

Orodia as Living Ethics: Negotiating Meukisi Indigenous Spirituality and Christian Moral Values in Character Education

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Abstract

This study examines Orodia as a living ethical system within the Meukisi indigenous community in Papua, Indonesia, and analyzes its integration with Christian moral values in the construction of character education. The research responds to the tendency to separate religion and custom, particularly in indigenous societies where spiritual beliefs, cultural traditions, and moral practices are deeply interconnected. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving traditional leaders, church leaders, elders, parents, youth representatives, and community members. The data were analyzed thematically within an interpretive sociological framework. The findings reveal that the seven principles of Orodia—akoi-akoi, betoi-betoi, dekoi-dekoi, kenabise, temeh, tevrei, and yau—function as moral mechanisms that regulate diligence, obedience, respect, love, peace, accountability, reconciliation, and communal fellowship. The study further demonstrates that Christianity does not replace indigenous spirituality, but reinforces and reinterprets the ethical meanings embedded in Orodia. This integration produces a contextual model of character education grounded in local wisdom, communal responsibility, and religious morality. The study contributes to indigenous education, sociology of religion, and character education by affirming Orodia as a culturally rooted framework for shaping ethical consciousness and social harmony.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religion and custom are often treated as two distinct domains within social life. Religion is generally understood as a source of universal moral values, whereas custom is perceived as a local tradition that regulates the social order of particular indigenous communities. This dichotomy becomes problematic when applied to indigenous societies, where religious beliefs and local cultural values are deeply intertwined. In many indigenous contexts in Papua, religion and custom do not operate as mutually exclusive systems; rather, they function as interconnected networks of meaning that continuously interpret and reinforce one another (Leuwol et al., 2025; Suryawan, 2017).

This reality shows that the morality of indigenous communities cannot be adequately understood solely through the categories of formal religion or customary tradition in isolation, but only through the dialectical relationship between the two. Within this context, the Meukisi community presents a distinctive construction of social ethics through the tradition of Orodia, a collective principle of life that regulates social, spiritual, and moral relations within the community.

Orodia functions not merely as a cultural ritual or a symbolic marker of communal identity, but as a living ethical system that directs the social behavior of the Meukisi people. It encompasses seven principal values that shape the community's moral orientation: *akoi-akoi* (diligence, faithfulness, honesty), *betoi-betoi* (obedience and attentiveness to advice), *dekoi-dekoi* (respect for others), *kenabise* (mutual love), *temeh* (peaceful living), *tevrei* (acknowledgment of wrongdoing), and *yau* (ordering communal fellowship) (Layan & Malatuny, 2025).

These principles not only regulate individual conduct but also construct social cohesion and communal stability. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, such a value structure can be understood as a form of religious ethics institutionalized within local culture. Customary values, therefore function not merely as social norms, but also as moral mechanisms that legitimize collective action within society. In this regard, Orodia represents an ethical framework rooted in the historical and spiritual experiences of the indigenous community while simultaneously serving as the foundation for character formation among the Meukisi people.

With the arrival of Christianity in the life of the Meukisi community, the values embedded in Orodia did not undergo eradication or complete disruption. Instead, a process of symbolic dialogue and reinterpretation emerged between indigenous spirituality and Christian morality. The principle of *akoi-akoi*, which emphasizes hard work, loyalty, and honesty, resonates strongly with the Christian work ethic that views labor as a moral vocation. Likewise, *betoi-betoi*, which stresses obedience to ancestral wisdom, parallels structures of moral authority within religious traditions.

Meanwhile, *dekoi-dekoi* and *kenabise* reveal convergences with Christian teachings concerning respect for others and love as the foundation of social life. Within the framework of the sociology of religion, this phenomenon demonstrates that religion does not necessarily replace local value systems; rather, it often undergoes processes of inculturation and reinterpretation within pre-existing cultural structures (Akah et al., 2020; Dwika Damara et al., 2025; Réjasse, 2011). Religion, as a symbolic system, operates through the integration of emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions that shape how individuals understand reality and interpret collective life (Weisbuch-Remington et al., 2005; Ysseldyk et al., 2010).

