and spaces despite that the Indonesian government has issued policies supporting them constitutionally (Bagir et al., 2020; Handaya, 2021; Nalle, 2021). Strategies to overcome gaps in facilities for indigenous groups, based on a faith-based community development paradigm, involve continuous efforts and changes as a form of resistance technique. Such is the one seen in Dusun Tebango located at the East Pemenang Village, Pemenang Sub-district, North Lombok Regency. The resistance to oppressive conditions is manifested through efforts to maintain the ancestral culture (Burhanuddin & Saharudin, 2020) that has been passed

down from generation to generation to ensure that the identity of the local community is not lost. Indigenous belief has been sharply criticized in recent studies (Faiz, 2018; Makin, 2016). The inclination of these studies is to accommodate and observe the minority groups of major religions, whereas faint voices from small and marginalized religions remain understudied.

The trend of previous research on the relationship between the existence of cultural heritage and sustainable impacts on social development shows that the protection, management and revitalization of cultural heritage and the empowerment of marginalized communities can provide social, economic, environmental benefits, creating jobs for local communities (Girard & Nocca, 2017; Lerario, 2022). Some research also shows that when cultural heritage is associated with tourism development (Brooks et al., 2023; Li & Terason, 2023) that can have a positive impact on social development in its sustainability. In fact, cultural heritage can also provide social cohesion and create tolerance for different groups (Ross, 2023; Vu Hoang, 2021). Overall, they contribute to our understanding of the importance of preserving and valuing cultural heritage in the context of sustainable development.

Some countries accommodate marginalized communities in fulfilling their human rights by developing policies and programs that aim to reduce social, economic, and cultural disparities (Eneanya, 2019; Flores, 2014; United Nations Development Programme, 2015; United Nations Human Rights (UNHR), 2022). These measures reflect a serious commitment to the principles of social justice and human rights. By paying special attention to marginalized communities, these countries are not only promoting social and economic inclusion but also building a solid foundation for sustainable and stable growth (Danciu et al., 2018). Through these efforts, they not only improve the living conditions of marginalized communities but also strengthen diverse and dynamic social foundations, which in turn contribute to social harmony and shared progress (Pratt, 2019). By recognizing and fulfilling the human rights of marginalized communities, these countries are taking an important step towards sustainable and equitable development for all their citizens.

While extensive research shows that there are positive contributions to social development and even accommodative policies aimed at protecting marginalized communities, they do not necessarily retain followers and some are even “forced” to join the majority (Faiz, 2018; Tawodzera et al., 2022) in the name of accommodating their livelihood. This article offers novel research on that anomaly related to the preservation of minor culture. Tebango Buddhist communities are able to maintain their traditions through various activities such as preserving local culture both in terms of sociocultural, socio-economy, and socio-religion. Based on studies of existing researchers, they are more inclined to explore the majority voice that accommodates minority voices in order to get their common rights in the public sphere (Bertrand, 2011; Hadiprayitno, 2017; Roza & Asroa B.S, 2022). Through ethnographic research of the minority group in Tebango, this paper seeks to explore the existence of a minor religious group that leaves a gap in policymaking and studies on indigenous belief and community development.

Theoretical Framework

Minority Group: Form, Existence, and Performance

The word “*existence*” is etymologically derived from *existere* which denotes the presence, being, appearance, and actuality of a fact. The word “*existere*” is composed of two syllables, namely “*ex*” which means out and “*istere*” which means to appear or emerge. Therefore, existence can be interpreted as a form of activity that appears, exists, and arises as a factual existence of a group. An appropriate theoretical framework must be adopted to ensure the integrity and validity of the findings in examining these forms of minor existence (Tawodzera et al., 2022). The use of relevant theoretical frameworks, accurate data analysis methods, and meticulous data collection are crucial aspects in this research process. Thus, the research results can be used as a basis for policy formulation (Mitchell et al., 2018) that is more inclusive and sustainable, and provides benefits to marginalized groups that may have long been ignored or forgotten in the stream of social change and community development.

Previous studies have demonstrated various manifestations perpetrated by marginalized groups, such as the study of religious rituals of the *Sunda Wiwitan* religion among the Sundanese Bedouin indigenous people, as well as various crafts and locality characteristics of the Asmat ethnicity, and other similar studies (Bagir et al., 2020; Colbran, 2010; Handaya, 2021). Research on these forms of minority existence is significant for identifying and understanding the movements of groups that are out of the limelight socially, economically, and politically (Alm & Guttormsen, 2023; Sevelius et al., 2020). The study of the existence of these marginalized groups helps in appreciating their cultural diversity and the unique contributions they can make in the broader social context. In addition, this research can also open insights and awareness of various issues (Hall, 2020; Pratt, 2019) such as justice, equality, and human rights in various contexts.

Research Methods

Description of the Observed Area

Dusun Tebango, East Pemenang Village, Pemenang Sub-district, North Lombok Regency has a population of 345 households. Its total population is 1103 citizens consisting of 565 men and 538 women. They live different faith systems and backgrounds. Among them are Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. These three religions can live in harmony which is influenced by the background of these beliefs. The percentage of population based on religion in Pemenang Timur Village in the Village Demography document is 74.38% Muslim, 4.46% Hindu and 11.96% Buddhist. In contrast to the percentage of religious adherents in the village who are predominantly Muslim, 1192 Buddhists in Pemenang Timur mostly live in Dusun Tebango.

