

Social Dynamics of the Larung Cai Diraga Tradition in Contemporary Society

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Abstract. *The Larung Cai Diraga tradition is a cultural ritual practiced by the community of Ciledug, Cirebon Regency. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation as a form of gratitude to nature and its resources while representing the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Furthermore, it serves as a cultural identity for the coastal communities of West Java. However, the advancement of modernization, globalization, and the widespread influence of social media have generated social dynamics that affect both the meaning and implementation of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. This study aims to analyze the social dynamics occurring within the Larung Cai Diraga tradition and to examine the preservation of local wisdom in contemporary society. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Data were collected through in-depth observations, interviews with traditional leaders, young generations, and local community members, as well as documentation of various Larung Cai Diraga activities. The findings indicate that the Larung Cai Diraga tradition has undergone a transformation from a sacred ritual into a more open and socially oriented cultural festival. Despite these changes, the community continues to preserve the cultural values embedded in the tradition, making it an important symbol of local cultural identity. The preservation of this tradition is supported through the active participation of local communities, regional governments, traditional leaders, artists, and younger generations. Therefore, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition functions not only as a cultural heritage but also as a medium through which society adapts to contemporary social changes.*

Keywords: Larung Cai Diraga, Social Dynamics, Cultural Transformation, Cultural Preservation

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country consisting of 38 provinces, one of which is West Java Province, where each region possesses its own distinctive cultural characteristics and traditions (Dienaputra, 2023; Undang et al., 2022; Harwati & Sathian, 2024; Lauder et al., 2023). Cirebon Regency, located in West Java Province, is well known for its rich local traditions and cultural heritage. These traditions not only serve as an ethnic and regional identity of the Cirebon community but also embody profound philosophical and spiritual values. Cultural activities within society, including traditional arts, never exist independently; rather, their forms and functions are closely related to the culture that lives, develops, and is maintained by the community.

Tradition constitutes an essential component of social life, functioning as a medium for transmitting values, norms, and cultural identity from one generation to the next (Kasmiati et al., 2024; Ishami et al., 2025; Akbar & Ansori, 2024; Azzahra et al., 2025; Jurdi & Amiruddin, 2024; Sudirman et al., 2025; Anjelika et al., 2025). In cultural studies, local traditions are not merely ceremonial practices; they also function as social practices whose meanings are continuously reproduced and reinterpreted within community life. According to Novia (2025), Novitasari et al.

(2026), Dalmeda & Elian (2016), culture is a symbolic system that enables individuals to interpret and assign meaning to the social realities they encounter. Therefore, tradition can be understood as a medium of cultural expression that not only represents the past but also remains an integral part of contemporary social life. Tradition plays a significant role in the belief system and social structure of the Ciledug community. This view is supported by Sulasman and Gumilar (2013), who argue that local traditions function as a community knowledge system that helps maintain social and cultural balance. Consequently, this tradition serves as a symbolic medium that represents the relationship between humans and nature.

One of the cultural traditions that continues to thrive within the community of Ciledug, Cirebon Regency, is the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. This tradition is performed as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty and as a prayer for the safety, prosperity, and well-being of the community (Pohan et al., 2025; Ramiyati et al., 2026; Siregar, 2024). In its implementation, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition embodies symbolic meanings that are closely associated with the relationship between humans, nature, and the spiritual dimensions of community life.

The terms “*Cai*” (water) and “*Diraga*” (body) function not merely as material elements but also as conceptual representations of the interconnected relationship between humans, nature, society, and the transcendental realm. Within this tradition, water (*cai*) symbolizes life, purity, and balance, while the ritual of releasing the water reflects a harmonious relationship between human beings, nature, and spiritual forces. However, as society continues to evolve, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition has undergone significant changes in both meaning and social function. What was once regarded as a sacred ritual has gradually transformed into a cultural festival that is open to broader public participation.

The transformation of the meaning of cultural rituals often creates a dilemma between preservation and adaptation, as change is frequently viewed as a strategy for ensuring the continuity of a tradition in the face of societal development (Ningrum & Abdullah, 2025; Zainuddin, 2023; Danugroho et al., 2025; Miswardi et al., 2024). On the other hand, uncontrolled change may lead to the erosion of the noble values embedded within a cultural ritual. According to Nurfajiani et al. (2025), cultural transformation refers to changes in form, characteristics, and other attributes, while culture encompasses human thought, intellect, customs, traditions, and all aspects of a developed civilization. This condition reflects the existence of social dynamics within the life of the Ciledug community. In this context, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition is experiencing a process of cultural transformation, which is evident in the changing ways people interpret and perform the ritual.

