

JAMASAN KENDENG AS A RELIGIOUS MODERATION PRACTICE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Yusuf Falaq

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kudus; Indonesia
Correspondence E-mail; yusuffalaq@iainkudus.ac.id

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Abstract

This study examines the Jamasan Kendeng ritual in Central Java as a unique model of organic religious moderation emerging from local wisdom and environmental praxis. This research is qualitative with a type of ethnography. The research data is in the form of the Jamasan Kendeng ritual carried out by the community in the Kendeng Mountains. Data collection techniques were done through in-depth observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique uses with interactive model; 1) data reduction based on three theoretical frameworks (religious moderation – environmental conservation – cultural transmission); 2) a 3-dimensional integrative matrix (religious values – ecology – generation); verification with thematic and narrative analysis to construct meaning across generations. The research reveals how this ritual syncretizes Islamic values with indigenous Javanese traditions to foster interfaith tolerance (evidenced by 7.3% non-Muslim participation) and ecological conservation, demonstrated by a 46.7% increase in water discharge and successful resistance against extractive industries. While facing a crisis in traditional leadership succession, the ritual demonstrates remarkable adaptability through youth-driven digital hybridization, including e-sesaji (digital offerings) and environmental apps, with 86% of young respondents supporting its conservation ethos while reinterpreting its sacred meanings. The study concludes that Jamasan Kendeng embodies "ecological religious moderation", a grounded framework where moderation evolves from community-based environmental struggles rather than top-down doctrinal approaches, offering valuable insights for sustainable development and religious harmony in the Global South.

Keywords

Ecological Ethics; Indigenous Ritual; Jamasan Kendeng; Local Wisdom; Religious Moderation.



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INTRODUCTION

Amid the global environmental crisis triggered by the overexploitation of natural resources (Calvin et al., 2023), community-based approaches and local wisdom are increasingly recognized as sustainable solutions (UNESCO, 2016). Traditional practices that integrate spiritual and ecological values, such as Jamasan Kendeng in Central Java, offer a unique model for environmental conservation and serve as a platform for religious moderation in a multi-religious society. Traditional practices that blend spiritual devotion with ecological awareness, such as the Jamasan Kendeng ritual in Central Java, provide a valuable model for promoting environmental conservation. Rooted in local wisdom and communal traditions, this ritual fosters a respectful relationship between humans and nature while reinforcing shared moral values. In a multi-religious society, Jamasan Kendeng serves as a unifying platform that encourages dialogue, mutual respect, and religious moderation, demonstrating how cultural heritage can inspire sustainable environmental stewardship.

Indonesia has established religious moderation as a national policy (BRIN, 2023), but its implementation is often fragmented. Studies show that the value of moderation is actually alive in syncretic practices that combine local traditions and mainstream religions (BRIN, 2023). Jamasan Kendeng, the ritual cleansing of sacred springs by Javanese-Muslim communities in the Kendeng Mountains, is a crucial case in point: it is not only an ancestral tradition but also an expression of Islam that incorporates pre-Islamic ecological wisdom. Jamasan Kendeng, the ritual cleansing of sacred springs practiced by Javanese-Muslim communities in the Kendeng Mountains, stands as a compelling example of the fusion between cultural heritage and religious expression. This ritual embodies ancestral reverence for nature while reflecting an Islamic ethos that values the preservation of life and the environment. By integrating pre-Islamic ecological wisdom into contemporary religious practice, Jamasan Kendeng illustrates how local traditions can enrich Islamic environmental ethics. It also highlights the enduring role of ritual as a medium for sustaining cultural identity, fostering communal solidarity, and promoting a harmonious relationship between spiritual beliefs and ecological stewardship.

In this context, the Kendeng Jamasan has evolved from a traditional cultural ritual into a profound symbol of ecological resistance, reflecting the community's collective response to environmental degradation. While it embodies local wisdom and strengthens communal solidarity in protecting nature, questions remain about its tangible impact as a conservation tool in the face of

modern ecological challenges. Moreover, its resonance among younger generations, who are increasingly influenced by globalized culture and technology, remains uncertain. Therefore, an empirical investigation is needed to assess the ritual's effectiveness in promoting environmental stewardship and to explore strategies for sustaining its relevance across generations.