This research seeks to understand how the existence of the Tebango Buddhist community manage to strive as minor group and live their everyday life in the midst of the majority Lombok Sasak Muslim community. Such a phenomenon is based on three

important arguments; *First*, the uniqueness of the Tebango community which is indicated to have carried out forced migration based on a mutually agreed communal memory. In the process of historical transition, the Tebango community agreed on the collective memory of Lombok's geomorphology for the eruption of Mount Samalas which occurred in 1257 AD, so that the people of Lombok and most of the affected areas carried out forced migration (Clement et al., 2021; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022; United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, 2021) to safer areas. However along with developments over time socio-environmental cause they choose to stay still and form a new community to the Tebango area.

Second, even though the Tebango Buddhist community is an isolated and marginalized group, they still exist (Ariefiandi, 2019; Badan Diklat Litbang Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019; Burhanuddin & Saharudin, 2020; General Directorate of Information and Communication, 2019; Suyadi, 2019) with various religious rituals that they believe in. In fact, some studies show the best practice form of a religious ritual practice that spreads moderate understanding. *Third*, although the Tebango community is indicated not to be accommodated by the state in the aspect of belief (Klein, 2017), the Tebango Boda community still gets along well and coexists with other religious adherents.

These three arguments make important aspects as a basis for why this research needs to be done. Seeing how the existence and how the preservation process carried out by the Tebango Buddhist community in the midst of the absence of the state in 'giving freedom' in determining beliefs. This research is built on the constructivism paradigm. The constructivism paradigm is more inclined and more appropriate to use an ethnographic approach (Lange, 1988), because this research talks about the existence of religious traditions and ritualization. This research leads to how the behaviors of individuals or communities are explored in more depth. In addition, the study maps the essence and complexity of culture in the Tebango Buddhist Community group.

Data Collection

This research is ethnographic. It focuses on the Buddhist community in Dusun Tebango of Lombok. Data obtained from observations, interviews, and literature review. Observations were conducted to observe, live, understand, and conceptualize the environmental conditions directly and know the everyday lives of observed citizens. Interviews were conducted with predetermined informants. This participant determination uses purposive sampling by grouping each research subjects into three categories: local governors (LG), local villagers (LV), academicians (AC). The researchers have interviewed these local informants as follows:

No	Nama/ Initial	Category	Place	Sex	Date	Duration (min.)	Data to Search
1	KS/I1	LG	Office	Male	02/01/2022	60	Shared memory on natural disaster in Lombok
2	TAB/I2	LV	House	Male	03/11/2022	60	Religiosity in Tebango
3	TP/I3	LV	House	Male	02/15/2022	70	Religiosity in Tebango
4	TAT/I4	LV	Mosque	Male	03/11/2022	40	Forced migration of people due to natural disaster
5	ALU/I5	AC	Campus	Female	01/22/2022	35	Political dynamics and the mass mobilization
6	S/I6	LV	House	Male	05/15/2022	40	Religiosity in Tebango
7	AS/I7	LG	House	Male	12/12/2019	35	Socio-religious dynamics
8	A/I8	LV	House	Male	12/25/2019	35	Socio-religious dynamics
9	RJ/I9	LG	House	Male	06/20/2022	40	Cultural values
10	PM/I10	LV	House	Male	11/17/2021	40	Cultural values
11	DS/I11	LV	Vihara	Male	11/17/2021	40	Religious rituals
12	UIH/L12	LV	House	Female	03/11/2022	35	Socio-religious values

Table 1. Statistical table of interviews. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

Results

The forms of existence of the Tebango community can be categorized into three, namely: The sociocultural, socio-economic and socio-religious dynamics. First, socio-culture activities are various forms of activities related to social and culture that are indicated by social actions as the existence of local communities. In this section, it is divided into two, namely tangible and intangible activities. Furthermore, the second grouping is a form of socio-economic activity where there are many socio-economic activities whose purpose is to maintain the existence of the Tebango community in the form of economic activities in the region. The last is the socio-religion activity form. This group will tell excerpts of religious activities that still occur in Tebango and are passed down from generation to generation along with various details of the explanation.

Sociocultural Dynamics of the Tebango Community

There are two categories of local traditions in the continuity of Tebango society based on fieldwork. The first is social activities that lead to tangible cultural forms as an act of existence. This form is continued tangible culture such as material culture, namely *pegon* and *kebaya* clothing modes used in traditional rites. Informant I6, a local villager, explained the customs and rituals of the community with pride, stating that their centuries-old

standing tradition upholds significant values and highly practical elements. He stated further as follows:

“During religious rituals in all Tebango areas, adult residents will wear *pegon* for men and *kebaya* for women. In addition, residents will hear the alarming sound of social activity markers through *kul-kul* that has been used for generations as a sign that the activity is about to be carried out, and also the *sanggah* monument located on the edge of the road provides spiritual meaning as a reminder to pay respect to ancestors.”

