

FROM TRADITION TO GLOBAL TRADE: CULTURAL VALUE TRANSFORMATION IN SEAWEED FARMING COMMUNITIES OF LAIKANG VILLAGE, TAKALAR

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Abstract *This study examines the transformation of cultural values in seaweed farming communities in Laikang Village, Takalar Regency, focusing on the traditional practice of Ma' Bettang. While previous studies on globalization and coastal livelihoods emphasize economic change, limited attention has been given to how local symbolic traditions are reinterpreted within global market integration. Addressing this gap, this research investigates how Ma' Bettang, once a ritual embodying spiritual, ecological, and social relations, is reshaped under the pressures of global trade expansion. Using an ethnographic approach informed by symbolic interpretation and the social construction of reality, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and field documentation. The findings reveal that Ma' Bettang is not disappearing but undergoing reinterpretation, where its symbolic meanings are increasingly aligned with economic rationality and commodification processes. This study contributes to the anthropology of globalization by demonstrating that cultural transformation in coastal communities involves not only adaptation but also the reconfiguration of symbolic systems within new socio-economic contexts.*

Keyword:

Cultural, globalization, seaweed farming, Ma' Bettang, symbolic

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1. Introduction

Coastal communities have long been recognized as social groups whose cultural systems are closely intertwined with marine ecosystems. The sea is not merely an economic resource but also a cultural landscape that shapes local identity, belief systems, and patterns of social interaction. In many maritime societies, livelihood activities such as fishing, seaweed farming, and coastal agriculture are embedded within symbolic meanings, rituals, and traditional knowledge passed down across generations. These practices represent a form of cultural adaptation that reflects how communities interpret and manage their natural environment (Berkes, 2018). Within this context, cultural traditions often function not only as expressions of

collective identity but also as mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion and ecological balance.

In Indonesia, coastal societies have developed diverse cultural practices related to maritime livelihoods. These traditions often contain symbolic meanings that regulate social relations, define community identity, and establish moral connections between humans and nature. Anthropological studies have shown that cultural symbols embedded in rituals and traditions play a crucial role in shaping how communities understand their world and organize their social life (Geertz, 1973). Symbolic practices within coastal communities therefore cannot be separated from their economic activities because they simultaneously express cultural values and practical strategies for survival.

One of the most significant economic activities among coastal communities in eastern Indonesia is seaweed farming. Over the past three decades, seaweed cultivation has developed into a major livelihood sector due to increasing global demand for carrageenan and other seaweed-derived products used in the food, pharmaceutical, and cosmetic industries (Valderrama et al., 2015). Indonesia has become one of the world's leading producers of tropical seaweed, particularly species such as *Kappaphycus alvarezii* and *Eucheuma denticulatum*. This rapid expansion has transformed many coastal villages into export-oriented production zones integrated into global commodity chains.

However, the growth of the seaweed industry has not only changed the economic structure of coastal communities but has also influenced their cultural systems. The integration of local livelihoods into global markets often produces significant transformations in social values, community relations, and traditional practices. Scholars have argued that globalization does not merely introduce new economic opportunities but also reshapes local cultural meanings and identities (Appadurai, 1996). In many cases, traditional practices that once carried symbolic or spiritual significance gradually become reinterpreted within the logic of production, efficiency, and market demand.

The transformation of cultural values in coastal communities is particularly visible in areas where traditional practices intersect with global economic forces. When local traditions become embedded within market-driven production systems, their meanings often shift from collective cultural expressions to economic activities. This phenomenon reflects what anthropologists describe as the commodification of culture, a process through which cultural symbols and practices are increasingly shaped by market logic (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). While such processes may create new economic opportunities, they can also lead to tensions between cultural preservation and economic modernization.

Laikang Village, located in Mangarabombang District of Takalar Regency, South Sulawesi, represents one example of a coastal community experiencing such transformations. Historically, the community has relied on marine resources as the foundation of its economic and cultural life. Over time, seaweed farming has become the dominant livelihood activity, significantly contributing to household income and regional economic development. At the same time, local traditions related to seaweed cultivation continue to exist, reflecting the deep cultural connection between the community and the sea.

One of the cultural practices associated with seaweed farming in this region is the tradition known as *Ma' Bettang*. Within the local cultural context, *Ma' Bettang* functions as a symbolic practice marking the beginning of seaweed cultivation activities. It represents a form of collective expression that reflects spiritual beliefs, social solidarity, and ecological awareness within the community. The tradition embodies values such as mutual cooperation, respect for the sea, and the recognition of human dependence on natural forces.

From an anthropological perspective, traditions like *Ma' Bettang* can be understood as symbolic systems through which communities interpret their relationship with the environment. Clifford Geertz (1973) argued that culture functions as a system of symbols that provides meaning and orientation for human actions. Rituals and traditions are therefore not merely ceremonial acts but represent structured forms of communication through which societies express their worldview. In coastal communities, such symbolic practices often serve to reaffirm collective identity and maintain social cohesion.