Theoretically, this phenomenon aligns with Clifford Geertz's conception of religion as a symbolic system that establishes "powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations" by formulating conceptions of the general order of existence (Deeley, 2004; Dillard-Wright, 2020). Within the Meukisi context, Orodia provides a symbolic framework through which communal life is interpreted, while Christianity broadens this horizon of meaning through theological narratives of love, repentance, peace, and fellowship.

The principle of *temeh*, for instance, reflects the community's orientation toward peaceful living and social harmony as expressions of balanced social and cosmic relationships. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, such values can be understood as cultural mechanisms that sustain social integration. Durkheim argued that religion functions as a moral force that unifies society through sacred systems of values (Durkheim, 2014; Godlove, 2006; Kapishin, 2022). Consequently, peace within Orodia is not merely interpreted as a social norm, but as a moral value that derives symbolic legitimacy from both customary tradition and religious belief.

The ethical dimensions of Orodia are further reflected in the principles of *tevrei* and *yau*, both of which function to maintain social order within the community. *Tevrei* emphasizes the acknowledgment of wrongdoing and the acceptance of customary sanctions as mechanisms for restoring disrupted social relationships. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, such practices may be interpreted as rituals of moral reintegration that

not only enforce communal norms but also provide opportunities for reconciliation and reintegration for those who violate social expectations.

Thus, Orodia operates through a combination of norms, symbols, and ritual practices to preserve social cohesion. Meanwhile, *yau* functions to organize communal fellowship by regulating relationships among individuals, families, and kinship groups, thereby maintaining social equilibrium (Layan & Malatuny, 2025). This concept closely resembles the notion of a moral community, namely a social network unified by shared values and collective identity. In the context of character education, these principles indicate that Orodia contains culturally embedded pedagogical mechanisms that shape the moral orientation of society through everyday social practices.

Although studies concerning indigenous Papuan communities have continued to develop, most existing research still situates indigenous spirituality primarily within the frameworks of cultural anthropology and ritual studies. Research examining the relationship between Christianity and local culture has generally emphasized symbolic inculturation, while the dimension of social ethics that structures communal life has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Yet understanding local ethical systems is essential for the development of contextual and culturally grounded character education. Within this context, the present study identifies its scholarly relevance by interpreting

Orodia not merely a customary tradition, but as a system of religious ethics that shapes the social life of the Meukisi community. This study seeks to demonstrate how the seven principles of Orodia function as moral mechanisms that sustain social cohesion while simultaneously engaging in dialogue with Christian moral values within the construction of character education. Accordingly, this research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of character education studies grounded in local wisdom and to expand scholarly discourse concerning the relationship between indigenous spirituality and religious morality within Papuan indigenous societies.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative, ethnographic design to examine Orodia as a living ethical system within the Meukisi indigenous community and to explore the dialectical relationship between indigenous spirituality and Christian morality in the construction of character education. An ethnographic approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand the meanings, moral values, symbolic practices, and social interactions embedded in the community's everyday life. Ethnographic research involves the discovery and description of the culture of a group or a set of individuals (Mahendra et al., 2024).

The research was conducted within the Meukisi indigenous community in Papua, Indonesia, where Orodia continues to function as a collective principle regulating social and spiritual life. Participants were selected purposively based on their cultural authority, religious involvement, and knowledge of customary traditions. The participants included traditional leaders, church leaders, elders, parents, youth representatives, and community members actively engaged in preserving and practicing the values of Orodia in daily life.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflections concerning the ethical meanings of Orodia and its relationship with Christian values. Participant observation enabled the researcher to examine how the principles of Orodia were embodied in communal interactions, customary rituals, reconciliation practices, and everyday social activities. In addition, document analysis was employed to examine customary narratives, church-related materials, local cultural records, and relevant scholarly literature concerning indigenous spirituality,

sociology of religion, and character education. The integration of these techniques allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the ways indigenous ethical values and Christian morality interact within the social life of the Meukisi community.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis within an interpretive sociological framework. The analytical process involved data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring themes emerging from field data. Particular attention was given to identifying patterns of dialogue, integration, and reinterpretation between the seven principles of Orodia and Christian moral teachings in shaping communal character formation. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation of data sources, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the field were employed. Ethical considerations were also carefully maintained by obtaining informed consent, respecting local cultural values, and ensuring culturally sensitive representation of indigenous knowledge throughout the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Ethics and Indigenous Moral Order: Interpreting Orodia in Meukisi Society