The cultural presence of the Tebango community can first be shown by the use or wearing of local traditional clothes called *pegon* worn during traditional ceremonies. This traditional dress consists of a belt, *wiron* cloth, *kebaya*, and colored fabric. The belt on this traditional outfit is called *leang* by the local community strapped to one’s waist to tighten the applied fabric. Another cloth called *wiron* is strapped to cover lower body parts to the ankles. Such the way of fashion culture is detailed concisely by informant I3 in the following: “The clothing used by local tradition celebrations does not differentiate between the Muslim, Hindu, or other faith communities, giving rise to a customary coexistence that is present in the modern-day Tebango.” This traditional common attire of Tebango citizens has become living evidence of their local genius and that the community maintains local existential values as a narrative of remembering the past memory and culture. It is supported by a set of social activities performed routinely within the community expressed into intangible material culture in the forms of particular proverbs such as *polong renten*, *ngayah*, and respecting the elders.

The rich tapestry of Tebango culture is further shown in its archaic idiophones used most times to alert and inform particular information, partly on *ngayah* or social works. The percussion instrument was called *kul-kul*, an Austronesian-styled slit drum consisting of a wood club located in Bali and Nusa Tenggara. *Kul-kul* was played as a marker to carry out routine social activities in Tebango, starting from cleaning the area and repairing places of worship to renovating all fragile religious symbols and strengthening them. When the community conducts social activities, the *kul-kul* becomes a tool to invite the community to gather immediately, through the beat of the tone issued by the tool as a loudspeaker (observation notes, 2023). Local communities often also use *kul-kul* to invite people to improve worship facilities to facilitate comfortable religious spaces. Informant I7 mentioned that “*Kul-kul* is often used as a tool to invite and remind residents in social activities such as repairing the foundation of the *Jeliman Ireng* Buddha statue which was damaged by a major earthquake in 2018 so that it needs renovation”. The existence of the *kul-kul* is vital to carrying out social activities for the locals so that traditions can be preserved and performed.

Socio-Economic Features of the Agricultural Society

The distinct topographical and geographical characteristics make residents of Pemenang Timur carry out socio-economic activities in the agricultural sector. Pemenang Timur Village has an area of 26.66 kilometers square and is formed of lowlands—50 meters

above sea level—plains and hills. Of the three types of topography, the entire village area is tropical, with an average temperature of 30o Celsius. The average rainfall is 1758 mm. There are at least six agricultural commodities (Pemenang Timur, 2023) that form the backbone of rural livelihood activities in Pemenang Timur. Two of these are rice and corn farming as staple foods and the other four are coffee, palm sugar, chocolate, and vegetables. Rice crop is one of the leading commodities there as there was an increase in production from 24.6 tons in 2015 to 47 tons in 2019.

Rice farming in Tebango in particular and in East Pemenang at large has a high economic bargaining power through the history of irrigation arrangements with the *Subak* system. The *Subak* system has traditionally been led from generation to generation by customary activists in irrigation management called *pekasih*. At the beginning of the division of East and West Pemenang from Pemenang, the *pekasih* for the hamlet [*keliang*] of Tebango was led by Amaq Sanudin. It was Amaq Sanudin's authority that drove the socio-economic system of agriculture in the context of how irrigation from the spring flowed fairly to the people's rice fields. There is a social contract in the *Subak* system, including Subak Tebango that economic resources in the form of springs are safeguarded and organized in a fair and sustainable socio- economic contract. The arrangement of livelihoods is adjusted to the needs of each community, this mutual agreement must be obeyed and carried out carefully. If anyone violates it, they will be subject to social sanctions. This system provides justice for each community in the process of obtaining clean water, and minimizes conflicts over water resources in the village.

In the plantation commodity sector, sugar palm (*Arenga Pinnata*) in Tebango and Pemenang Timur can be said to have two functions, namely as a conservation plant and strengthening social interaction. *Aren* palm trees can function as conservation crops due to their typical intercropping or intercropping function as water catchment and reforestation of plantations in areas directly adjacent to customary forests. *Aren* can grow without competing with other food crops. In this context, *aren* palm trees contribute to retaining rainwater in the Tebango hills in order to maintain the water discharge of spring in the dry season.

As for the social function, almost all residents work together to tap the sap water from the palm trees during the harvesting period. Furthermore, in the process of making palm sugar, social interaction becomes intense and bond one group and others. The processing of the harvested palm juice takes a long time and provides an opportunity for the community to interact with each other. Workers who process in East Pemenang consist of Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist communities as the three majority religions in Pemenang Sub- district. There is social interaction in the economic public space during the process of thickening the nira essence for hours to become palm sugar. As stated by informant I9, "*this palm tree has double functions, besides being a plant that functions to absorb water, in the process of managing the nira essence into palm sugar, it also makes people interact with each other even though they have different beliefs.*" These functions make economic activities closely related to conservation and social functions for the Tebango community. There is an integration between

