

From Sacred Practice to Tourist Experience: Daoist Standpoint on Ritual Authenticity and Balinese Purification Tourism

Gede Yoga Kharisma Pradana^{1*}, Gede Eka Wahyu², I Dewa Gede Kresna Wirawan³ and Ni Made Ruastiti⁴

¹Applied Tourism Planning and Development (Master Program), Postgraduate, International Institute of Tourism and Business (IPBI), Denpasar, Indonesia

²Hotel Management (Diploma IV Program), Vocational, International Institute of Tourism and Business (IPBI), Denpasar, Indonesia

³Entrepreneur (Bachelor Program), Faculty of Economics and Business, PGRI, Mahadewa University, Denpasar, Indonesia

⁴Dance (Bachelor Program), Faculty of Performing Arts, Indonesia Institute of the Arts Bali (ISI Bali), Denpasar, Indonesia

Abstract

Balinese purification tourism should ideally preserve the sacred meaning, ritual authority, ecological harmony, and community control of *melukat*, while a Daoist standpoint offers a comparative framework for understanding water, purification, balance, and ritual authenticity as expressions of cosmological harmony. However, *Melukat* at Taman Mumbul has been transformed into a tourism experience in which sacred symbols, ritual knowledge, and holy water are negotiated with visitor access. This study examines how Balinese people negotiate this transformation and decipher its implications through a Daoist lens. Employing a qualitative case-study design with a cultural studies approach, data were collected through field observation, interviews and document analysis. The principal finding demonstrates that the transformation of *melukat* into a tourism experience does not necessarily eliminate its ritual authenticity, because local communities retain control over sacred meanings, ritual procedures, visitor access, and environmental boundaries, thereby negotiating commercial benefits while preserving cosmological harmony and community authority. The study concludes that Balinese purification tourism can remain ritually authentic and ecologically harmonious when customary communities retain authority over sacred meanings, ritual procedures, spatial boundaries, and visitor conduct, showing that tourism transformation need not destroy spiritual integrity when it is governed by balance, restraint, and community legitimacy. This study contributes to Daoist and sacred-tourism scholarship by demonstrating, through the Balinese case of *melukat*, that ritual commodification is not inevitably equivalent to desecralisation, because community-based authority, customary regulation, ecological restraint, and the cosmological meaning of water can mediate tourism transformation while preserving ritual authenticity and spiritual legitimacy.

Keywords: Sacred, Tourist Experience, Daoist, Ritual, Balinese

1. INTRODUCTION

Melukat, as a Balinese purification practice, is a sacred, culturally regulated practice rooted in Hindu cosmology, ritual discipline, and traditional governance, where well-being is defined as a holistic balance among humanity, God, nature, ancestors, and community. Sacred water possesses intrinsic spiritual and healing power rather than being a mere commercial asset, warning that wellness products disconnected from Indigenous practices risk marginalizing local knowledge and undermining sociocultural sustainability. This deep-seated connection to water-management traditions is empirically supported by Geria et al. (2023), reflecting high community trust despite the need for ecological and economic improvements. Similarly, qualitative field studies in two tourism villages by Rosalina et al.

(2023) demonstrate that sustainable resource management necessitates local control, storytelling, co-created experiences, and strict adherence to harmony among spirituality, people, and nature.

Furthermore, the legitimacy and continuity of these religious practices are safeguarded by strict ritual rules and customary institutional authority. Rai et al. (2023) remain indispensable to sacred-art activities in the customary community because of the religious, social, and aesthetic values embedded in specific ritual contexts. In terms of governance, Suhartana et al. (2025) demonstrated that heritage tourism relies on cognitive social capital and structural attachment to traditional institutions, effectively integrating cultural, ecological, social, and economic dimensions into tourism management. Lu et al. (2024) identified four critical dimensions of meaningful ritual interaction. Collectively, these findings confirm that the authenticity and viability of Balinese purification tourism derive not simply from the sacred water itself, but from the preservation of spatial contexts, symbolic objects, prescribed prayer sequences, behavioral discipline, and customary oversight.

The continuity and authenticity of living religious heritage depend heavily on the intersection of sacred spaces, ritual discipline, and the authoritative governance of customary institutions rather than mere visual preservation. In a multi-method qualitative comparative study of Cypriot World Heritage sites, Thouki (2024) demonstrated that ritual authenticity emerges from material heritage, active community memory, and clerical authority; notably, 32 out of 40 interviewed visitors emphasized that the physical and spiritual condition of these sacred spaces was pivotal to their experience. Conversely, neglecting indigenous prescriptions severely compromises authenticity. Tuyen and Noseworthy (2023) revealed that the Cham community rejected the government-backed introduction of joss-stick incense as a violation of customary procedures, proving that external actors cannot dictate ritual legitimacy through visitor convenience alone.