The forces of modernization have significantly influenced human perspectives, often positioning Western culture as a symbol of modernity while perceiving Eastern culture as traditional or conventional (Saputri et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the social dynamics of contemporary society reveal shifts in values, interests, and cultural orientations. Modernization and the rapid development of social media have contributed to these changes. As a result, the community no longer perceives the Larung Cai Diraga tradition solely as a ritual practice; it is increasingly regarded as a form of cultural entertainment, a regional cultural identity, and a potential cultural tourism attraction. According to Jati et al. (2025), Zamani (2022), Jailani & Isma (2024), Arisandi (2017) social change refers to transformations within social institutions that subsequently influence social systems, values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior. Therefore, when viewed through the lens of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition, social change can be observed in the evolving ways through which community members understand, interpret, and engage with the cultural ritual.

This study is important because the Larung Cai Diraga tradition is not merely understood as a form of cultural heritage but also as an integral part of the social dynamics of contemporary society. As social, cultural, and technological changes continue to shape community life, traditional practices face increasing challenges in maintaining their relevance and significance (Poddar, 2024; Amri & Khayru, 2022; Alsaleh, 2024; Harefa, 2024; Sisodiya, 2026). Therefore,

this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how local communities preserve and sustain their cultural traditions amidst ongoing social transformation. Furthermore, the findings are expected to contribute to broader discussions on the preservation of local culture and the adaptation of traditional practices within the context of modern society.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design using an ethnographic approach. The research was conducted in Ciledug, Cirebon Regency, West Java Province, which serves as the center for the implementation of the Larung Cai Diraga ritual. The selection of this location was based on historical and cultural considerations, as Ciledug has an active cultural community that continues to preserve and maintain the tradition. The ethnographic approach was considered appropriate for exploring the cultural meanings embedded within the tradition and for understanding the social dynamics surrounding the practice of Larung Cai Diraga. The research participants consisted of a traditional leader (Mr. Hendra Supriatna), members of the younger generation, and local community members who actively participate in the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. The study was carried out in Ciledug, Cirebon Regency.

Observation

Observation was employed to directly examine the social and cultural phenomena associated with the implementation of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition within the Ciledug community. The researcher observed the ritual process, community participation, and the social dynamics that emerged within the context of contemporary society. Observations were conducted during the ritual activities and within the social environment of the community members directly involved in the tradition.

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain information related to cultural meanings, social change, and efforts to preserve the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. Interviews were carried out with several informants, including traditional leaders, members of the younger generation, and local community members, in order to obtain accurate and comprehensive data. This technique enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the changing meanings and interpretations of the tradition amid the development of modern society.

Documentation

Documentation was used to collect supporting data in the form of photographs, videos, program records, event schedules, and archival materials related to the implementation of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. These materials were obtained from community members, cultural and artistic groups, and various media sources. Documentation served as supplementary evidence for understanding both the implementation of the tradition and the socio-cultural dynamics of the Ciledug community. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and document analysis. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed triangulation techniques, whereby data obtained from interviews were cross-checked with information gathered through observation and documentation. Furthermore, data analysis was guided by the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994). The analysis process consisted of three stages: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing and verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rahmawati et al. (2026) argues that every traditional performing art serves as a representation of the worldview of the community that supports and preserves it. Accordingly, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition carries profound cultural significance for the people of Ciledug. The symbol of *cai* (water) represents the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, while simultaneously reflecting the continuity, adaptation, and sustainability of cultural traditions amid the challenges of modernization and social change.

Larung Cai Diraga Tradition as a Local Cultural Identity

Traditions in every region reflect a rich and distinctive cultural diversity. Each community possesses its own unique way of expressing beliefs, values, and ancestral heritage through various traditional practices (Agung et al., 2024; Bi, 2024; Banda et al., 2024). Although each tradition embodies different symbolic meanings, moral values, and social functions, they all share a common purpose: maintaining harmony within society. Therefore, the preservation of cultural traditions is essential to ensure that they are not eroded by the forces of modernization. One tradition that continues to be firmly upheld by the agrarian community of Ciledug is the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. This cultural ritual has been passed down from generation to generation and serves as an important component of the cultural identity of the Ciledug community in Cirebon Regency. The Larung Cai Diraga tradition is a customary ritual rich in symbolic meanings, particularly those associated with expressing gratitude to God Almighty and seeking safety, prosperity, and well-being for both the community and the natural environment. One of the central rituals involves the ceremonial release of water collected from nine natural springs, symbolizing the unity of the sources of human life and serving as a form of respect for nature.



Figure 1. Larung Cai Diraga Tradition
Source: Researcher's Dokumentation, 2026.