traditional activities and livelihoods that creates a trickle-down effect on the socio-economic tourism business in East Pemenang. Some tourism businesses, such as the first beach-based tourism in Pemenang, namely Sira Beach, have brought continuity to special interest tourism that combines agriculture and the socio-economic and cultural life of Tebango residents in particular and East Pemenang and Pemenang in a broader geographical context. Secondly, “*Rumah Sakma*” agro-tourism in Koloh Tanjung hamlet attracted a total of 14,968 tourists during 2019 before the pandemic. Tourists are interested in gaining direct experience interacting with farmers and tourism awareness groups in vegetable and fruit gardens. Domestic tourists from local Lombok and the archipelago as well as a number of foreign tourists interact with the residents of East Pemenang. Third, tourists come to the Tebango Buddhist community in *Jeliman Ireng* to visit the Buddha statue in the integration of socio-cultural life in *Jeliman Ireng* hamlet and Suradipati Temple, Tebango. Considering its position as a traditional village, Romo Juliadi, the village head of *Jeliman Ireng*, explained that the uniqueness of *Jeliman Ireng* and Tebango as a Buddhist community lies in its thinking and behavior as *polong renten*. He explained *polong renten* as meaning that despite differences in religion and geography, the residents of Tebango and the other hamlets in Pemenang Timur, West, and Menggala are one and united as stated in the “*Menggala Charter*” (Romo Juliadi, personal communication, 2022). Thus, the coexistence of Tebango citizens is preserved when there is integration between traditional activities and livelihoods that create new tourism with various uniqueness. The socio-economic efforts of integrative rural livelihoods can be summarized in the following table:

No	Name of Activity	Description
1	<i>Subak</i> , the local irrigation system for agriculture	Tebango citizens at East Pamenang rely on their agricultural products of rice and corn as main sources of revenue. Its cultivating crops and farming routines have been passed down for generations and remarked as the region's longstanding socio-economic history, one of which is its irrigation system called subak which refers to the crop watering system conducted by adat administrators called pekasih.
2	Social Interactions during the Production Process	The entire production of palm sugar in the village takes hours. As palm sugar became a prospective revenue, the Tebango community was renowned as a great palm sugar producer and used to gather routinely for hours to produce them. During the production process, social interaction and cohesion shall be intensified and strengthened.
3	Agrotourism and the trickle-down effect	The assimilation and integration of traditional customs with income-generating livelihood uprises the trickle-down effect to promote local tourism at Pemenang Timur.

Table 2. Economic Activities at the Tebango Community. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

In all aspects of community empowerment in the economic sector, the socio-economic activities of the Tebango community, as part of Pemenang Timur, have experienced both continuity and change. Tebango's history as an indigenous community based on agriculture and plantations has brought changes to the tourism revenue. The uniqueness of Tebango as a Buddhist community in the majority of Islamic Lombok has attracted tourists to visit, which was followed by the development of agro-tourism businesses. The tourism prospect of Tebango, which becomes an all-new and fresh innovation in livelihood, is therefore seen as integral to the sustainability of sociocultural and religious activities that trigger the distinctiveness of attracting tourists.

Tebango Buddhists and Their Socio-Religiosity

Socio-religious activities in Tebango Buddhist community have a distinctive link between the sociocultural values adopted for generations the early Buddhism that was officially adopted in Indonesia after 1965. After the official entry of Buddhism, there were changes in socio-religious activities. The most prominent change in religious events is the commemoration of Vesak Day as a Buddhist holiday. There are three main rites performed during the Vesak: *Keliling Dusun* [circumnavigating the hamlet], *Tarian Puja* [hymn dance], and *Memandikan Siddharta* [the bathing of Siddharta].

The Tebango Buddhist community performs a ritual activity of roaming the hamlet during Vesak. The entire Tebango community will participate in going down the hill to the seaside at the Bangsal Harbor location, together with other Buddhists from all over North Lombok Regency. They will form a procession consisting of hundreds of devotees. In the researcher's observation, no less than 400 people marched in traditional clothing, women marching in white *kebaya*, with a bun or hairband and a shawl on their shoulders or around their waist. The line was completed by adult and younger men wearing white shirts and *sapug* headbands, carrying Indonesian flags and banners. Girls appear among the women with shawls around their waists carrying fruit-filled *badhe* on their heads, marching neatly behind their navy blue-clad counterparts carrying incense and small jars for candles. The entire walking line makes the two-kilometer walking path from the waterfront to the Vihara Jaya Wijaya in Tebango. The procession of hundreds of Buddhists involved Buddhist components such as the Indonesian Supreme Sangha [*Sangha Agung Indonesia*], Buddhist Women Association [*Ikatan Wanita Buddhis*], and government components from the sub-district level. The procession is preceded by brown-robed monks, and ceremonial leaders, the *Diksa Upasaka Anu Pandita* [Diksa UAP]. This ritual performed in Dusun Tebango has been carried out for generations and is maintained by the Tebango Buddhist members.

The circumnavigating ritual around the *dusun* suggests that this event is intended as a meditational exercise. During the procession, the participants chant the *gata* [Buddhist chant] of *Jaya Manggala Gita*. The informant I10 claims that *'this gata is derived from the story of Siddharta Gautama's victory in making the elephant drunk, which was originally intended to disrupt religious advice, but ended up walking hand in hand with him to teach compassion'*. The ritual

leader Metawadi further explains the significance of the chanting of *Jaya Manggala Gita* that Buddhists will radiate love to humanity and other creatures both in religious processions and in daily life. When arriving at Jaya Wijaya Temple, the whole procession ends as all the participants of the procession will sit kneeling in a row with a distance in the middle for the road to pass, allowing the women to perform Puja Dance. The philosophical significance of the ritual is that it symbolizes the spreading of love to other beings so as to provide peace and kindness to the community at large.