This imperative for local institutional custody is starkly evident in Bali. Suhartana et al. (2025) demonstrated that heritage-tourism governance successfully withstands commercialization by relying on *ngayah* and structural attachment to *banjar adat* and *adat* leaders within the *Tri Hita Karana* framework. When these customary frameworks are sidelined, the consequences are severe; ethnographic research by Basir et al. (2025) restructuring rituals for public consumption resulted in staged, sanitized performances and a marked erosion of cosmological knowledge among younger generations. Collectively, these studies confirm that *melukat* for others as authentic Balinese purification tourism demands the absolute integration of sacred meanings, prescribed ritual sequences, and the authoritative involvement of *pemangku* and customary bodies; stripping away these institutional anchors risks transforming a living religious practice into a decontextualized tourism commodity.

Mediated participation in *melukat* as purification tourism can broaden public appreciation of Balinese spirituality, provided the experience functions as an integrated religious, ecological, and ethical system rather than a commercialized wellness commodity. Şahin and Güzel (2024) established six core dimensions of spiritual tourism. Lu et al. (2024) developed a 17-item ritual-interaction scale identifying four dimensions proving that visitor engagement relies on preserving the holistic connection between sacred spaces, prayer sequences, and priestly guidance.

Furthermore, environmental settings serve as vital mediums for spiritual reflection. Wang et al. (2023) construct a hierarchical framework connecting natural landscapes and traditional wisdom to spiritual transcendence, mirroring how Balinese sacred springs and temple environments mediate spiritual understanding. The profound socio-ecological value of these settings is reflected in Geria et al. (2023)'s multidimensional assessment of Balinese water-management traditions, which yielded a socio-cultural sustainability score of 71.11%, indicating robust community trust in inherited water-protection customs. Adopting a Daoist lens, Thompson and Xu (2023) emphasize *wu wei* and the interdependence of human activity and environmental conditions, warning against exploitative commercialization. Authenticity, therefore, dictates that *melukat* must unfold organically according to sacred spatial constraints, natural water flows, and community-prescribed procedures rather than hurried, consumer-driven expectations.

From Sacred Practice to Tourist Experience: Daoist
Standpoint on Ritual Authenticity and Balinese
Purification Tourism

Carefully mediated *melukat* package as a form of purification tourism can broaden public appreciation for Balinese spirituality and support cultural preservation, provided visitors experience its sacred elements through authentic community knowledge rather than commercialized entertainment packaging. Şahin and Güzel (2024) identified transformation, healing, atmosphere, transcendence, escape, and divine connectedness as core dimensions of spiritual tourism, proving that spiritually significant settings stimulate profound personal reflection and emotional restoration. This experiential value is systematically unlocked through ordered engagement. Lu et al. (2024) construct a 17-item ritual-interaction scale that spans four dimensions. This framework demonstrates that intercultural understanding blossoms when tourists actively engage with cultural symbols and prescribed prayer sequences within their proper spatial and emotional contexts, under the direct guidance of temple priests or local custodians.

Furthermore, empirical evidence from Bali confirms that anchoring tourism within customary frameworks directly reinforces resource conservation and institutional sustainability. Employing multiple qualitative methods across two tourism villages, Rosalina et al. (2023) established that local storytelling, co-created experiences, and absolute community control over resources optimize local infrastructure and labor. This long-term resilience is structurally reflected in Sanur's heritage-tourism governance, which Suhartana et al. (2025) found to depend fundamentally on cognitive social capital and structural attachment to *banjar adat*. Even amidst intense commercial expansion, these enduring customary networks successfully balance cultural, social, ecological, and economic vectors through collective community responsibility. Ultimately, while a comparative Daoist lens provides a theoretical baseline for evaluating whether tourism adaptations maintain harmony and succumb to disruptive commodification, the actual viability of *melukat* depends entirely on local communities regulating visitor conduct, directing economic benefits, and preserving the living sanctity of their heritage.

Comparative evidence from Suriyankietkaew et al. (2025), based on extensive fieldwork, demonstrates that community-based tourism drives cultural revitalization, economic diversification, and environmental stewardship, provided it operates under collaborative, participatory governance. Collectively, the literature suggests that *melukat* can yield identical communal and spiritual benefits; however, escalating commercialization poses acute risks. This tension highlights a critical gap identified by Chen et al. (2024), which revealed that tourism frequently decouples rituals from collective religious frameworks, shifting them toward individualized consumer experiences lacking robust analytical models.