Historically, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition emerged from the community's belief in the importance of water as the source of life. According to traditional leaders and the deliberations of the East Cirebon youth community who established the *Midang Cai Diraga* movement, the term *cai* means "water," which is regarded as the essential substance sustaining all forms of life on Earth. Water is understood as the foundation of existence: blood is water, bodily fluids are water, and all organs depend on water for survival. This concept is further analogized to nature itself. If the human body represents the physical self (*diraga*), then the Earth may likewise be viewed as a body whose dominant component is water. Therefore, *diraga* (body) functions not merely as a material element but as a conceptual representation of the interconnected relationship between humans, nature, society, and the transcendental dimension. Consequently, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition serves as both a form of respect for nature and a symbol of balance within community life.

According to Antara & Yogantari (2018), Ayu & Bela (2023) culture is the product of human creativity, feeling, and intention that develops within society and is transmitted across generations. In this context, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition represents a cultural expression of the Ciledug community that embodies spiritual, social, and ecological values. Tektigul et al. (2023) explains that culture is a system of symbols and meanings through which people understand their social world. The symbolic meaning of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition is reflected in the use of water as the primary element of the ritual. Water (*cai*) symbolizes life, purity, and balance, while the ritual of releasing the water represents a harmonious relationship between humans, nature,

and spiritual forces. Furthermore, ritual practices, traditional prayers, and cultural symbols illustrate the close connection between cultural traditions and the community's belief system.

Research conducted by Sadiyani et al. (2025), Hadrawi et al. (2025), Dewi et al. (2025) suggests that the Larung Cai Diraga tradition possesses symbolic values related to honoring the sources of life and preserving harmonious relationships between humans and nature. The ritual plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural identity of the Ciledug community amid the social transformations of contemporary society. Beyond its symbolic meanings and cultural significance, the tradition also functions as a medium of non-formal cultural education. It promotes social solidarity among community members, encourages mutual cooperation among younger generations, and raises awareness of environmental conservation through active participation in cultural activities. Through direct involvement in the ritual, community members develop a stronger sense of responsibility toward preserving their surrounding environment. Therefore, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition serves not only as a ritual practice but also as a significant symbol of the local cultural identity of the Ciledug community in Cirebon Regency. It embodies spiritual, social, cultural, and ecological values that continue to be preserved and transmitted across generations despite the challenges posed by modernization and social change.

Social Dynamics in the Larung Cai Diraga Tradition

The Larung Cai Diraga tradition has experienced various social dynamics that have influenced its implementation, functions, and meanings within community life. The socio-cultural dynamics of the Ciledug community have also affected the continuity of the Larung Cai Diraga ritual. Changes in social structures, increasing tolerance toward diversity, shifts in livelihood patterns, and cultural diversification have contributed to changes in the orientation of the ritual. A ritual that was once considered highly sacred has gradually undergone functional transformation and has become part of regional cultural and tourism programs. This shift reflects a transition from predominantly spiritual values toward broader social and economic interests. While the ritual originally emphasized religious and spiritual aspects, contemporary attention has increasingly focused on social relationships, social status, and economic benefits. Richards (2020) argues that the commodification of culture has the potential to alter the value orientation embedded within traditional practices. Therefore, this phenomenon requires critical examination to ensure that ongoing changes do not undermine the essential meanings and values of the tradition.

Over time, field observations have revealed indications of meaning distortion within the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. Several indicators can be identified. First, there has been a shift in motivation from ritual devotion toward festival-oriented participation. Second, there has been a decline in symbolic understanding among younger generations. Although many young people actively participate in the Larung Cai Diraga procession, their involvement is often limited to physical participation rather than a deeper understanding of the symbolic and philosophical meanings embedded within the ritual. Consequently, the tradition risks becoming a cultural activity that is performed without a comprehensive understanding of its underlying values. In this context, ritual symbols are vulnerable to meaning reduction, where they are perceived merely as ceremonial procedures rather than as living systems of cultural values. Third, the social function of the ritual has changed. Previously, the tradition served as a medium for strengthening collective identity and transmitting cultural values across generations (Afridi et al., 2025; Pugra et al., 2025; Dacin et al., 2019). Today, it is increasingly viewed as an annual cultural ceremony. Fourth, there is a lack of systematic documentation and knowledge transmission regarding the history and meanings of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. Knowledge about the tradition continues to be largely preserved through oral transmission by elders and traditional leaders. Challenges may arise when traditional leaders pass away without transferring their knowledge systematically to future generations, potentially leading to further distortions in meaning. Nevertheless, despite these transformations, the tradition continues to function as a form of cultural expression and social communication within the community.