However, the rapid expansion of seaweed production and its integration into global markets has introduced new dynamics that influence the meaning and function of traditional practices. As seaweed farming becomes increasingly oriented toward export markets, production activities are often driven by economic efficiency and market demand rather than cultural considerations. This transformation raises important questions about how local traditions adapt to the pressures of globalization and economic modernization.

Theoretical perspectives on the social construction of reality provide useful insights into understanding these processes. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that social reality is continuously constructed through human interaction and institutionalization. Cultural meanings are not fixed but are produced and reproduced through everyday practices within specific social contexts. When new economic structures emerge, they can reshape the institutional framework through which cultural symbols are interpreted and practiced.

In the context of coastal communities engaged in global commodity production, traditional practices may undergo processes of reinterpretation and transformation. Some elements of tradition may be maintained as markers of cultural identity, while others may be modified or even abandoned as communities adapt to new economic conditions. These changes illustrate how culture is dynamic and constantly negotiated within changing social and economic environments.

Globalization has further intensified these transformations by connecting local communities to broader economic networks. According to Appadurai (1996), globalization creates complex cultural flows that influence how local societies perceive and reconstruct their identities. Rather than simply erasing local cultures, global processes often produce hybrid forms in which traditional practices coexist with modern economic systems. In many cases, coastal communities develop strategies to balance economic opportunities with cultural preservation. Local traditions may be reinterpreted to maintain their relevance within contemporary contexts. Such processes demonstrate the resilience of cultural systems and the capacity of communities to negotiate the challenges posed by globalization.

Nevertheless, the transformation of cultural values in maritime communities remains an important area of study within anthropology and cultural studies. Understanding how local traditions adapt to global economic forces provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of cultural change. It also highlights the importance of documenting and analyzing local knowledge systems that may otherwise be overlooked in development-oriented narratives. Despite the growing economic importance of seaweed farming in Indonesia, relatively few studies have explored the cultural dimensions of this livelihood. Most existing research focuses on economic productivity, technological development, or environmental sustainability, while the cultural meanings embedded within seaweed farming practices receive less attention. Yet these cultural aspects are crucial for understanding how communities interpret and respond to socio-economic changes.

This research therefore seeks to examine the transformation of cultural values within seaweed farming communities in Laikang Village by focusing on the tradition of *Ma' Bettang*.

Through an ethnographic approach, this study aims to explore how the meanings associated with this tradition have evolved in response to the expansion of global seaweed markets. By analyzing the intersection between local culture and global trade, the research provides insights into the processes through which traditional practices are negotiated and reinterpreted within contemporary economic contexts. Furthermore, this study contributes to broader discussions on cultural transformation in maritime societies. It highlights how local communities actively engage with global economic systems while simultaneously attempting to maintain their cultural identity. Rather than viewing globalization solely as a force that erodes tradition, this research emphasizes the dynamic ways in which culture adapts and evolves.

Ultimately, examining the transformation from tradition to global trade in coastal communities offers an important perspective on the relationship between culture, economy, and identity. The case of Laikang Village demonstrates that economic development and cultural change are deeply interconnected processes. By documenting these transformations, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how coastal societies navigate the complex challenges of globalization while preserving elements of their cultural heritage.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach to explore in depth the resilience and survival strategies of seaweed farmers in Laikang Village, Mangarabombang District, Takalar Regency. Ethnography was selected as it enables the researcher to understand social reality from the perspective of cultural actors themselves, emphasizing meaning-making, lived experience, and symbolic interpretation within everyday practices (Spradley, 1980; Geertz, 1973). This approach is particularly relevant for examining *Ma' Bettang* not merely as a practice, but as a cultural system embedded within broader socio-economic transformations driven by globalization.

Fieldwork was conducted over a period of four consecutive days. While this duration may appear limited compared to conventional long-term ethnographic standards, this study adopts a focused ethnography approach, which allows intensive, short-term engagement in specific cultural settings (Knoblauch, 2005). The relatively short fieldwork duration was compensated through prolonged daily interaction, repeated informal conversations, and triangulation of data sources, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and field documentation. Focused ethnography is increasingly recognized as a valid methodological adaptation in contemporary research contexts where time and access may be constrained but depth is maintained through intensity and analytical rigor (Pink & Morgan, 2013).

Data collection techniques consisted of: (1) participant observation, where the researcher directly engaged with the daily activities of seaweed farmers, particularly during the preparation and symbolic enactment of *Ma' Bettang*; (2) in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture narratives, interpretations, and experiences of informants; and (3) documentation, including field notes, photographs, and contextual recordings. This triangulation strategy was employed to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Denzin, 1978; Creswell, 2014).