This threat of cultural distortion is highly pronounced in Bali's expanding commercial landscape. This phenomenon mirrors the commodification seen in other Indonesian traditions; qualitative research by Ghafur (2024) revealed that transforming a sacred ritual into a public spectacle altered its spiritual meaning and severed it from its original cultural ecology. Nevertheless, both studies indicate that total cultural loss is not inevitable; if customary institutions retain the capacity to re-anchor the tourist experience within its cosmological foundations, ritual authenticity and socio-cultural sustainability can be preserved.

Basir et al. (2025) reveal that tourism restructuring often sanitizes sacred rites, reducing them to staged performances and weakening youth cosmological knowledge. Rather than causing binary destruction, it engenders a hybrid space where spiritual integrity and economic pragmatism are continuously negotiated, suggesting that *melukat* authenticity should similarly be investigated as a dynamic, contested process. Such contestation often hinges on seemingly minor adaptations; Tuyen and Noseworthy (2023) demonstrated that government-imposed alterations were rejected by indigenous communities as severe violations of ritual tradition, demonstrating that authenticity must be dictated by customary rules rather than by external visitor expectations.

Collectively, these studies delineate a critical research gap. While transforming sacred rituals into tourism products enhances commercial visibility, it routinely decontextualizes meanings, individualizes collective practices, and shifts interpretive authority away from local custodians.

However, existing literature fails to explain how *pemangku*, customary institutions, and visitors actively negotiate these boundaries during *melukat*. Furthermore, tourism scholarship remains conceptually fragmented; Chen et al. (2024) confirmed that the field lacks a comprehensive analytical framework to address the shift from collective religious practices to individualized tourist experiences. Crucially, prior research has entirely omitted Daoist principles such as *ziran* and *wu wei* as evaluative lenses, underscoring the need for a focused investigation that integrates these harmony-centric philosophies to determine how purification tourism can accommodate external visitors without severing its vital Hindu cosmological foundations.

Recent scholarship on Bali has primarily prioritized socio-cultural sustainability and market-driven commodification over cosmological alignment. However, their analytical scope omitted Daoist paradigms of naturalness or non-coercive adaptation. Similarly, research on broader Indonesian ritual tourism focuses on cultural transformation. Ghafur (2024) demonstrated that sacred agricultural rite to a commodified public spectacle, noting that partial spiritual restoration occurred only through selective reintegration with the traditional practice, yet without evaluating this transition through Daoist metrics of restraint or spontaneous development.

Furthermore, Basir et al. (2025) revealed that ritual was restructured into staged, sanitized tourism performances, accelerating the erosion of cosmological knowledge among youth while triggering contentious negotiations over economic pragmatism versus spiritual integrity. Conversely, the unexploited conceptual utility of a Daoist framework is articulated by Thompson and Xu (2023), who position humanity and nature as interdependent participants within the *Dao*. Their analysis presents *wu wei* as a reflective, non-coercive mode of engagement, alongside *ziran*, which demands that human actions respect rather than dominate natural processes. Applied to *melukat*, these harmony-centric principles offer a vital evaluative lens to discern whether tourism adaptations respect sacred water rhythms, forcibly impose coercive commercial schedules and standardized visitor expectations.

Collectively, these studies substantiate a critical research gap. While existing scholarship robustly delineates ritual interaction, cultural politics, and sociocultural sustainability, Daoist philosophy remains largely confined to environmental theory rather than being systematically deployed as an evaluative framework for Balinese purification tourism. Consequently, this study offers a novel interpretive contribution, using harmony, balance, simplicity, *ziran*, and *wu wei* to examine whether the tourism transformation of *melukat* constitutes a balanced adaptation or a disruptive, excessive intervention.

The degree to which commercial commodification alters sacred purification remains theoretically underdeveloped. Indeed, Chen et al. (2024) concluded that the field is conceptually fragmented, marked by a pervasive shift from collective, publicly regulated religious practices to individualized tourist experiences.

Furthermore, digital mediation actively alters contemporary spiritual trajectories. Hussain and Wang (2024) mapped five distinct stages of social media involvement, demonstrating that digital platforms structurally reshape the expectations and meanings attached to sacred journeys. Applied to *melukat*, this indicates that promotional algorithms, influencer narratives, and visitor-generated digital content may drastically redefine tourist expectations before they ever encounter authentic Balinese ritual authority, prescribed procedures, and cosmological meanings.

