

## Exploring the Values of Local Wisdom of the Meukisi Indigenous Community, Papua

Santy Layan<sup>1</sup>, Yakob Godlif Malatuny<sup>2</sup>

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Protestan Negeri Sentani

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### Abstract

*The existence of the indigenous community in Meukisi Village is becoming increasingly concerning, because in recent decades this community has become vulnerable to change. In fact, the values of local wisdom have been deeply rooted and traditional in the lives of their ancestors. The approach in this study is qualitative using the case study method. Meukisi traditional leaders became informants. The researcher used techniques such as in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. Meanwhile, data analysis techniques were carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. The research found that the indigenous people of Meukisi have adopted yau as a guideline for their attitudes and actions. Yau has become a guiding star for the Meukisi indigenous community. The Meukisi indigenous community maintains and preserves yau through guidance and habit formation within the family and policies from indigenous institutions to provide guidance for the younger generation in indigenous activities that take place once a year. It can be concluded that, fundamentally, the existence of local yau wisdom values is dynamic because it adapts to the changing times, as it is able to survive in the face of globalization and is used as a means of strengthening the identity of the Meukisi indigenous community.*

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### Corresponding Author:

Santy Layan

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Protestan Negeri Sentani

Email: [santylayan@gmail.com](mailto:santylayan@gmail.com)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Local wisdom in Indonesian philosophy means a philosophy that lives in the hearts of the people, a wise way of life, the right way of life, expressed through traditional rituals. Local wisdom in this perspective is the product of centuries of spiritual purification in the relationship between people who share the same culture. It is related to the concept of God, and the relationship between humans and God, as well as the relationship with nature and the self (Pangalila et al., 2019). Local wisdom is tied to the concept of locus. The word local here implies the relationship between humans and specific places. Locus in philosophical terms not only implies a geographical perspective, but also refers to how human life interacts with the arrangement of the world into different regions: plains or mountains, or beaches, forests or rice fields (Nurasiah et al., 2022).

The role and function of local wisdom in local communities within indigenous societies can be divided into three categories. First, local wisdom serves as a moral and spiritual guide for the community, because the measure of truth in a particular community's way of life refers to how that community views the world. Second, local wisdom serves as an inspiration for knowledge that supports life, because local wisdom contains a system of

values and knowledge that supports the sustainability of various natural resources and a sustainable lifestyle for all living things in the local environment. Third, local wisdom functions as a guarantor of integrated life, demonstrated by harmonious and equal relationships between humans and between humans and nature that are not exploitative (Pesurnay, 2018: 7).

However, the position of local wisdom in indigenous communities in Indonesia is currently weak in some areas. The roots of the fading of local wisdom in indigenous communities include: First, the influx of foreign cultures that are not in line with the cultures of local indigenous communities, which can erode indigenous cultures that have noble values. Second, the lack of support and enthusiasm from the community to maintain, preserve, and develop local technologies and local wisdom (Suastra 2010; Wagiran, 2011).

The existence of the indigenous community in Meukisi Village, Yokari District, Jayapura Regency, Papua, is becoming increasingly concerning. In recent decades, this community has become vulnerable to change. In fact, the local wisdom of this community has been deeply rooted and traditional in the lives of their ancestors. This local wisdom is *yau*, which regulates/binds and unites the local indigenous community.

Local wisdom *yau* is one of the seven local wisdoms of the Meukisi indigenous community, which is referred to as “*orodia*”. *Yau* is marked on the “*Batu Lingkaran/Traditional Stone*”. *Yau* has its own meaning, whereby the indigenous community, which begins with family associations, has a responsibility to care for communal life; to share/help/assist one another, to advise, and to build relationships with others to care for the surrounding environment. What stands out about *yau* is its strong sense of solidarity and mutual cooperation.

The local wisdom of the Meukisi indigenous community in this study focuses on the responsibility of indigenous communities in caring for each other and the environment. In short, living in harmony. Based on preliminary field studies, researchers found several fundamental issues. First, the value of mutual cooperation or helping one another among community members has begun to fade. Personal interests are often placed above the common good. For example, it has become rare for community members to advise and admonish one another. As a result, there have been many violations of the seven customary norms established by the ancestors of the Meukisi indigenous community.