The selection of informants was conducted using purposive sampling, aimed at identifying individuals who possess direct experience, cultural knowledge, and social roles relevant to the research focus (Patton, 2002). The criteria for selecting informants included: (1) active involvement in seaweed farming activities, (2) participation or knowledge of *Ma' Bettang* practices, and (3) representation of different social roles within the community to capture diverse perspectives. The number of informants (five individuals) was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where additional interviews no longer produced new significant

insights (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Importantly, informants in this study are not merely treated as sources of information but as social actors whose narratives reflect the intersection between cultural symbolism and global economic dynamics. Their accounts provide insight into how *Ma' Bettang* is interpreted, negotiated, and transformed within the pressures of market integration and livelihood adaptation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Appadurai, 1996). The following table presents the profile of key informants:

Table 1. Informant Table

No	Name	Age	Occupation
1	Dg. Intang	34 years old	Housewife/Mrs. of the Bettang Family
2	Dg. Ngrrang	40 years old	Seaweed Farmer
3	Dg. Andi	38 years old	Seaweed Farmer
4	Ibu Wanti	39 years old	Housewife/Mrs. of the Bettang Family
5	Puang harri	55 years old	Religious Leader

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants' subjective understandings of the cultural values embedded in *Ma' Bettang*, their interpretations of ritual symbolism, and their perspectives on cultural transformation in the context of global export and consumption markets. The interviews were designed as semi-structured to balance consistency and flexibility, enabling the researcher to follow predetermined themes while remaining open to emergent insights from participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide was constructed by operationalizing key concepts derived from Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, particularly focusing on processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization as analytical lenses for understanding how cultural meanings are produced, maintained, and transformed in everyday life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1991).

To further operationalize the theoretical framework, questions were grouped into three thematic domains: (1) symbolic meanings of *Ma' Bettang* (aligned with Geertzian interpretive anthropology), (2) identity formation and community belonging (informed by social construction theory), and (3) perceptions of economic change and globalization. This structure ensured that abstract theoretical constructs were translated into empirically observable categories, allowing for systematic data collection and interpretation (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

The selection of informants followed a purposive sampling strategy aimed at capturing diverse yet relevant perspectives within the community. Informants included seaweed farmers actively engaged in production, women involved in domestic and ritual roles within the *Bettang* family structure, and a religious leader who provides moral and symbolic guidance within the community. The inclusion of these varied social actors allowed for a multi-layered understanding of how cultural meanings are negotiated across different positions within the social structure (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, the sampling process was iterative, meaning that initial findings informed subsequent selection of participants to deepen emerging themes, consistent with qualitative research principles (Charmaz, 2014).

All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve the richness of participants' narratives. The data were then analyzed using an interactive model of qualitative analysis, which emphasizes a cyclical and iterative process rather than a linear sequence (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The analysis began with open coding, where transcripts were carefully read to identify meaningful units of data related to cultural symbolism, identity, and economic transformation. These initial codes were descriptive and closely tied to participants' language.

Following open coding, the analysis proceeded to axial coding, where relationships between codes were examined and grouped into broader categories such as "ritual reinterpretation," "economic rationalization," and "symbolic continuity." This stage involved constant comparison to ensure consistency and to refine conceptual distinctions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In the final stage, selective coding was applied to integrate these categories into overarching themes that explain the transformation of *Ma' Bettang* within the context of globalization.

The interpretation of data was guided by a hermeneutic approach, emphasizing the understanding of meaning within its cultural and social context (Ricoeur, 1976). Geertz's concept of "thick description" was employed to contextualize symbolic actions and narratives, enabling the researcher to move beyond surface-level observations toward deeper cultural interpretation (Geertz, 1973). At the same time, Berger and Luckmann's framework was used to trace how individual experiences reflect broader processes of social reality construction, particularly in relation to shifting economic conditions.

To ensure the validity and reliability (trustworthiness) of the study, several strategies were employed. First, triangulation was conducted by comparing data from multiple sources, including interviews, participant observation, and field documentation. This approach enhances credibility by cross-verifying findings across different types of evidence (Flick, 2018). Second, member checking was informally applied by discussing preliminary interpretations with selected informants to confirm the accuracy of representations and to minimize misinterpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity was also a critical component of the research process. The researcher continuously reflected on their positionality, potential biases, and influence on the research setting, acknowledging that ethnographic knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participants (Finlay, 2002). Field notes included reflexive entries documenting the researcher's impressions, emotional responses, and evolving interpretations, which were later integrated into the analytical process.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring that they were aware of the research objectives, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by using pseudonyms and omitting identifying details in the presentation of findings (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Additionally, cultural sensitivity was prioritized, particularly in documenting ritual practices such as *Ma' Bettang*, to ensure that representations remained respectful and aligned with community values. Through this comprehensive and systematic approach, the study ensures

methodological rigor by clearly articulating how data were collected, coded, categorized, and interpreted, while also addressing key aspects of validity, reflexivity, and ethics. This strengthens the credibility of the findings and supports their contribution to broader discussions on cultural transformation in the context of globalization.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Cultural Value Transformation under Global Markets and Consumer Culture