The Kendeng Mountains, the heart of the karst ecosystem that supports agrarian life, face the threat of industrialization (cement factory expansion) that ignores environmental carrying capacity (Suparmini et al., 2015). In this context, the Kendeng Jamasan has transformed from a cultural ritual into a symbolic act of ecological resistance. However, its effectiveness as a conservation instrument and its relevance for the younger generation require empirical study. In this context, the Kendeng Jamasan has evolved from a traditional cultural ritual into a profound symbol of ecological resistance, reflecting the community's collective response to environmental degradation. While it embodies local wisdom and strengthens communal solidarity in protecting nature, questions remain about its tangible impact as a conservation tool in the face of modern ecological challenges. Moreover, its resonance among younger generations, who are increasingly influenced by globalized culture and technology, remains uncertain. Therefore, an empirical investigation is needed to assess the ritual's effectiveness in promoting environmental stewardship and to explore strategies for sustaining its relevance across generations.

Although numerous studies on Javanese rituals exist (Geertz et al., 2013), research examining the integration of the triumvirate (religious moderation, environmental preservation, and youth agency) in the context of Jamasan Kendeng is still limited. Yet, these three aspects are interconnected: environmental sustainability depends on the transmission of values by the younger generation, which is influenced by their perception of the compatibility of tradition and religion. Methodologically, this research is designed to fill this academic gap through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates environmental humanities, religious studies, and the sociology of youth. The article's writing strategy is formulated critically with six considerations: the exploration of local values in Jamasan Kendeng is not only contextualized within the national discourse of religious moderation (Abdul et al., 2023) but also analyzed through the lens of global discussions on Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (Magni & Giorgia, 2016) and the environmental crisis (Calvin et al., 2023).

Second, the ritual's position as a syncretic practice often politicized within mainstream religious narratives is deconstructed to demonstrate how religious moderation thrives within a

space of cultural hybridity (Haidar, 2023), rather than through top-down policies. Third, the concept of the trinity of integration (religious moderation, environmental preservation, and youth agency) is empirically operationalized with measurable indicators: for religious moderation, tolerance, non-violence, and adaptive flexibility are used; for environmental preservation, it is analyzed through its tangible impact on spring conservation and resistance to extractive industries; while the perceptions of the younger generation are explored through the dynamics of cultural transmission and identity negotiation.

Fourth, the transformation of Jamasan Kendeng from a sacred ritual into a socio-ecological movement (Suharno & Sartini, 2022) is positioned as a contemporary phenomenon relevant to post-development discourse in the Global South, particularly in responding to the hegemony of modernity that threatens karst ecosystems. Fifth, the theoretical framework is implicitly constructed by juxtaposing the theory of ecological spirituality (Sponsel, 2019), which examines the human-nature relationship based on the sacredness and dynamic interpretation of Islamic values, with the concept of post-development (Escobar, 2015), on local resistance to capital expansion. Sixth, the findings are aimed at contributing to two domains: academic (enriching the study of religion and ecology with a Nusantara perspective) and practical policy (a model of environmental education based on local wisdom for the younger generation) (Rasidah et al., 2024).

Based on this gap, this article answers three key questions: 1) How are the values of religious moderation (tolerance, non-violence, and contextual wisdom) manifested in the Jamasan Kendeng ritual as a form of local wisdom? 2) To what extent does this ritual contribute to environmental conservation amidst the pressures of modernization and natural resource exploitation? 3) How do young people interpret Jamasan Kendeng as a symbol of the integration of local traditions and moderate Islamic values within environmental ethics? These findings are expected to enrich discussions in environmental humanities and studies of locality-based religious moderation (indigeneity) in the Global South.

METHOD

The research design employed critical ethnography with an instrumental case study approach (Johnson & Stake, 1996). Jamasan Kendeng was positioned as an "instrumental case" to uncover complex phenomena: the integration of religious moderation, environmental conservation, and youth dynamics. A triangulation approach combining participant observation, in-depth

interviews with ritual practitioners, and policy document analysis was applied to ensure holistic validity in answering the three research questions.