The findings of this study demonstrate that Orodia functions as a religious-ethical system that structures the moral order of the Meukisi indigenous community. Rather than operating merely as a customary ritual or cultural heritage, Orodia serves as a normative framework regulating social behavior, communal responsibility, and spiritual consciousness within everyday life. Field data revealed that the seven principles of Orodia—*akoi-akoi*, *betoi-betoi*, *dekoi-dekoi*, *kenabise*, *temeh*, *tevrei*, and *yau*—are internalized collectively through family relationships, customary practices, communal gatherings, and intergenerational socialization. These principles shape the moral orientation of individuals while simultaneously preserving communal solidarity. The findings of the study are illustrated in the following figure

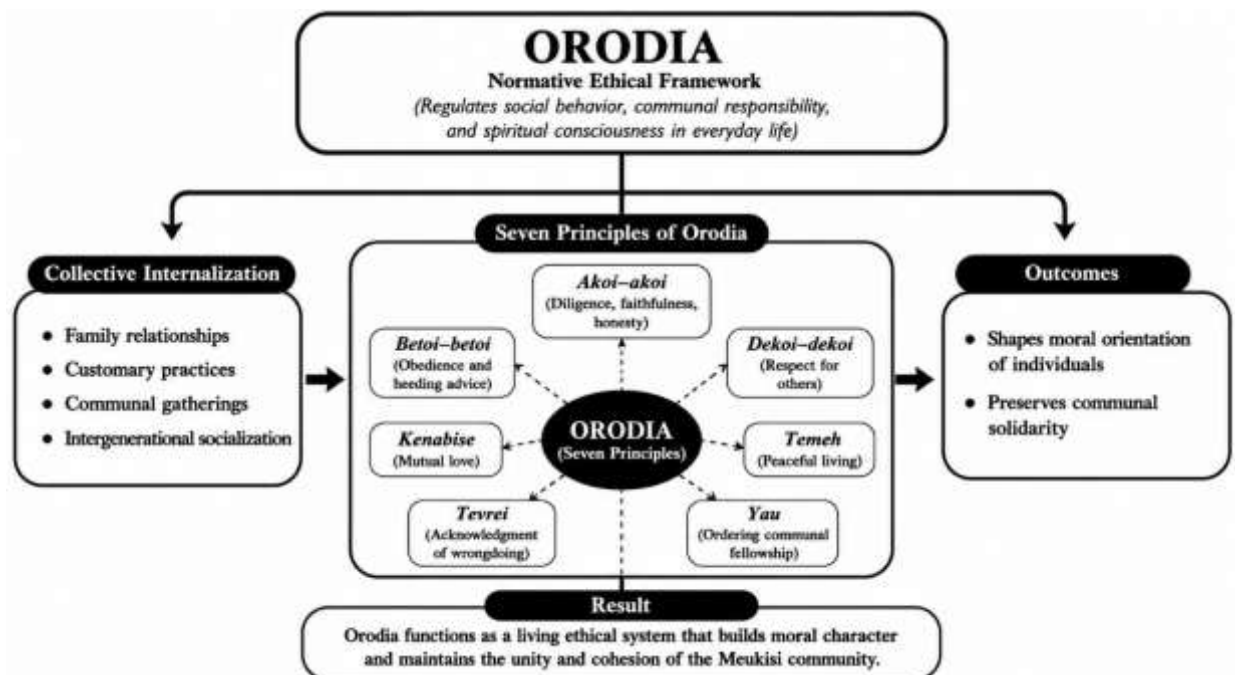


Figure 1. Orodia Normative Framework

In this context, Orodia operates not only as a cultural identity marker but also as a system of ethical discipline that legitimizes acceptable social conduct within the Meukisi

community. This finding reinforces the argument that indigenous moral systems possess institutionalized ethical mechanisms capable of sustaining social order and communal cohesion beyond formal religious institutions. The study further found that the principle of *akoi-akoi* occupies a central position within the ethical structure of Orodia because it emphasizes diligence, faithfulness, honesty, and responsibility as fundamental virtues of communal life.