Over the past two decades, globalization has not only restructured economic systems but has also profoundly reshaped the cultural and social foundations of coastal communities. In the case of Laikang Village, Takalar Regency, the transformation of seaweed farming from a subsistence-based activity into an export-oriented commodity system represents a critical site for examining the intersection between global economic forces and local cultural practices. This study argues that the integration of seaweed farming into global markets has triggered a process of cultural value transformation characterized by the commodification of tradition, the reconfiguration of moral economies, and the gradual shift in habitus among community members.

From the perspective of cultural commodification, local practices that were once embedded in symbolic and spiritual meanings are increasingly redefined in economic terms. Traditions such as *Ma' Bettang* and *Appanai Rappo*, which historically functioned as mechanisms of social cohesion and collective identity, are now situated within a production system driven by efficiency, market timing, and export demand. In this context, cultural expressions are not necessarily abandoned but are selectively maintained, modified, or instrumentalized to align with market logic. This reflects a broader process in which culture becomes both a resource and a strategy within global capitalism.

At the same time, the transformation of seaweed into a high-value export commodity has reconfigured what can be understood as the community's moral economy. Previously, economic activities were governed by norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and shared responsibility, where production and distribution were closely tied to social relations. However, as market integration intensifies, these norms are increasingly challenged by individual economic rationality and competitive accumulation. The weakening of collective practices such as *Appanai Rappo* illustrates a shift from a solidarity-based system toward a more individualized economic orientation, where success is measured through productivity and income rather than communal contribution.

This shift is further reinforced by the expansion of consumer culture, which operates as a symbolic system shaping aspirations, identities, and everyday practices. The penetration of digital media and mass communication technologies introduces new standards of lifestyle and consumption, encouraging the pursuit of modernity through material goods such as branded products, permanent housing, and private vehicles. Within this framework, consumption becomes a means of social differentiation and self-representation, contributing to the transformation of value orientations within the community. As a result, economic activities are no longer solely directed toward subsistence or collective welfare but are increasingly tied to the fulfillment of individual desires shaped by global cultural flows.

These transformations can also be understood through the concept of habitus, where long-standing dispositions and practices are gradually reoriented in response to changing structural conditions. In the past, labor in seaweed farming was embedded within a cultural framework that emphasized cooperation, spiritual meaning, and relational interdependence. Today, this habitus is being restructured toward efficiency, calculation, and productivity,

reflecting the internalization of market-oriented values. This shift does not occur uniformly but varies across generations, gender roles, and social positions, creating a dynamic field of negotiation between continuity and change.

Importantly, the findings indicate that cultural transformation in Laikang Village is not a linear process of loss or decline. Rather, it involves complex processes of adaptation, negotiation, and resistance. While some younger community members perceive traditional practices as less relevant, other groups actively reinterpret and integrate these values within contemporary contexts. Initiatives such as farmer cooperatives, women-led *Pa'Bettang* networks, and digitally mediated community interactions demonstrate how local actors strategically respond to global pressures while maintaining elements of cultural identity.

Thus, this study highlights that globalization does not simply erode local culture but reconfigures it through processes of commodification, moral restructuring, and habitus transformation. By situating empirical findings within these theoretical frameworks, the analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of how coastal communities navigate the tensions between tradition and global market integration.

3.2 The Erosion of Patron–Client Relations under Global Market Pressures

Within Bugis-Makassar coastal societies, particularly in southern Sulawesi regions such as Laikang Village, patron–client relations have long structured social and economic life in maritime sectors, including seaweed farming. Patrons traditionally functioned not only as financiers or collectors of marine products but also as protective figures who ensured the socio-economic stability of their clients. This relationship was built upon values of loyalty, respect, and mutual support. Clients relied on patrons for production necessities such as seedlings, ropes, and working capital, while patrons received long-term harvest supplies and loyalty. Importantly, this relationship was deeply personal rather than purely transactional, reflecting a system in which economic exchange was embedded within social and moral obligations.

Recent international scholarship continues to affirm that patron–client relations in small-scale fisheries and coastal economies operate as hybrid systems combining economic exchange with social protection mechanisms. For instance, Fabinyi et al. (2018) demonstrate that patron–client arrangements in Southeast Asian fisheries function as adaptive institutions that provide access to capital, markets, and risk-sharing in uncertain marine environments. Similarly, Crona et al. (2019) argue that such relationships are embedded within complex power structures, where asymmetry coexists with mutual dependency, challenging simplistic interpretations of exploitation. In this sense, the Laikang case reflects a broader pattern in which patron–client ties act as informal governance systems regulating production, distribution, and social stability.