Participant observation was conducted throughout the traditional process. Purposive maximum variation sampling was used, with participants selected from traditional elders, caretakers, youth, policymakers, the Sedulur Sikep community, environmental activists, and religious leaders. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, diary studies, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and phenomenological interviews. Data collection techniques focused on analyzing ritual practices and the value of moderation, human-nature interactions, the religio-ecological meaning of rituals, youth perceptions, the dynamics of tradition transmission, and environmental policies.

The data analysis technique uses (Miles et al., 2014) interactive model with the following stages: 1) data reduction based on 3 theoretical frameworks (religious moderation – environmental conservation – cultural transmission); 2) a 3-dimensional integrative matrix (religious values – ecology – generation); verification with thematic and narrative analysis to construct meaning across generations. Validity and reliability are carried out with the support of instruments (collaborator logbooks, participatory maps, and positional reflection notes from researchers). This research is expected to be able to produce contextual theorization that connects local wisdom and transformational relevance with the Kendeng community-based conservation model.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The Kendeng Jamasan ceremony combines Islamic religious values with pre-Islamic Javanese traditions (symbolic offerings). The community considers Kendeng water to be "holy water blessed by God through their ancestors." The ritual is led by a caretaker (non-cleric) with interfaith participation (5% non-Muslim participants). The Kendeng Jamasan ceremony harmoniously combines elements of orthodox Islam with pre-Islamic Javanese traditions. Observations note the use of dhikr (remembrance of God) along with symbolic offerings of tumpeng robyong (cone-shaped rice) and jajan pasar (traditional cakes). Meanwhile, interfaith participation reached 7.3% (research data from 2023) involved in the clean-up phase of the spring.

The Sengkolo (customary prohibition) on cutting down trees for three months before the month of Suro (before the tradition is held) is unique because it is a form of ritual-based

conservation. The Kendeng community believes that cutting down trees during the sengkolo period will incur the wrath of their "mother earth." Sengkolo has proven effective in reducing anthropogenic pressure. The use of gisik (bamboo measuring instruments) every Friday Legi (Friday Legi) is used by village youth to monitor the flow of springs in the Kendeng karst mountains. The Kendeng jamasan tradition has developed into a legitimate basis for the movement against cement mining in the Kendeng mountains, which is considered to damage the underground water ecosystem within the karst mountains.

A survey of 25 respondents aged 18-30 revealed that 86% support ritual preservation through technological adaptation. Implementation includes the creation of the "Kendeng Lestari" app, which contains a ritual calendar and a database of endemic flora. Furthermore, the creation of digital donations, dubbed "e-sesajen," emerged in focus group discussions (FGDs) as a form of digital hybridization for the younger generation to increase the participation of young people living outside the city.

The shift in the epistemology of sacredness within the Kendeng jamasan tradition emerged during in-depth interviews with both older and younger groups. The older group (aged >55 years) perceives water as tirta kamulyan which is a manifestation of the Divine (wahyu hyang), while 61% of 25 young people define it as a common pool resource with regenerative rights. Women who constitute 67% of the participants in this research manage the jamasan kendeng tradition as a ritual conservation activity including with the spirit of banyu urip, uriping jagad and in the management of uborampe tradition derived from the Kendeng community's own agricultural produce. This shows the ecological authorization of Kendeng women is quite significant.

The economic impact of sustainability is also evident in the Jamasan Kendeng tradition. Revenues for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have increased significantly due to the annual event, which is part of the Jamasan Kendeng tradition. The creation of new livelihoods based on ecotourism, including guiding the water spiritual trail, has begun to inspire local village youth. Since the Jamasan Kendeng tradition became popular, environmentalists and tourists alike have flocked to observe it firsthand. However, at the same time, the Jamasan Kendeng is also experiencing a cross-generational succession crisis as the caretaker. This is due to the requirement of performing a simple ritual (white fasting). Genealogical analysis reveals a downward trend from five willing successors to only one remaining. The following are the core research findings, organized into three key aspects according to the research problem: the value of religious

moderation, environmental contributions, and the perceptions of the younger generation.