Second, the sense of solidarity to care for nature has begun to be neglected. Actions that destroy nature, such as logging and dynamite fishing in the sea, are carried out by those who lack awareness. In fact, local wisdom can shape the ability of indigenous peoples to depend on natural resources and be able to manage or regulate them well for the sake of sustainable coexistence.

Third, fulfilling the interests of living together in a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere is not well practiced in everyday life. Arguments often occur in society because the attitude of mutual respect for one another is beginning to fade. The local wisdom that was once well observed, resulting in peace and harmony in society, is now being neglected. This situation has caused concern among traditional leaders and religious leaders. The issue of the fading local wisdom in the Meukisi indigenous community must be brought to the surface for scientific analysis.

Given the importance of the values contained in local wisdom for the future survival of the Meukisi indigenous community, the theme of this paper is very interesting and important to study. This is because the author believes that there will be many losses if the theme of this paper is not researched and the best solution is not found.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The approach used in this study is qualitative, employing the case study method. The researcher chose this approach in order to conduct an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the dimensions of local wisdom in caring for communal life among the Meukisi indigenous community. This means that the researcher wanted to conduct an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the research subjects based on the facts obtained in the field as they were, in accordance with the results of the research data analysis.

Creswell, (2010: 20) asserts that a case study is a research strategy in which researchers carefully investigate a program, event, activity, process, or group of individuals. Yin, (2011: 1) states that a case study is an empirical investigation that examines contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomena and the context are not clearly defined.

The author chose traditional leaders and representatives of the Meukisi indigenous community as participants in this study because they have markings on the "Circular Stone" and as an indigenous community directly involved in preserving local wisdom for the sake of communal survival. The data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, and documentation. Meanwhile, the data analysis techniques consisted of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### The Value of Yau Local Wisdom

Yau is one of the local wisdoms of Orodia. In Orodia, the first rule is *akoi-akoi* (diligent, loyal, and honest), the second is *betoi-betoi* (obedient and accepting advice from elders), the third is *dekoi-dekoi* (mutual respect among peers), fourth *kenabise* (loving one another), fifth *temeh* (living in peace), sixth *tevrei* (sincere acknowledgment of wrongdoing), and seventh *yau* (organizing the community).

Yau has become a local wisdom that binds the Meukisi indigenous community. The life lived by the community is based on a set of norms contained in yau. This concept is in line with the view of Suastra et al. (2017: 307) that local wisdom is essentially a binding norm in a community that is believed to be true by the community and whose existence is used as a reference in daily activities and behavior, so that local wisdom is an entity that greatly determines human dignity in daily life.

Local wisdom or local knowledge is a set of values inherited from one generation to the next in the form of religion, culture, or customs, generally in oral form within a community's social system. The existence of local wisdom in society is the result of a long process of adaptation over a very long period of time to an environment that is usually inhabited or an environment where interactions often occur (Juniarta et al., 2013: 12).

The existence of local wisdom has been adapted from generation to generation by the Meukisi indigenous community. The law contains the meaning that good life management must begin from a smaller scope, namely the family community, and then extend to the indigenous community. All family members can gather to discuss various issues and their solutions within the family environment. The management of the family community is based on the customary law of orodia.

Yau originated from a traditional way of life that had long been ingrained in indigenous communities, which was then brought to the fore by the Meukisi ancestors to be used as customary rules. The organization of communities around good and proper ways of life in accordance with customary rules within the family has been practiced by the ancestors since long ago.

In Yau law, parents teach their children to recognize *akoi-akoi*, *betoi-betoi*, *dekoi-dekoi*, *kenabise*, *temeh*, *tevrei*, and *yau* so that community life becomes more harmonious, peaceful, mutually supportive, respectful, and familiar with close relatives. When each

family is well organized in accordance with customary law, then collectively, community life will also run well. The family is the main basis for instilling orodia customary law.

The Meukisi indigenous community has adopted yau as a guideline for behavior and action. Thus, yau has become a guiding star for the Meukisi indigenous community. In their daily lives, they help the weak, protect each other, care for each other, and advise each other. They believe that by obeying yau, they will receive joy or happiness from God in addition to living in harmony and peace.