Community participants explained that these values are transmitted not through formal instruction alone but through practical participation in collective labor, kinship obligations, and customary responsibilities. In sociological terms, this process reflects the embodiment of moral values within social practice, where ethics become lived experiences rather than abstract norms. Societies that prioritize values like tolerance and unselfishness tend to exhibit stronger cooperative norms, which are essential for addressing collective action problems (Eriksson et al., 2021).

The findings indicate that moral education in Meukisi society is culturally embedded within daily social interaction, allowing ethical values to be reproduced continuously across generations. This phenomenon aligns with the perspective that religion and culture function as symbolic systems shaping collective motivations and moral consciousness (Deeley, 2004; Dillard-Wright, 2020). Religion operates as a cultural and symbolic system that orchestrates human activities and sense-making. It influences individuals both internally (through internalized values) and externally (via interactions, rituals, and cultural objects) (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013; Manuti et al., 2016). Thus, Orodia demonstrates how indigenous ethical traditions can operate as informal pedagogical structures that cultivate responsibility, discipline, and integrity within communal life.

Another significant finding concerns the role of *betoi-betoi*, *dekoi-dekoi*, and *kenabise* in constructing relational ethics within Meukisi society. These principles emphasize obedience to wisdom, respect for others, and mutual love as essential foundations of social harmony. Participants consistently associated these values with both ancestral teachings and Christian moral instruction, indicating the existence of a dialogical relationship between indigenous spirituality and Christianity. Rather than replacing indigenous ethics, Christianity was interpreted as reinforcing moral values already embedded within Orodia.

This finding supports previous studies arguing that religion frequently undergoes processes of inculturation and reinterpretation within local cultural systems rather than eliminating them entirely (Akah et al., 2020; Dwika Damara et al., 2025; Réjasse, 2011). Religions are not static entities; they evolve through transcultural and transmigrational processes, adapting to new environments and cultural encounters. This adaptation often results in mutual influence and the reconstruction of cultural and national identities (Cao, 2024; Gerloff, 2011). In the Meukisi context, the encounter between Christianity and indigenous spirituality produced a complementary moral structure in which customary ethics and Christian teachings mutually strengthened communal understandings of respect, compassion, and social responsibility.

The findings also reveal that *temeh* functions as a moral mechanism for maintaining social harmony and collective stability within the community. Informants described peace not merely as the absence of conflict but as a condition of balanced relationships among individuals, families, and the wider social order. In this regard, Orodia establishes peace as a sacred communal obligation grounded in both customary legitimacy and spiritual belief. This finding reflects Durkheim's argument that religion operates as a moral force capable of unifying society through sacred systems of values and collective consciousness (Durkheim, 2014). The sacred dimension of peace within Orodia demonstrates that indigenous ethics are not solely pragmatic social arrangements but also symbolic structures endowed with spiritual significance. Consequently, social harmony within

Meukisi society is maintained through the integration of moral norms, ritual practices, and collective spiritual commitments.