These dynamics can also be interpreted through the lens of the contemporary moral economy framework, which has been revisited in recent studies to explain how economic behavior remains shaped by norms of fairness, obligation, and social legitimacy even under market pressures. As highlighted by Thompson et al. (2019), moral economy persists in many rural and coastal societies, where economic decisions are negotiated within culturally defined expectations of reciprocity and social responsibility. In Laikang Village, the expectation that patrons provide support during times of hardship illustrates how economic relations are intertwined with moral obligations, reinforcing long-term social cohesion.

However, over the past two decades, this system has gradually eroded due to the penetration of global market logics. Global economic dynamics that emphasize production efficiency, flexible supply chains, and rapid profit accumulation have reshaped local perceptions and practices. Seaweed farmers are no longer dependent on a single patron or middleman as

they once were. Instead, many now sell their harvest to various buyers offering higher prices, sometimes even directly to networks outside the village. While this shift expands economic freedom, it simultaneously weakens social bonds that were previously organic and collectively maintained.

This transformation aligns with recent analyses of global value chains, which show how integration into international markets restructures local economic relations by prioritizing competition, price efficiency, and scalability (Bush & Oosterveer, 2020). In the context of seaweed farming, global demand has repositioned farmers as independent producers within a broader capitalist system, reducing reliance on localized patronage networks. Moreover, Béné et al. (2021) note that such transitions often lead to the “individualization” of livelihoods, where collective mechanisms of support are replaced by market-based interactions.

At the same time, this shift can be understood as a process of economic “disembedding,” where social relations become increasingly separated from economic transactions. Recent studies in economic anthropology emphasize that globalization tends to weaken socially embedded forms of exchange, replacing them with more impersonal and transactional systems (Eriksen, 2018). In Laikang Village, this is evident in the declining exclusivity of patron–client ties, as farmers prioritize price advantages over long-term relational commitments.

The erosion of patron–client relations also reflects changing power dynamics within the community. With improved access to information, transportation, and digital communication, farmers are now able to connect with multiple buyers and negotiate better terms. According to Lindkvist et al. (2020), digitalization and market integration in small-scale fisheries have significantly redistributed power by reducing dependency on intermediaries. This shift enhances farmers’ bargaining positions but simultaneously diminishes the authority of traditional patrons.

Puang Harri, a 55-year-old customary leader, expressed his concern regarding these changes during an interview. Reflecting on earlier times, he explained that relationships between farmers and patrons were once characterized by mutual care and shared understanding of each other’s hardships and successes.

“In the past, we protected each other. We understood each other’s difficulties and joys.”
(Interview, 2025)

According to him, when a client fell ill or experienced crop failure, the patron would intervene and provide assistance. Today, however, such relationships have largely disappeared.

“Now, if there is no harvest, there is no relationship. What matters is only the sale.”
(Interview, 2025)

Puang Harri believes that global market pressures have removed the human dimension from production relationships. Dg. Intang, a 34-year-old *Pa’Bettang* mother, also observed these transformations from a different perspective. She argued that the increasingly individualistic work patterns have altered the way women participate in seaweed farming networks. Previously, women played a crucial role in maintaining communication between patron and client families.

“Before, if we needed rope or seedlings, we just told the patron, and they would bring them the next day. Now we must find them ourselves, sometimes through apps or people outside the village.” (Interview, 2025)

She noted that communication among farming families has weakened because everyone is focused on obtaining the highest possible selling price. Similar observations were shared by

Dg. Andi, a 38-year-old seaweed farmer who has been involved in cultivation since his youth. He explained that he once remained loyal to a single collector known since his father's generation. However, because the prices offered were no longer sufficient to cover operational costs, he eventually began selling to collectors from outside the district who offered better prices.

"It's not because we don't respect them, but we must think about our children and their education. Everything is expensive now. We cannot rely only on sympathy anymore." (Interview, 2025)

Although he recognizes that this decision has affected his social relationships some neighbors and relatives no longer greet him as warmly as before he believes it is simply part of changing times. Nevertheless, this transformation should not be interpreted as a complete disappearance of patron–client relations. Instead, recent literature suggests that such systems often persist in modified or hybrid forms within globalized economies (Khan & Roy, 2022). In Laikang Village, some patrons continue to function as facilitators of market access and providers of logistical support, although their roles are no longer monopolistic. This reflects a process of institutional adaptation, where traditional structures are reconfigured rather than entirely replaced.

In the Indonesian context, contemporary studies also highlight that patron–client relations remain culturally embedded despite economic transformation. Research by Rachman et al. (2021) shows that values such as trust, respect, and moral obligation continue to shape economic interactions in rural Indonesia, even as communities engage with global markets. This indicates that the weakening of patron–client systems is not purely structural but also involves shifts in cultural values and social expectations.