The most concrete practice of yau in the Meukisi indigenous community is mutual cooperation in building houses, fishing at sea, harvesting crops in the fields, contributing to close relatives to complete their studies at university, and contributing to dowries.

The values of goodness contained in yau are in stark contrast to the practices of the younger generation today. They do not adhere to or respect yau. They have adopted and practiced cultural values from outside. As a result, their way of life is unhealthy. They have shifted away from the values of goodness in yau.

Local wisdom will have meaning if it remains a reference in overcoming every dynamic of social life. The existence of local wisdom values will be tested in the midst of a dynamic social life. Local genius is not exactly the same as local wisdom. Local genius can localize outside cultures, which involves creativity and wisdom to produce a distinctive culture in the form of local wisdom, among other things.

Both do contain wise steps, one in the context of processing-localisation, while the other in the context of using it-product as habitus. Local wisdom functions as a recipe for action to realise a wise and prudent human being. Local wisdom is passed down from generation to generation and preserved, not only because of its function as a recipe for action, but also because it is true from a pragmatic point of view so that it has use value in the context of realising a harmonious society.

The Meukisi indigenous community believes that as human beings, they are dependent on each other and must work together to achieve a common goal, namely fulfilling their shared interests in an atmosphere of harmony, mutual assistance, mutual protection, and preservation of their ancestral heritage, both cultural and natural. Through this way of life, they can build a better future.

In Soekanto's view (1990: 72), the pattern of dependence in indigenous communities can develop because it is driven by the desire to achieve common goals and the awareness that these goals have significant benefits for all members of the indigenous community. In other words, cooperation arises in indigenous communities because they realize that they have various common interests and need all members of the community to fulfill these interests. Thus, awareness is the main capital in building cooperative relationships within indigenous communities.

### **The Relevance of Yau's Local Wisdom in People's Lives**

Local wisdom is something or an action that is considered good by the indigenous people of Meukisi. The meaning of local wisdom is formed and reflected in the ethics and noble values that are believed in. The values embedded in local wisdom can be the main capital in building a society without damaging or changing the social order related to the surrounding natural environment.

Local wisdom is said to be the superior culture of the local community, because the values held by the community are still closely related to the social order, geographical conditions, and the surrounding natural environment. Yau has become a bastion that protects the existence of indigenous cultures from the influences of modernization and foreign cultures. Fundamentally, local yau wisdom is dynamic, meaning that it can adapt to changing times. Thus, even though the indigenous Meukisi community has entered the era

of modernization, the values of local wisdom remain because they are deeply rooted in the community.

In its development, local wisdom has continuously served as a guideline in life so that communities can survive safely, comfortably, and prosperously. The relevance of local wisdom values in the lives of the Meukisi indigenous community will be explained in several points. First, *yau*, which is a hereditary tradition, is still suitable to be practiced by today's society. The practice of *yau* law is still very strong among the elders because they deeply understand its benefits in life.

Second, *yau* is a guiding star for every family. If it is practiced well in every family, then collectively, the Meukisi indigenous community will live in harmony and peace. *Yau* provides direction for parents and children in their actions. Mutual respect, mutual assistance, mutual advice, unity within the family, and peaceful coexistence are the core values of *yau* that must be prioritized and nurtured within the family.

Third, *yau* does not contradict religious truth. In fact, *yau* is in line with religious teachings. When the Gospel entered this land, our ancestors said that what was taught in the Gospel was what was taught in *yau*. Therefore, the Gospel and *yau* law are not contradictory at all. In other words, the values of goodness in the Gospel are exactly the same as the values of goodness in *yau* law.

Fourth, the Meukisi community still uses *yau* as a reference for behavior in the modern era. This is because many cultures and challenges from outside, especially from the West, can erode the culture and order of society, so there is a great need for local wisdom that can serve as a filter for outside cultures. Without *yau*, society would live in chaos and disharmony.