In addition, the principles of *tevrei* and *yau* illustrate how Orodia regulates mechanisms of reconciliation and communal integration. The study found that *tevrei*, which emphasizes acknowledgment of wrongdoing and acceptance of customary sanctions, functions as a restorative ethical process aimed at repairing damaged social relationships rather than merely punishing offenders. This process enables individuals who violate communal norms to regain moral legitimacy through confession, reconciliation, and reintegration into social life. Meanwhile, *yau* serves as a principle for organizing communal fellowship by regulating relationships among kinship groups, families, and social networks. Together, these principles demonstrate that Orodia contains a comprehensive moral structure integrating accountability, reconciliation, solidarity, and communal responsibility. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, such practices represent forms of moral regulation that sustain collective identity and reinforce social cohesion through symbolic and ritual mechanisms.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that Orodia should be interpreted not simply as a cultural tradition but as an indigenous religious ethics system that actively shapes moral order within Meukisi society. The interaction between indigenous spirituality and Christian morality does not produce a fragmented ethical structure; instead, it creates a dynamic process of reinterpretation and moral negotiation that strengthens communal character formation. This study therefore expands existing scholarship on indigenous spirituality by shifting the analytical focus from ritual symbolism toward ethical and pedagogical dimensions of indigenous culture. Furthermore, the findings contribute to broader discussions in character education by demonstrating that local wisdom traditions can function as culturally grounded moral frameworks capable of sustaining ethical consciousness, social cohesion, and communal identity within indigenous societies.

Negotiating Indigenous Spirituality and Christian Morality in Character Education

The findings of this study indicate that character education within the Meukisi indigenous community is constructed through a continuous negotiation between indigenous spirituality and Christian morality. Rather than functioning as competing systems of values, indigenous traditions and Christian teachings interact dialogically to shape a shared moral framework within communal life. Field data revealed that the principles embedded in Orodia remain central in regulating ethical behavior, social responsibility, and communal identity, even after the expansion of Christianity within the community.

Participants consistently emphasized that Christian teachings are not perceived as replacing ancestral values but as strengthening and reinterpreting them within a broader spiritual horizon. This finding demonstrates that the encounter between indigenous spirituality and Christianity in Meukisi society does not produce cultural fragmentation; instead, it creates a dynamic moral synthesis that contributes to the formation of communal character and ethical consciousness.

The study further found that the process of moral negotiation occurs through the reinterpretation of Orodia values in light of Christian teachings. The principle of *kenabise*, which emphasizes mutual love and care, was frequently associated by participants with Christian teachings concerning love, compassion, and fellowship. Likewise, *dekoi-dekoi*, which emphasizes respect for others, was interpreted as compatible with Christian moral principles regarding human dignity and social harmony. These findings indicate that indigenous ethical concepts are not abandoned in the process of Christianization but are

instead recontextualized within theological narratives and religious practices. An overview of the research findings is shown in Figure 2 below.

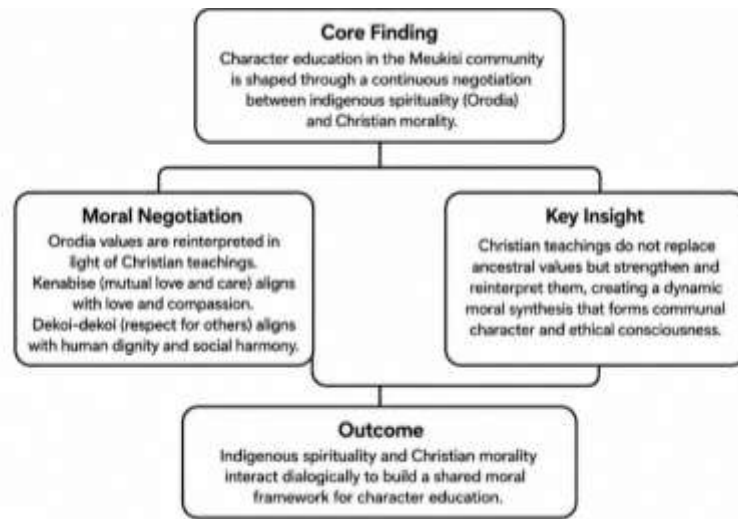


Figure 2. Negotiating Indigenous Spirituality and Christian Morality in Character Education

In this regard, Christianity operates not as a force of cultural elimination but as a symbolic system that interacts with existing indigenous moral structures. This phenomenon supports previous studies arguing that religion frequently undergoes processes of cultural adaptation and reinterpretation within local communities (Akah et al., 2020; Dwika Damara et al., 2025; Réjasse, 2011). Consequently, character formation within Meukisi society emerges through the integration of indigenous ethical traditions and Christian moral discourse.