At the same time, the decline of dependency on patrons creates new forms of agency among seaweed farmers. Greater market access allows farmers to diversify income sources and reduce vulnerability to exploitative arrangements. However, as noted by Campbell et al. (2022), increased market integration also exposes small-scale producers to price volatility and economic uncertainty, highlighting the dual nature of globalization as both enabling and destabilizing. Alfian, a 28-year-old young farmer, confirmed that his generation no longer views patron–client relationships as sacred or obligatory. For him, loyalty has little meaning if it does not bring tangible economic benefits.

"If someone offers a good price, I sell. It doesn't matter who they are. We must be smart in taking opportunities." (Interview, 2025)

He believes that technology and access to information have created new opportunities for farmers, making dependence on a single patron increasingly irrelevant. However, he also admitted that when prices collapse or harvests fail, there is no longer anyone to turn to for help. Meanwhile, Dg. Ngarrang, who has spent more than fifteen years in seaweed farming, expressed a more moderate perspective. He experiences a dilemma between maintaining long-standing relationships with patrons and seeking the best possible prices in the market.

"I don't want to break our social ties, but I also need to survive. So I divide the harvest—some still goes to the old patron." (Interview, 2025)

From his perspective, market structures have fundamentally reshaped community priorities and values. Ibu Wanti, a 39-year-old *Pa'Bettang* mother, observed these changes from the perspective of household life and women's roles. She believes that the disappearance of patron–client relations has also weakened solidarity among women.

“Before, during harvest we cooked together and helped each other carry the seaweed. Now everyone hires workers. We rarely meet.” (Interview, 2025)

According to her, global markets have transformed not only economic transactions but also social relationships. The erosion of patron–client relations therefore affects not only economic and social structures but also deeper cultural values. Traditional systems emphasizing mutual cooperation, loyalty, and respect for social hierarchies are gradually replaced by market rationalities centered on efficiency, wages, and price competition. The challenge now lies in how communities like Laikang Village can navigate these changes without losing their cultural identity as maritime societies grounded in solidarity, loyalty, and collective sustainability.

3.3 Global Price Fluctuations and the Economic Vulnerability of Seaweed Farmers

Within the economic ecosystem of the coastal community of Laikang Village, seaweed cultivation is not merely a productive activity but constitutes a socio-cultural system that integrates livelihood practices, collective identity, and local value structures. However, this study argues that over the past two decades, the incorporation of seaweed farming into global value chains has structurally increased the vulnerability of local farmers, particularly through mechanisms of price volatility, asymmetric market power, and dependency on external demand. Thus, price fluctuations should not be understood as isolated market phenomena but as manifestations of broader structural inequalities embedded within global production networks.

From a global value chain (GVC) perspective, seaweed farmers in Laikang occupy a weak position within a buyer-driven commodity chain, where pricing power is concentrated among large-scale processors and international buyers rather than producers (Gereffi, 2018). In such systems, small-scale producers are typically positioned at the lowest end of the chain, functioning as raw material suppliers with limited capacity to influence prices or negotiate terms of trade. This structural positioning explains why local farmers are highly exposed to global price fluctuations without having corresponding control over market mechanisms.

Seaweed cultivated in Laikang Village, predominantly *Eucheuma cottonii*, is strongly integrated into export-oriented markets, particularly in East Asia, including China, South Korea, and Japan. These countries act as dominant nodes within the global seaweed industry, shaping demand patterns, quality standards, and pricing structures. Recent studies highlight that such commodity dependence creates what is often described as “market vulnerability,” where local producers become highly sensitive to external shocks, including shifts in international demand, trade policies, and global supply dynamics (Neilson, Pritchard, & Yeung, 2018). As a result, price fluctuations at the global level are transmitted directly to the local level, often without buffering mechanisms.

Dg. Andi, a 38-year-old seaweed farmer, described price fluctuations as an invisible game that leaves farmers without certainty in their lives. He stated:

“Sometimes we harvest a lot, but the price is low. Sometimes the price is good, but the seaweed doesn’t grow because of bad wind or poor water conditions. Every season feels like gambling for us.” (Interview, 2025)

His statement illustrates how farmers face a double uncertainty: uncertainty from nature and uncertainty from the market. Dg. Andi feels powerless when confronting price changes determined outside the village, without control or transparency. Under such conditions, farmers’ economic vulnerability becomes even more severe due to the absence of price

protection schemes or local market guarantees. When prices fall, farmers are still forced to sell their harvest because household needs cannot be postponed. This situation was also expressed by Dg. Ngarrang, a 40-year-old farmer, who complained that there is little room for negotiation when large buyers arrive.

“They come with the price already decided. What can we say? If we don’t sell, the seaweed will rot. If we sell, we still lose. But we sell anyway because we need to buy rice.” (Interview, 2025)

With a tone of resignation, he explained that farmers, as the final actors in the distribution chain, inevitably bear the greatest losses when prices decline. Sharp price fluctuations also affect the structure of work and production within families. *Pa’Bettang* mothers such as Dg. Intang and Ibu Wanti experience double pressure as they must manage household finances, children’s education costs, and daily necessities despite uncertain incomes.