Fifth, the modern way of life that has been adopted by today's youth is currently being targeted for elimination by various traditional leaders. This is because it is not in accordance with what is stipulated in *yau*. Mutual cooperation is contrary to individualism, so materialism has shifted immaterialism values so that respect for a person is no longer based on the person's morality, but rather on the material and wealth they possess and other Western values.

Preserving local wisdom is not an easy task. The hegemony of globalism—especially the hegemony of social media—has unknowingly become part of our lives. There is a tendency for moral values to weaken due to the advancement of science and technology on the one hand, and on the other hand, there is a growing awareness of the importance of these values. The weakening of values and awareness of the importance of local wisdom must be addressed wisely. The uncertainty of this dichotomy has given rise to a new attitude of returning to local wisdom as our identity and continuing our culture in a differential manner.

### **Preserving the Local Wisdom of *Yau***

Local wisdom is based on ethics and values in social life that are considered products of past culture, but many are still upheld as guidelines for behavior. Values in the context of local wisdom are guidelines or standards of behavior and cannot be separated from every form of human activity and behavior from generation to generation (Niman, 2019: 95).

Local wisdom reflects knowledge, values, and practices that have been passed down from generation to generation, becoming the distinctive characteristics and unique identity of a community (Rifani et al., 2024; Shofiyani et al., 2025). This is especially important in this day and age, an era of openness in information and communication, which, if not handled properly, will result in the loss of local wisdom as the identity and character of the nation.

Local wisdom in Meukisi village is still practiced today because it is a mandate from the ancestors that must be carried out in accordance with existing rules. Local wisdom

related to daily life is a binding rule or norm that regulates the lives of the Meukisi community. Local wisdom is a local way of thinking or idea that contains wise, creative, and good values, which have been internalized from generation to generation (tradition).

These values are believed to contain truth and are therefore followed by members of the community. This local wisdom can be called the noble values of society that serve as the philosophical foundation for good behavior towards harmony. Local wisdom has become a guiding star that can ensure the continuity of the Meukisi community's life as well as a symbol of the continuity of the community's cultural development.

The following will describe the preservation of local yau wisdom by the Meukisi indigenous community, including the following. First, the Meukisi indigenous community maintains and preserves yau through guidance and habit formation that begins within the family, where both parents always provide guidance to family members and practice yau laws such as helping one another, respecting one another, advising one another, and always living in harmony with relatives.

Second, indigenous institutions have policies or measures to preserve yau, such as guidance from indigenous leaders for the younger generation in indigenous activities that take place once a year. This activity is called "lepas sambut" (welcome ceremony) which takes place on January 10 or 15, where the procession begins with a meal together and ends with guidance from traditional leaders to the younger generation. In addition, there is guidance provided by traditional leaders to each clan or family to continuously apply yau law within the family.

Third, certain measures are needed in the field of education to preserve yau. Educational institutions, in this case schools, must preserve yau by building unity and solidarity through regional dances, regional songs, and learning regional languages. Fourth, in order to preserve yau law in society, traditional institutions impose sanctions on people who commit violations to provide a deterrent effect. There are several sanctions imposed by traditional leaders on violators according to the severity of the violation. Fifth, violations of yau law by the community can be remedied by the community if they are aware of and comply with the sanctions imposed by traditional leaders.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study confirms that the local wisdom of the Meukisi indigenous community is a noble value system that has been passed down from generation to generation, serving as a guideline for life in regulating family relationships and collective community life. The values contained therein, such as akoi-akoi, betoi-betoi, deko-dekoi, kenabise, temeh, tevrei, and yau itself, form the foundation for a harmonious social life, full of respect, mutual assistance, and strengthened kinship ties. Thus, yau is not merely a customary rule, but also a philosophy of life that unites the community in facing the dynamics of the times.

Furthermore, this study shows that yau is a cultural fortress that preserves the identity of the Meukisi community amid the currents of modernization and globalization. Even though times have changed, this local wisdom remains alive because of its dynamic nature, able to adapt without losing its traditional roots. It is not only a symbol of ancestral heritage, but also a moral force that strengthens the community's identity, ensuring a safe, comfortable, and prosperous life. Thus, yau can be seen as a guiding star that bridges the past, present, and future of the Meukisi community.

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