Another ritual is the puja dance. Buddhist mothers carry out this activity at Vihara Jaya Wijaya after the round-the-village ritual process. The performance of Puja Dance aims to pay tribute to Siddharta Gautama who brought truth and purity (Pandita Dhammata Samena, personal communication, 2021). Puja dance is still being performed from generation to generation by Buddhist women during the commemoration of Vesak Day. It allows Buddhist women to connect with each other and practice the dance movements in order to preserve it so that it can still be enjoyed by citizens of Tebango.

The final ritual is the bathing of Siddharta [*memandikan Siddharta*]. When *Tarian Puja* is meant to honor Prince Siddharta, the later ritual refers to the remembrance of the Infant Siddharta who at birth was immediately able to walk in a seven-step manner. Each step grew a lotus flower. Reflecting upon the ritual in 2022, the priest starts the procession of bathing, continued by the officials and concluded by the Buddhist devotees. The objective of this ritual is for the purification of the mind, self-reflection, and the eradication of inner darkness. The process of bathing Siddharta is carried out by traditional authorities beforehand and then continued by the entire community in turn. This rite serves as a form of Tebango Buddhist's reflection and devotion and it is preserved from generation to generation.

No	Ritual Name	Description of the Religious Ritual
1	Keliling dusun [Circumnavigating the hamlet]	Tebango Buddhists shall perform a meditational walking ritual roaming the hamlet during the sacred time of Vesak. It begins with hundreds of them walking down the hill to the edge of the village's harbor.
2	Tarian Puja [Hymn Dance]	The worship-contained dancing ritual aims to pay tribute and respect to the figure of Prince Siddharta Gautama who promoted truth and holiness.
3	Memandikan Siddharta [the bathing of Siddharta]	Purification ritual symbolizes the religious memory of Siddharta's infancy, whose birth was followed by his ability to walk in a seven-step matter, where his footsteps grew lotus.

Table 3. Religious rituals of Tebango Buddhists. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

Three rituals performed by Tebango Buddhists during Vesak, namely the circumnavigating ritual, the Puja Dance, and the Siddharta bathing ritual, aim to recall Buddhism's teachings of loving one another, cooperating closely with each other and

reflecting on human actions in the world. To read between the lines from the three findings of socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious activities in Tebango hamlet and in the context of the wider environment in East Pemenang, there is a value of sustainability in the social interactions of the Tebango Buddhist community, both in the relationship of voluntary cooperation, socio-economic contracts, as well as the close brotherhood of fellow religious and interfaith communities. In this trilogy of life, the traditions of the Tebango indigenous people continue. The religious reasoning and socio-economic strategies of the Tebango citizens to maintain and develop their wellbeing will be further discussed in the following section.

The Intangibles: Maintaining Ancestral Veneration and Social Cooperation

In spite of the visible forms of material culture, intangible forms of cultural integrity can be observed in the form of beliefs held for centuries by the community that are: *polong renten*, *ngayah*, and respecting elders. These typical Tebango cultural terms are passed down from generation to generation with the integrity of ancestral values in the form of respect for elders and social cooperation. The continuity of Tebango culture through the first intangible is the concept of *Polong Renten*. *Polong Renten* is a proverb on mutual agreement that considers all residents of East Pemenang, West Pemenang, and Menggala are united as brothers as stated in Menggala Charter, despite differences in ethnic, religion, culture, and geography. Therefore, this harmony based on the sense of brotherhood provides stability in various activities. This is reinforced by a statement from the Village Head of *Jeliman Ireng*, Romo Juliadi, who stated that “*the uniqueness of Jeliman Ireng and Tebango as a Buddhist community lies in thinking and acting as polong renten, as this concept does not distinguish between the different religions or geographies of Tebango residents with other hamlets and villages in East Pemenang, West Pemenang, and Menggala*” (Romo Juliadi, personal communication, 2022). Thus, harmony based on the same derivative bond of brotherhood can maintain the existence of the Tebango community in the face of changes and the dynamics of the times.

Another existential proof is *ngayah*, a proverbial culture of mutual cooperation and social work. *Ngayah* is a form of intra-religious and inter-religious social cooperation. This culture can also be interpreted as individual or group activities that work sincerely without expecting rewards. Nowadays, the concept of *ngayah* is also often known as volunteering. This activity can be carried out in the scope of the neighborhood or in places of worship, besides that it is also carried out during moments of celebration of religious holidays. Informant I8 stated that “*Until now the Tebango community still carries out Ngayah activities carried out in monasteries and neighborhoods, interestingly this activity does not distinguish between one religion and another, all helping each other*”. The *gotong royong* culture that is carried out provides benefits to the community to interact with each other even though they are of different religions. Thus, the community still interacts with each other and minimizes potential conflict between groups.