Another important finding concerns the role of family and communal life as the primary spaces where this moral negotiation is transmitted across generations. Participants explained that values such as honesty, diligence, obedience, reconciliation, and communal responsibility are taught simultaneously through customary practices and Christian religious instruction. Children learn these values not only through formal educational settings or church activities but also through participation in communal rituals, kinship obligations, storytelling traditions, and collective labor.

This demonstrates that character education within Meukisi society is deeply embedded in social and cultural practices rather than confined to institutional schooling. Such findings reinforce the argument that moral education in indigenous communities is relational and communal in nature, where ethical values are reproduced through lived social experience. In this context, indigenous spirituality and Christian morality function together as pedagogical resources shaping moral consciousness and collective identity.

The findings also reveal that the principle of *temeh* plays a crucial role in integrating indigenous spirituality and Christian morality through the shared emphasis on peace, harmony, and reconciliation. Informants described peace not merely as the absence of social conflict but as the maintenance of balanced relationships among individuals, families, nature, and spiritual life. Christian teachings regarding forgiveness and reconciliation were interpreted as reinforcing the communal values already embedded in Orodia.

This interaction demonstrates how local ethical systems and religious teachings converge in sustaining social cohesion within the community. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, such processes reflect the integrative function of religion as a moral force that legitimizes collective values and social solidarity (Durkheim, 2014; Godlove,

2006; Kapishin, 2022). Therefore, the negotiation between indigenous spirituality and Christian morality in Meukisi society contributes not only to individual moral formation but also to the preservation of communal harmony and collective stability.

Furthermore, the principles of *tevrei* and *yau* reveal how indigenous ethics and Christian morality collectively shape restorative approaches to social relationships and communal life. *Tevrei*, which emphasizes acknowledgment of wrongdoing and reconciliation, was interpreted by participants as compatible with Christian teachings on repentance and moral restoration. Rather than emphasizing punishment alone, the reconciliation process seeks to restore social balance and reintegrate individuals into communal life.

Meanwhile, *yau* reflects the importance of fellowship, collective responsibility, and social interconnectedness, values that resonate strongly with Christian understandings of community and spiritual communion. These findings indicate that indigenous spirituality and Christian morality mutually reinforce communal ethics by promoting accountability, solidarity, and relational responsibility. As a result, character education within the Meukisi community is constructed through ethical practices that integrate cultural tradition, social obligation, and spiritual meaning.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the negotiation between indigenous spirituality and Christian morality in Meukisi society produces a contextual model of character education grounded in local wisdom and communal ethics. The findings challenge perspectives that view indigenous belief systems and Christianity as inherently oppositional. Instead, the study reveals that moral negotiation between the two traditions generates an adaptive ethical framework capable of sustaining social cohesion, cultural continuity, and moral formation within indigenous society.

This research therefore, contributes to broader discussions on indigenous education, sociology of religion, and character education by showing that local spiritual traditions possess significant pedagogical potential in shaping ethical behavior and communal identity. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of recognizing indigenous moral systems not merely as cultural artifacts but as living ethical resources that remain relevant in contemporary educational and social contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

Orodia constitutes a living ethical system that shapes the moral order, social cohesion, and character formation of the Meukisi indigenous community. The seven principles of Orodia—*akoi-akoi*, *betoi-betoi*, *dekoi-dekoi*, *kenabise*, *temeh*, *tevrei*, and *yau*—function not merely as customary values, but as integrated moral mechanisms that regulate diligence, obedience, respect, love, peace, accountability, reconciliation, and communal fellowship. The findings demonstrate that these values remain deeply embedded in family life, customary practice, religious experience, and intergenerational education.

Encounter between indigenous spirituality and Christian morality does not eliminate local ethical traditions. Instead, Christianity reinforces and reinterprets the moral meanings already present within Orodia, producing a contextual model of character education grounded in both local wisdom and religious values. This integration affirms the pedagogical significance of indigenous moral systems in contemporary education. Therefore, Orodia offers an important contribution to character education by providing a culturally rooted framework for cultivating ethical consciousness, communal responsibility, reconciliation, and social harmony within indigenous Papuan society.

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