This condition can also be analyzed through the lens of vulnerability theory, which emphasizes the exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity of communities facing external economic pressures (Adger, 2016). In the case of Laikang, farmers exhibit high exposure to global market volatility due to their reliance on a single commodity and export-oriented distribution channels. At the same time, their adaptive capacity remains limited due to restricted access to financial capital, storage facilities, and alternative market networks. This combination produces a condition of structural vulnerability, where farmers are not only affected by price fluctuations but are systematically constrained in their ability to respond to them.

Furthermore, the instability of seaweed prices reflects deeper inequalities in market power and information asymmetry. Large buyers and intermediaries often possess greater access to market information, logistical infrastructure, and financial resources, enabling them to dictate purchasing prices and adjust quickly to global trends. In contrast, small-scale farmers rely on localized knowledge and immediate cash needs, which often force them to accept unfavorable prices. As argued by Ponte et al. (2019), such asymmetries are characteristic of contemporary global commodity markets, where value capture is unevenly distributed across the supply chain, disproportionately disadvantaging primary producers. Dg. Intang, who assists her husband in tying and drying seaweed, admitted that over the past two years she has frequently borrowed from local shops because the selling price is insufficient to cover household expenses.

“If the price falls below ten thousand rupiah per kilogram, it’s not even enough to pay the workers, let alone buy rice and pay for children’s school needs.” (Interview, 2025)

Price fluctuations have therefore forced women in Laikang to become increasingly resourceful and patient in managing household economies that face unpredictable conditions every month. Ibu Wanti, aged 39, explained that in the past farmers could still store their harvest and wait for prices to increase, but this is no longer possible.

“Before, collectors could store the harvest and pay later. Now we have to sell immediately because there are many debts and many needs. There’s no time to wait for prices to rise.” (Interview, 2025)

This shift indicates that the community’s economic logic has moved from a long-term orientation toward a more pragmatic short-term strategy. The fast-moving realities of global markets leave little room for economic resilience based on traditional values and social solidarity. Alfian, a 28-year-old young farmer, views price fluctuations as part of the challenges

faced by the new generation of seaweed cultivators. According to him, younger farmers must learn to read market trends and utilize digital information to search for more stable buyers. However, he also acknowledged that this effort is not easy because trading systems remain largely controlled by actors outside the village.

“Sometimes I try to find buyers through WhatsApp or Facebook, but in the end we still send the harvest to large collectors. They are the ones who have export connections.” (Interview, 2025)

In his view, without government intervention or strong farmer cooperatives, farmers will continue to remain in a weak position. From a broader cultural perspective, price fluctuations are also perceived as a manifestation of structural inequality within an unfair global trading system. Puang Harri, a customary leader who has observed changes in the village for decades, believes that global markets do not only alter economic figures but also reshape people’s ways of thinking.

“In the past, people cultivated seaweed to live peacefully, just enough to eat and send their children to school. Now people cultivate seaweed, but their hearts are always anxious because they fear prices will fall.” (Interview, 2025)

For him, this vulnerability is not only an economic issue but also a matter of losing the sense of security that once characterized coastal life. In Bugis-Makassar maritime culture, economic stability is considered a prerequisite for social and spiritual harmony. These conditions create new social pressures within the community. When prices fall and farmers’ incomes decline drastically, hidden conflicts begin to emerge within families and among neighbors. Some households have started borrowing from mobile banks or informal moneylenders because they can no longer rely on assistance from local patrons as they once did.

“Now many people use online loans or quick cooperatives. But the interest is high. If the harvest fails or prices drop, things become even harder.” (Interview, 2025)

Dependence on fluctuating market mechanisms without safety nets has therefore increased economic risks and contributed to new cycles of poverty. This phenomenon highlights the importance of understanding economic vulnerability within the context of local culture. Seaweed cultivation is not merely a production sector but a network of social and moral relationships. When one element such as global price stability is disrupted, the entire system is affected. The people of Laikang Village have adopted various adaptive strategies, including selling directly to buyers outside the village, joining cooperatives, and seeking alternative employment beyond the marine sector. However, these efforts remain insufficient if price structures and trade systems continue to be unequal and unfavorable to local producers.

The seasonal volatility described by farmers in Laikang where prices may rise significantly in one period and collapse in another illustrates the precarious nature of their economic position. However, rather than viewing this volatility as a natural market cycle, it is more accurately understood as a structural outcome of integration into global capitalism, where local livelihoods are subordinated to fluctuating international demand. This aligns with recent findings that commodity-dependent communities often experience “boom-and-bust” cycles that undermine long-term economic stability and social resilience (Béné et al., 2021).