These phenomena demonstrate that culture is inherently dynamic and continuously evolves in response to societal development. This study is grounded in Soekanto's (2013) theory of social dynamics, which defines social dynamics as changes occurring within society, including transformations in values, social norms, behavioral patterns, social organizations, and social institutions that influence the overall social system. Based on this perspective, social dynamics can be understood as a process of change driven by developments in social, cultural, economic, technological, and educational spheres. Similarly, Trirezeki et al. (2025) and Rosana (2015) explains that social change refers to transformations within social institutions that subsequently affect social systems, social values, behavioral patterns, and social relationships. Therefore, social change influences not only individuals but also society as a whole. In this context, younger generations who grow up amid rapid cultural development tend to possess a more open perspective toward traditional culture. Social reality is constructed through continuous processes of social interaction, and cultural meanings are not fixed but are constantly reconstructed through evolving social experiences (Döbler, 2022). Within the Larung Cai Diraga tradition, community members continuously create new interpretations of the ritual that correspond to the conditions of contemporary society. Despite experiencing social change, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition remains an important component of the cultural identity of the Ciledug community in Cirebon Regency. Traditional leaders and community members continue to preserve cultural values through the implementation of the ritual and by encouraging the active involvement of younger generations in cultural activities. Therefore, the social dynamics surrounding the Larung Cai Diraga tradition demonstrate that local culture is capable of surviving through processes of social adaptation without losing its fundamental cultural identity.

The Influence of Modernization on the Larung Cai Diraga Tradition

Amid the forces of modernization and globalization, cultural traditions have undergone significant transformations. Social changes driven by technological advancement, social media, and education have altered the ways in which communities perceive and engage with traditional culture. Practices that were once conducted in a sacred and relatively exclusive manner have gradually evolved into more open and publicly accessible cultural activities. Initially, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition was understood primarily as a spiritual ritual expressing the community's gratitude toward nature. However, under the influence of modernization, the tradition has increasingly developed into a broader cultural event that involves various segments of society. According to Sharma (2024), Magu (2015), Saleh et al. (2022) modernization transforms social life through technological progress and cultural globalization. In the context of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition, these transformations are evident in the growing use of social media as a medium for cultural documentation and promotion.

One of the most visible manifestations of modernization is the utilization of digital platforms in the implementation and dissemination of the Larung Cai Diraga tradition. Ritual activities, ranging from the ceremonial unification of water from nine natural springs to the final water-release procession, are no longer witnessed solely by local community members. These events are now documented and shared through social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. As a result, the tradition has gained wider recognition among broader audiences, including younger generations and people outside the local community. Kolay (2016), Zhang et al. (2025), Jati (2025) argues that the development of digital media has transformed local cultural practices from traditional rituals into visually oriented forms of public cultural representation. Consequently, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition is no longer interpreted solely as a customary ritual but also as a cultural identity that reflects the characteristics of contemporary society.

Beyond the influence of social media, modernization has also shaped the perspectives of younger generations toward cultural traditions. Field observations indicate that many young people increasingly perceive the tradition not only as a ritual practice but also as a form of cultural entertainment and social activity. This phenomenon presents both opportunities and challenges for the sustainability of the tradition. On the one hand, modernization encourages greater participation and visibility; on the other hand, it may shift attention away from the philosophical

and spiritual values embedded within the ritual. As a result, some community members tend to emphasize the entertainment and visual aspects of the tradition rather than its deeper cultural meanings. This tendency contributes to the simplification of cultural meanings within the context of modern society.

Despite these challenges, the people of Ciledug continue to make efforts to preserve the Larung Cai Diraga tradition, which is performed annually as an important cultural event. The sustainability of the tradition depends upon the synergy between traditional values, local cultural education, active participation of younger generations, and support from local government institutions. These efforts demonstrate that modernization does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of traditional culture. Instead, it can serve as a mechanism for cultural adaptation, enabling traditions such as Larung Cai Diraga to remain relevant and continue to exist within the evolving landscape of modern society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition represents an important cultural heritage of the Ciledug community in Cirebon Regency, embodying spiritual, social, and symbolic values that continue to play a significant role in community life. The tradition functions not only as a cultural ritual but also as a cultural identity that has been transmitted from generation to generation. Over time, the Larung Cai Diraga tradition has experienced various social dynamics as a result of the development of modern society. These changes have led to a transformation in both the function and meaning of the tradition, shifting it from a predominantly sacred ritual toward a more open socio-cultural activity. Several factors have contributed to this transformation, including changes in societal perspectives, technological advancements, the growing influence of social media, and broader processes of modernization. Despite these developments, the people of Ciledug continue to preserve the Larung Cai Diraga tradition as an important effort to safeguard local cultural heritage. Traditional leaders, community members, younger generations, and local government institutions all play essential roles in ensuring the sustainability of the tradition through various cultural activities and preservation initiatives. The Larung Cai Diraga tradition demonstrates that local culture can remain resilient and relevant through processes of social adaptation without losing its fundamental cultural identity. Therefore, the tradition serves not only as a cultural legacy of the past but also as a dynamic cultural practice that continues to adapt and thrive within the context of contemporary society.

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