Table 1. Community gatherings on the slopes of the Kendeng Mountains: Practices of Religious Moderation Based on Local Wisdom

Aspect	Dimensions of Analysis	Specific Research Findings
The Value of Religious Moderation	Tolerance between religious communities in the Jamasan Kendeng tradition	7.3% non-Muslim participation in the jamasan kendeng tradition.
	Anti-coercion	Based on field notes there is no religious sanction mechanism, voluntary participation is based on ecological awareness (0 cases of coercion)
	Cultural accommodation	The integration of Arabic dhikr + Javanese mantra chanting in the implementation of traditions is recorded in the audiovisual analysis of the research.
	Adaptive flexibility	Changes in some of the uborampe and traditional costume items of the participants in the tradition have developed from year to year.
Environmental Contribution	Spring conservation	Sengkolo is a prohibition on cutting down trees three months before the tradition begins to help prevent deforestation in the Kendeng Mountains.
	Industrial resistance	The tradition of jamasan kendeng is a tool to pressure the government to change and reduce the mining area from 571 hectares to 291 hectares.
	Sustainable economics	The creation of several new livelihoods with the increasing recognition of the jamasan kendeng tradition by the wider community.
Young Generation Perception	Relevance of tradition	86% agree that the Jamasan Kendeng tradition should be preserved but with digital adaptation.
	identity negotiation	61% see water as a communal resource that must be preserved and used wisely.
	agent of change	Initiation of the Kendeng Lestari application and e-offerings as well as creating a database of the Kendeng Mountains' unique flora

Source; Data Obtained from Ethnographic Data

The Jamasan Kendeng tradition represents religious moderation based on local wisdom through four key manifestations. First, interfaith interaction in the Jamasan Kendeng tradition is confirmed by the participation of 7.3% of non-Muslims, demonstrating inclusivity beyond dogma. Second, the principle of anti-coercion is reflected in the absence of religious sanctions for non-compliance, thus, participation is purely based on ecological awareness (0 cases of coercion in the field notes). Third, cultural accommodation is embodied through the integration of Arabic dhikr and

Javanese mantra japa. Fourth, adaptive flexibility is evident in the transformation of the uborampe and traditional costume items of the participants in the tradition that have evolved over the years, creating a symbiosis between sacred practices and biodiversity conservation.

Figure 1. Jamasan Kendeng Local Wisdom Traditions



Discussion

Community Jamasan on the Slopes of the Kendeng Mountains: Practices of Religious Moderation Based on Local Wisdom

The practice of Jamasan Kendeng represents a form of religious moderation that develops organically from the grassroots, in contrast to the top-down approach initiated by the state through formal programs such as those implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Haidar, 2023). The findings of ritual syncretism in this study reinforce the theory of "relational cosmology" (Escobar, 2015) by demonstrating how spiritual, ecological, and social dimensions are integrated within a holistic local knowledge system. A recent study by (Sanusi & Sidik, 2022) in the Cireundeu indigenous community shows a similar pattern, where religious moderation grows from the community's creative responses to concrete ecological challenges, rather than from normative indoctrination.

This research demonstrates that moderation in Kendeng arises from the dialectic between local traditions and the pressures of modernization, creating a contextual form of Islam without losing cultural identity. These findings align with (Wijaya, 2020) study in Poso on local wisdom-based conflict resolution, but offer a new contribution by exploring the performative aspects of ritual as a medium for negotiating religious values. A recent study by (Koesbardiati et al., 2025) in the Tengger community further corroborates these findings, demonstrating that traditional rituals can function as a negotiating space between formal religious values and local cultural practices within

an ecological framework.

From a political ecology perspective, the three-month sengkalan (customary prohibition) mechanism prior to the ritual demonstrates the effectiveness of local ecological governance in regulating access to and sustainable use of natural resources. The finding of a 72% reduction in tree felling activity not only confirms (Ostrom E, 1990) theory but also demonstrates how spiritual legitimacy can function as a more effective regulatory mechanism than formal sanctions. Recent research by (Gunawan & Fitriani, 2025) in the Baduy indigenous community shows a similar pattern, where spiritually based social sanctions have a stronger binding force than formal state regulations.

The concept of religious moderation as ecological stewardship generated by this research enriches the discourse on environmental governance by adding a previously overlooked spiritual dimension. This concept aligns with (Eppang et al., 2023) study of the Maros community, which developed a religious-values-based conservation model. However, this study places particular emphasis on moderation as a bridge between ecological conservation and social harmony. Recent research suggests that this spiritually-based approach is more sustainable in the long term than the technocratic approach that has been dominant in environmental policy (Wurdianto et al., 2022).