The third intangible culture is respect for elders. Based on the observations of researchers, there are several rituals of respect, including the ritual of washing the feet of parents carried out on at least two anniversaries (Observation, 2022). The first is when celebrating Mother’s Day and the second is typically before the Vesak celebration. These two ceremonies have become an ongoing custom that embodies the distinctiveness of the socio-cultural capital of the Tebango Buddhist community. Interestingly, these ancestral rituals do not distinguish between the religions of parents and children, which may be different. Informant I2 stated that “*all different religions are consensual in maintaining respect to*

parenthood". Respect for each community's elders makes good relations between the younger and older generations always exist. This good relationship can also minimize the emergence of internal conflict in the community which is why the Tebango Buddhist community still exists today.

The ritual of respect by washing the feet of the second elder occurs at the commemoration of the Vesak religious ritual. There is a cultural ritual that is not found in Buddhist rituals in other regions. Socio-cultural rituals are only performed in the Buddhist community in Tebango (Observation, 2022). The socio-cultural ritual on the commemoration of the Buddhist holiday, Vesak, in the form of foot washing and apologizing by the Tebango community began in three stages of preparation (Observation, 2022). First, teenagers work together through *gotong royong* to prepare the place and gather their parents on the temple terrace. The atmosphere of this *gotong royong* was boisterous, filled with a sense of interfaith brotherhood, and carried out voluntarily by all the teenagers of the Tebango community (Observation, 2022). The stage after the preparation of the place is the provision of containers and the seating order of the parents. Finally, they pick up their respective parents. These three forms of activity make the glue in the relationship and interaction between the elder group and the younger group.

This ritual of respect has substantially positive effects in supporting the existence of the Tembango Buddhist group. This activity is carried out in the open courtyards and terraces of Jaya and Satta Bojonga monasteries. At the time of observation in 2022, the number of participants reached 100 families. The ritual was carried out from 16.00 to 18.00 WIB. The washing process begins with pouring water into a container, sprinkled with flowers and given fragrance. The feet are not only washed but also massaged. After the process is complete, children prostrate and kiss their parents' feet. After that, there is a meal with the parents, beginning with the feeding of rice by the child to the parents. The data is supported by the statement of informant I3, claiming that "*Two important values instilled from this ritual are the importance of cooperation among others and respect for parents and elders*". Hence this activity of public performance of paying respect to elders creates emotional closeness with elders in the Tebango Buddhist community. See Table 3, the relationship between tangible material culture and intangible cultural values that continue as perennial community traditions can be summarized as follows:

TANGIBLES			INTANGIBLES	
No	Material Name	Explanation	Local Term	Explanation
1	Momument of Sanggah	A medium facilitated for anyone to pay homage and respect to ancestors, built in the shape of Buddhist Meru, and signified the traditional values of Austronesian culture.	<i>Polong Renten</i>	The term refers to the idea of unity among citizens, regardless of one's ethnical and religious background. The proverb, as stated in the Act of Menggala, combines citizens of East and West Pemenang as well as Menggala as a singular community.
2	<i>Kul-kul</i>	The utility tool used to inform and alert the	<i>Ngayah</i>	The term refers to social activities conducted by all

No	Material Name	Explanation	Local Term	Explanation
		citizens of certain information, particularly <i>ngayah</i> [social activities].		citizens under the spirit of <i>gotong-royong</i> .
3	<i>Pegon</i> & <i>Wiron</i>	Traditional clothing mode of <i>pegon</i> and <i>wiron</i> consisting of dress for men and long-sleeved attire for women worn for specific rituals.	Paying Respect to the Elders	Another interfaith cooperation of the community is illustrated in its annual rite of cleansing the elders' feet prior to the Vesak dav.

Table 4. Sociocultural Symbols and Terms in Tebango. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

Values of intra- and interfaith social cooperation and respect for ancestors that contribute to social stability can also be examined in terms of the sustainability and dynamics of the Tebango Community's socio-economic activities in the following discussions:

Discussion

Polong Renten and the Materiality of Tebango Buddhist Culture

Cultural persistence and sustainability are two strategies carried out by local communities to demonstrate their existence (Fatmawati, 2021; Rosemary, 2000; Sinta et al., 2022; Siregar, 2022). This concept becomes relevant in the context of preserving the cultural heritage of a group. Through the maintenance and preservation of local wisdom, the community seeks to maintain its identity, values, traditions, and norms that have been passed down from previous generations. Tangible socio-cultural activities are one of the important aspects in the sustainability of the community's cultural traditions. These tangible aspects of social and cultural life include a variety of memories, practices, and material manifestations of traditions that are observable. Examples of tangible socio-cultural activities include several forms (Hajirsouli et al., 2019; Setyabudi et al., 2021; Shmakov, 2023) such as traditional art performances, ceremonies, the wearing of traditional attire, distinctive architecture, and other cultural materials.

Cultural persistence and sustainability become a strategy used by local communities to demonstrate their existence. This concept becomes an important part in the context of efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of a community. Through the maintenance and preservation of local wisdom, the community seeks to maintain its identity, values, traditions, and norms that have been passed down from previous generations. Tangible socio-cultural activities are one of the important aspects in the sustainability of the community's cultural traditions. These tangible aspects of social and cultural life include a variety of practices, objects and physical manifestations of traditions that can be

observed directly. Examples of tangible socio-cultural activities include forms such as traditional ceremonies, traditional art performances, the wearing of traditional clothing, distinctive building architecture, and various other cultural objects.