At the household level, these price fluctuations generate significant socio-economic pressures. Income instability affects not only consumption patterns but also investment decisions, access to education, and overall well-being. In this context, economic uncertainty

begins to reshape social relations and value orientations, as households increasingly prioritize short-term survival strategies over long-term collective practices. This process reflects what scholars describe as the “individualization of risk,” where economic uncertainty is transferred from institutions or collective systems to individual households (Beck, 2018).

Importantly, this transformation also interacts with existing cultural systems. As economic pressures intensify, traditional values of cooperation and shared responsibility may weaken, as farmers are compelled to prioritize individual economic gain in order to cope with uncertainty. However, as with other aspects of cultural transformation in Laikang Village, this shift is neither uniform nor absolute. Some community members continue to rely on informal networks of support, demonstrating that local resilience persists even within structurally constrained conditions.

As a mitigation effort, several community leaders have begun proposing alternative distribution systems that are more transparent and equitable. Puang Harri, for instance, plans to establish a customary forum to convey farmers’ concerns to the district government, urging greater attention to price stability. He believes that price intervention policies, support for local cooperatives, and export networks that involve farmers directly could serve as long-term solutions.

“If the government does not step in, we will continue to be victims. We need humane prices, not just economic calculations.” (Interview, 2025)

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that global price fluctuations are not merely economic phenomena but structural processes that generate profound vulnerability within coastal communities. Their impacts are felt not only in financial terms but also in quality of life, social relationships, and the cultural resilience of the community. For this reason, it is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and development actors to view price crises not simply as statistical data, but as lived realities that affect the values, identities, and dignity of local communities.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored the transformation of cultural values within seaweed farming communities in Laikang Village, Takalar, by examining the traditional practice of *Ma’ Bettang*. Through an ethnographic approach, the research sought to understand how a local cultural tradition that once functioned as a symbolic and collective expression of coastal identity has gradually experienced shifts in meaning due to the expansion of global seaweed trade. The findings demonstrate that *Ma’ Bettang* is not merely a ceremonial activity marking the beginning of seaweed cultivation but also represents a complex cultural system that reflects the community’s relationship with the sea, social solidarity, and inherited ecological knowledge.

Historically, *Ma’ Bettang* functioned as a symbolic mechanism that connected economic activity with spiritual and social values. The tradition reinforced communal cooperation, collective responsibility, and respect for natural cycles. In this sense, seaweed farming was not only understood as a livelihood strategy but also as part of a broader cultural framework that structured the community’s interaction with the marine environment. The ritual dimension of *Ma’ Bettang* helped maintain a shared understanding of the sea as a space that required both economic use and cultural respect.

However, the rapid integration of seaweed production into global commodity markets has introduced significant changes to this cultural framework. As demand from international markets increases, seaweed farming has become increasingly oriented toward productivity,

efficiency, and economic profit. This transformation reflects the broader influence of globalization, where local livelihoods become embedded within transnational trade networks. As a result, traditional practices such as *Ma' Bettang* are gradually reinterpreted within a more pragmatic and economic context.

The study reveals that the symbolic meaning of *Ma' Bettang* has not disappeared entirely, but its role within the community has shifted. For some community members, the tradition continues to function as an important cultural marker that strengthens social cohesion and maintains a sense of local identity. At the same time, younger generations and economically oriented actors often perceive the practice as a routine activity associated primarily with the production cycle of seaweed farming. This shift illustrates how cultural traditions may undergo reinterpretation as communities respond to changing economic realities.

The transformation observed in Laikang Village reflects a broader anthropological pattern in which local cultures adapt to global economic forces. Rather than completely eliminating traditional practices, globalization often reshapes the meanings and functions of cultural symbols. In this context, *Ma' Bettang* can be understood as a dynamic cultural practice that continues to evolve alongside the socio-economic transformations experienced by the community. The transition “from tradition to global trade” therefore represents not a simple loss of culture but a process of negotiation in which communities reinterpret their traditions within new economic and social environments.

This research highlights the importance of examining economic development from a cultural perspective. Seaweed farming is often discussed primarily in terms of production, export value, and technological improvement, yet the cultural dimensions of this livelihood are equally significant for understanding how communities experience and interpret change. By documenting the transformation of *Ma' Bettang*, this study contributes to the broader field of maritime cultural studies and the anthropology of globalization, emphasizing the interconnected relationship between culture, economy, and identity in coastal societies.

Ultimately, the sustainability of cultural traditions in coastal communities depends on the ability of local societies to reinterpret and maintain the relevance of their symbolic practices within rapidly changing socio-economic contexts. Preserving traditions such as *Ma' Bettang* does not necessarily require resisting globalization entirely but rather finding ways to integrate cultural values with contemporary economic realities. In this sense, cultural continuity emerges not through static preservation but through adaptive reinterpretation that allows traditions to remain meaningful for future generations.

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