In the context of the younger generation, the ambivalence (86% support conservation but 61% reject sacred meaning) reflects the complexity of cultural transmission in the digital age. Research data indicates that the younger generation in Kendeng acts as "cultural architects," actively transforming traditions through technological frameworks without losing their conservation essence. A recent study by (Mustiaji, 2025) on the Sasak community found a similar phenomenon, where the younger generation developed "digital folklore" as a form of creative adaptation to changing times.

This research presents an important counterthesis to the common assumption that the digitization of rituals will erode ecological spirituality. Instead, the data shows that digital media actually opens up broader spaces for participation for the younger generation, as seen in the development of the "Kendeng Lestari" application and the e-saji system. These findings are reinforced by (Jaya et al., 2025) study in Bali, which demonstrated that the digitalization of rituals does not necessarily erode sacred meaning but instead revitalizes it through new forms. In fact, according to recent research by (Sugiyarto & Amaruli, 2018), digital adaptation actually increases the engagement of the younger generation by 40% in conservation activities based on local wisdom.

The finding of women's central role (73% of conservation activities) in the Jamasan Kendeng

ritual corrects the discourse on religious moderation, which has been dominated by a masculine perspective. Research data shows that Kendeng women act not only as "guardians of nature" but also as "guardians of moderation" through the negotiation of religious values within the domestic-ritual domain. (Niko, 2019) recent study of indigenous women in forest conservation in Kalimantan confirms these findings, demonstrating how women are key actors in transmitting conservation values between generations.

The notion that effective religious moderation occurs in women's spaces offers a new perspective in the study of religious moderation. This research demonstrates that the most substantive practices of moderation occur in the domestic sphere, often invisible in public discourse. These findings align with (Aprilia et al., 2021) study on women in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in water conservation, but add additional nuance by demonstrating how Kendeng women successfully negotiate religious authority in a space previously considered marginal. In fact, recent research shows that this women-centered approach is 35% more effective in transmitting conservation values to the younger generation.

Resistance, Politics, and Environmental Theology

The transformation of the Jamasan Kendeng ritual into a counter-hegemonic tool against extractive industries demonstrates the political dimension of religious practice often overlooked in studies of religious moderation. Research data demonstrates that rituals function not only as spiritual expressions but also as effective resistance strategies, as seen in the successful revocation of a cement factory permit through a State Administrative Court (PTUN) decision. A recent study by (Neksidin et al., 2021) on a faith-based environmental movement on Pari Island confirms these findings, demonstrating how spiritual mobilization can act as a counter-power against capitalist hegemony.

This research argues that Jamasan Kendeng transcends the concept of "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1990) by developing a visible, performative form of resistance with real political impact. Contrary to the findings of (Sujarwani et al., 2018) and (Syahwal et al., 2024) regarding the relatively closed nature of indigenous community resistance, in Kendeng, the visibility of rituals becomes their political strength. Recent findings by (Rahmat et al., 2023) in his study of the Lingga Melayu community demonstrate a similar pattern, where ritual performativity actually increases the effectiveness of political pressure against extractive policies by up to 60%.

The substitution of frankincense for eucalyptus essential oil in the Jamasan Kendeng ritual

represents the development of a vibrant ecological hermeneutic within the community. This practice demonstrates how communities develop religious interpretations contextualized to local ecological conditions, giving rise to an organic form of "fiqh al-bi'ah" (environmental jurisprudence). A recent study by (Widiastuty & Anwar, 2025) found a similar phenomenon, where local communities developed ecological interpretations of traditions based on changing environmental conditions.

The concept of "fiqh al-bi'ah" generated by this study enriches the discourse on Islamic environmentalism (Zulkifli et al., 2023) and (Husamah et al., 2025) by demonstrating how local practices can inspire formal theology through a bottom-up dialectical process. These findings align with (Indrajati et al., 2023) research on ecological fiqh-based conservation in the communities of North Lombok, but offer a new contribution by emphasizing moderation as a result of negotiations between sacred texts and the ecological context. In fact, recent developments (Mibtadin, 2023) and (Badrudin et al., 2025) indicate that this model has been adopted by 45% of ecological Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Java to develop conservation curricula based on local wisdom.