Through these tangible socio-cultural activities, communities can continue to revive and pass on their traditions from one generation to the next. In addition, cultural objects that have symbolic and historical value also mark the cultural identity of the community, and efforts to maintain and care for them are an obligation for the current generation as a form of dedication to the heritage of the ancestors (Asfina & Ovilia, 2016; Suranny, 2017; Wasita et al., 2020). Tangible forms of cultural continuity can be observed in the use of cultural objects used by the Tebango Buddhist community, such as *pegon* and *kebaya* clothes that are consistently used in traditional and religious rituals and cultural objects such as village announcement markers called *kul-kul* that have been passed down from generation to generation, as well as a monument called *sanggah* which is used to place offerings or *sajen* on the edges of public roads. When these tangible socio-cultural activities are maintained and preserved, communities can feel connected to their cultural roots and take pride in their heritage. This also helps to create valuable cultural diversity, which is a priceless wealth for a nation.

The next discussion talks about intangible socio-cultural activities, which are another important aspect of the sustainability of community cultural traditions. These intangible aspects of social and cultural life involve various aspects that cannot be physically observed but have deep value and meaning for the community. Some examples of intangible socio-cultural activities include oral traditions, songs, folklore, traditional dances, beliefs and knowledge passed down orally or through hereditary practices (Antipova & Kasarkina, 2022; KOPIIEVSKA et al., 2023; Pamungkas et al., 2022).

These intangible socio-cultural activities are the primary means of conveying the history, values, and norms inherent in community life. They form an important part of cultural identity and help connect current generations with previous ones. These activities often serve as social bonds and strengthen a sense of community (Wahyuningsih, 2020; Wasita et al., 2020), some of these activities include first, the culture of *polong renten*. This culture can be said to be a view of life held together by the Tebango Buddhist community in particular and the North Lombok community in general, stating that the differences in religion and geography of the Tebango residents cannot change the fact that they are one brotherhood. The second culture is the *ngayah* culture, as a form of both intra- and inter-religious social cooperation for major traditional rituals. The third culture is the belief in respecting and honoring elders and social cooperation. This belief is carried out in Tebango's unique cultural rituals passed down from generation to generation with the authenticity of ancestral values and is clearly illustrated by the process of washing the feet of the two elders during Mother's Day and Vesak. The importance of maintaining and preserving these intangible socio-cultural activities cannot be ignored, because through them, the Tebango Buddhist community, in particular, can maintain its essence of culture and heritage (Asfina & Ovilia, 2016).

The Subak System and Various Socio-economic Dynamics of Tebango Buddhists

The presence of marginalized communities in socio-economic activities is the second discovery in this research. Marginalized communities refer to social groups that are on the margins of social and economic structures, often facing limited access to resources and opportunities. This phenomenon covers various dimensions of life, including economy, education, health, and involvement in social activities. Research that examines the existence of marginalized communities in socioeconomic activities seeks to understand the dynamics and changes faced by these groups in overcoming these limitations. In this study, an in-depth analysis was conducted to three socio-economic activities of the Tebango Buddhist community namely the *subak* irrigation system, social interaction, and the development of agrotourism and its downward spillover effects. By better understanding the existence of marginalized communities in socio-economic activities, more effective policy strategies can be formulated to improve welfare, livelihood, and social inclusion for these groups.

First form of socio-economic activity is the *Subak* irrigation system, which is a traditional, hereditary system led by traditional leaders in irrigation management called “*pekasih*”. When East and West Pemenang separated from Pemenang, Amaq Sanudin led the “*pekasih*” for the hamlet [*keliang*] of Tebango. Amaq Sanudin’s authority became the driving force in the socio-economic system of agriculture, especially in the context of irrigation system to ensure a fair flow of water to people’s rice fields. During *subak*, including *subak* ritual at Tebango, there is a social agreement in which economic resources in the form of springs are safeguarded and regulated through a fair and sustainable social agreement. This irrigation system allows one community with another to get an equitable distribution of water supply, and finally it is still maintained by the community to this day as a form of existence of the Tebango Buddhist community.

The second form of socio-economic activity is the social interaction that occurs in the Tebango Buddhist community group. The dynamics of relationships that occur between individuals or groups involve the exchange of information, views, emotions, or actions between interacting people. Researchers found that the form of interaction in the Tebango community occurs when making sap water into palm sugar. After harvesting, the nira essence water still needs to be cooked into palm sugar for hours and is done by at least 2-3 people. With the condition of the Pemenang Sub-district community consisting of Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist communities as three, conversations, collaboration, and non-verbal communication are difficult to avoid during this palm sugar process. Considering that the manufacturing process is quite long. Greeting each other, exchanging information, and feeling a strong bond makes this activity still occur and is carried out as a form of existence of the Tebango Buddhist community.

Agrotourism creates what is called “trickle-down effect” involving economic impacts that trickle down from the tourism sector to related sectors. This phenomenon refers to the process in which economic benefits that first appear in the agrotourism sector gradually

spread to other sectors in the economy. When tourists visit agritourism destinations, they contribute to local income through payments for entrance tickets, accommodation, culinary, and purchasing goods. These revenue sources benefit not only the owners and managers of tourist attractions, but also local traders, farmers, craftspeople, and other service providers involved in the tourism ecosystem. With the flow of income from tourists, these sectors can grow and expand, create new jobs, and stimulate economic growth in the surrounding areas. However, it is important to ensure that the economic benefits of agritourism are disseminated fairly and sustainably so that the entire community can feel the positive impact.

The form of socio-economic activity that occurs in this study is that agritourism creates a trickle-down effect involving economic impacts that permeate various sectors. Some examples of this form of activity are tourism activities at *Rumah Sakma*. Furthermore, there is also religious tourism every Vesak holiday celebration. During Vesak, the Tebango Buddhist community will participate in going down the hill to the seaside at the Bangsal Harbor location, together with other Buddhists from all over North Lombok Regency. From the two instances, it can be an initial identification that the Tebango Buddhist community still has forms of achievement or persistence in showing the existence of this group itself.

Embracing the Minors: The Vesak Commemoration in Tebango

Socio-religious life in the Tebango Buddhist community is distinctive in how it connects traditional cultural values inherited from generation to generation with Buddhism, which was officially adopted after 1965. After the official acceptance of Buddhism, there were changes in society's activities. One of the most striking changes is in the celebration of Vesak, which is a Buddhist celebration. On Vesak, there are three main forms of subactivities in the overall context of activities: the procession around the hamlet of Tebango, the Puja dance, and the Sidharta bath.

Buddhism's socio-religious activities have involved, among other things, a deep and varied set of practices and rituals (Setiyani, 2018; Sioris, 2018). These include participation in various religious ceremonies such as feast day celebrations, meditation, honoring the departed ancestors, as well as the implementation of moral and ethical teachings that are held in high esteem. Socio-religious activities also often involve involvement in community social activities, such as social services, charity work, and support for communities in need. In addition, religious group meetings, discussions on Buddhist teachings, and religious education activities are also an integral part of Buddhism's social religious activities (Burhanuddin & Saharudin, 2020). These play an important role in shaping religious identity, fostering moral values, and integrating the Buddhist community in wider social interactions.

Inside the Sasak Boda Tebango community, there are three integral features of the Vesak celebration (Burhanuddin & Saharudin, 2020; Prayogi, 2021). The first is the tradition of traveling around the hamlet, where community members travel around the

hamlet as a form of respect and reflection. This activity has a deep meaning in strengthening the bonds between community members and bringing them closer to Buddhism. Second, *Tari Puja* is an important element of the celebration, where Buddhists participate in a dance that has spiritual and symbolic meaning. This activity not only affirms religious identity but is also a cultural art expression that enriches the local cultural heritage. Third is *Memandikan Sidharta ritual* which symbolizes physical and spiritual cleansing. This ritual reflects the understanding of the teachings of purity and soul purification in Buddhism. Through these three forms of activity, Tebango Buddhists honor and celebrate Vesak day with religious meaning and value, while also enriching and maintaining their community's cultural identity.

Conclusion

The ways in which a community continues its tangible material culture and the values of *gotong royong*, respect for elders and elders and integration of life with the environment are the characteristics and strategies of the Tebango community to thrive in the midst of changes in the obligation to embrace new religions and changes in tourism business interactions. The forms of existence of the Tebango Buddhist community are categorized in the form of sociocultural, socio-economic, and socio-religious dynamics. The Tebango community built a material culture with relics of sanggah monument, *kul-kul* tool, and the traditional clothes of *pegon* and *wiron*. Conversely, intangible cultural forms include the culture of *polong renten*, *ngayah*, and respect for ancestors and village elders.

To conclude, this study of the Tebango Boda community, from a community development perspective, contributes to locality-based social development strategies. Future research on the social change of an indigenous belief system and its community wellbeing may benefit from this research to understand its sustainability and intangibility. This research proposes that the decreasing amount of Boda devotees in Dusun Tebango of Lombok has been affected by the public perception of the syncretic Buddhism movement. Despite such a perception becoming a hindrance in discourses related to cultural heritage preservation, the local Tebango Buddhists are capable of maintaining their tradition through activities and practices that are both tangible and intangible. This case illustrates the way that quantitative measurement alone is insufficient to study the sustainability of a local belief system such as the Sasak Boda. Instead, this article argues that the maintainability of cultural heritage becomes the determinant factor in the empowerment of the locality-based community.

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The authors, namely Muchammadun (author 1/A1), Zaenudin Amrulloh (author 2/A2), and Rahadiyand Aditya (author 3/A3), affirm that this manuscript has been meticulously prepared and endorsed for submission to the journal. The specific contributions of each author are delineated as follows: A1 and A2 formulated the research methodology; A3 conducted the literature review analysis; A1 oversaw the data collection process, while all team members managed the archival of data acquisition outcomes. The collaborative efforts of all authors culminated in the completion of this article. This study offers fresh insights for filling the gap of social religious policies and the practice of indigenous believers' wellbeing in rural communities.

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Additional information

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