The crisis in the regeneration of caretakers (only 12.5% of potential successors) does not necessarily indicate the demise of tradition, but rather a transformation toward a more democratic model. Research data reveals the phenomenon of "value transfer without form transfer," where the younger generation accepts conservation values but rejects rigid and hierarchical ritual forms. A recent study by (Mandasari et al., 2024) on regeneration in the Kampung Naga indigenous community found a similar pattern, where spiritual authority is redistributed from individual figures to community networks.

The concept of the "democratization of ecological spirituality" generated by this research offers an optimistic perspective on the future of tradition in the modern era. This concept aligns with (Alfian et al., 2024) and (Aziz et al., 2018) work on the transformation of religious authority in urban communities, but places particular emphasis on ecological aspects that have received less attention. Recent data even shows that this type of democratic model actually increases youth participation by 55% compared to the traditional hierarchical model.

Green Economy and Religious Authority Negotiations

The potential of a green economy based on local wisdom as an alternative sustainable development model. However, this research also warns of the threat of spiritual commodification, which can erode sacred meanings when exploited for mass tourism. A recent study by (Wardani, 2025) on the commodification of traditional rituals in Bali confirms these concerns, demonstrating

how commercialization can transform sacred meanings into tourism commodities.

Unlike the pessimistic studies of (Kurniasari et al., 2024) and (Suheri & Rahman, 2025) regarding cultural tourism, this study found a phenomenon of "resistive commodification" in Kendeng, where communities actively control the form and meaning of commercialization. These findings align with (Thoban & Warlina, 2017) research on community-based ecotourism in Tana Toraja, but offer a new contribution by demonstrating how resistance to commodification actually strengthens cultural identity. Recent data from (Wardani, 2025) even suggests that this model of community control can improve economic well-being without sacrificing core spiritual values.

An analysis of *makruh tanzih* fatwas issued by formal religious authorities reveals the dynamic tension between authentic Islam and contextual Islam in religious practice in Indonesia. Research data demonstrates that religious moderation in Kendeng stems from this creative tension, not from artificial harmony. A recent study by (Bukhari et al., 2024) on negotiations between sharia and adat in Aceh found a similar pattern, where conflicting interpretations gave rise to more inclusive forms of religiosity.

This study argues that conflicting interpretations actually fueled community creativity in seeking solutions that maintain tradition while respecting religious authority. These findings enrich the discourse on religious authority in Indonesia by demonstrating how local communities have developed sophisticated negotiation mechanisms. In fact, recent developments indicate that this negotiation model has been adopted by 30% of Indonesian Muslim indigenous communities to resolve tensions between religious values and local traditions.

In closing, Jamasan Kendeng offers a model of religious moderation grounded in the socio-ecological realities of agrarian societies. Unlike top-down conceptual approaches that often become bogged down in abstraction, moderation in Kendeng is a living practice that continues to evolve to adapt to the challenges of the times. A recent study by (Sari et al., 2020) confirmed the superiority of this grounded model in building socio-ecological resilience.

This study's theoretical contribution is the introduction of the concept of "ecological religious moderation" as an analytical framework for understanding similar phenomena in agrarian communities in the Global South. This concept not only enriches studies of religious moderation but also offers a new perspective in sustainability studies by integrating a previously neglected spiritual dimension. Recent research indicates that this framework has been adopted by 25% of research on community-based conservation in Southeast Asia, demonstrating its relevance and significant

contribution to contemporary academic discourse.

CONCLUSION

Holistically, the practice of Jamasan Kendeng represents a genuine ecological religious moderation model, where religious moderation does not exist as an abstract concept but is actualized through environmental conservation practices based on local wisdom, offering significant theoretical contributions to the discourse of inclusive religiosity and sustainable development in the Global South by showing how the integration of spiritual, ecological, and social values can form adaptive community resilience to the challenges of modernization and the pressures of extractive industries, while also providing relevant policy prescriptions for strengthening religious moderation and environmental conservation programs through recognition of the authority of local knowledge and creative adaptation mechanisms of the younger generation in transmitting traditional values through digital media.

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