Ghafur (2024) transformed it into a commodified public spectacle, fracturing its original spiritual symbolism until a culturally grounded reintegration. Basir et al. (2025) revealed that restructuring the ritual into staged, sanitized tourist performances diluted cosmological knowledge among youth, transforming it into a mere familial activity despite ongoing negotiations over spiritual integrity versus economic pragmatism.

Collectively, these findings elucidate a critical research gap. While commercial standardization, visitor preferences, digital mediation, and simplified execution alienate rituals from their communal

From Sacred Practice to Tourist Experience: Daoist
Standpoint on Ritual Authenticity and Balinese
Purification Tourism

foundations, contemporary literature fails to explain how these four vectors operate simultaneously in the ways indigenous custodians negotiate these pressures. Furthermore, institutional friction remains unexamined. Thouki (2024) established that clergy, policymakers, and visitors hold divergent interpretations of authenticity, demonstrating that the legitimacy of religious destinations is actively contested depending on whose knowledge commands institutional authority. Consequently, a dedicated inquiry is imperative to determine how *melukat* can navigate tourism consumption without reducing sacred purification to a secularized wellness product.

Tuyen and Noseworthy (2023) demonstrate that government-imposed tourism adaptations were rejected by the Indigenous community, proving that external alterations disrupt authenticity when they ignore local religious authority. This institutional marginalization is further clarified by Quang et al. (2024), who revealed that Indigenous custodians face unequal, exclusionary tourism benefit-sharing arrangements, leaving them with immense religious responsibility but minimal managerial or economic influence.

Similarly, Basir et al. (2025) showed that sanitizing sacred rites into staged public performances erodes cosmological knowledge among youth, forcing traditional elders, diaspora returnees, and government actors into a perpetual, contested negotiation between spiritual integrity and economic pragmatism. To mitigate such degradation, evidence from Bali-specific studies by Rosalina et al. (2023) confirms that sustainable resource management is fundamental. Collectively, these findings dictate that tourism governance must be negotiated through customary institutions rather than dictated by commercial or governmental syndicates.

Collectively, while religious tourism frequently induces competing interpretations of authenticity, asymmetric decision-making authority, and ongoing conflict between spiritual integrity and economic pragmatism, the current literature fails to explain how temple priests, customary villages, managers, residents, and visitors negotiate these forces in *melukat*. Consequently, an integrated framework that utilizes Daoist principles to analyze the preservation or erosion of authenticity in Balinese purification tourism is absent. This conceptual fragmentation is corroborated by Chen et al. (2024), who concluded that the field is conceptually underdeveloped, marked by a paradigm shift from collective, communal practices toward individualized consumer experiences, and explicitly called for comprehensive frameworks incorporating emerging concepts.

Similarly, spiritual tourism scholarship overlooks Daoist heuristics in favor of conventional commodification metrics. Samarathunga et al. (2025) identified a convoluted relationship between existential authenticity and commercialization; however, they deployed the health model rather than Daoist principles to differentiate balanced adaptation from disruptive commercial intervention. Although their findings robustly detail the socio-cultural degradation of commercialized Balinese spirituality, their analysis remains confined to the paradigms of sustainable development and inequality, completely omitting Daoist constructs such as *ziran*, *wu wei*, restraint, and organic harmony.

Indonesian research confirms that ritual authenticity varies with the degree of tourism adaptation. Ghafur (2024) demonstrated that the ceremony shifted from a sacred agricultural rite embedded in tradition to a commodified public spectacle under tourism policies; however, selective reintegration with its original agricultural roots restored equilibrium. While these findings align conceptually with Daoist non-coercive adaptation, the study employed cultural openness and selective adaptation theories rather than explicitly employing a Daoist framework to assess whether the transformation disrupted the ritual's organic evolution.

Conversely, the conceptual potency of Daoism is well-established in contemporary philosophy. Thompson and Xu (2023) articulate that Daoist thought positions humanity and nature as interdependent participants within a unified whole, interpreting *wu wei* as a reflective, restrained, and non-coercive mode of engagement that rejects exploitative intervention in favor of simplicity, spiritual

enrichment, and ecological harmony. Nevertheless, these principles have remained confined to environmental ethics rather than being empirically applied to the commercial transformation of *melukat*.

Collectively, these studies substantiate the existence of a critical research gap. While conventional tourism scholarship examines ritual evolution through commodification, cultural politics, and community participation, and Daoist scholarship develops constructs of *ziran* and *wu wei* purely within philosophical discourse, an integrated empirical application is entirely missing. This study addresses this limitation by deploying Daoism as a comparative interpretive lens to determine whether tourism adaptation preserves *melukat* through place-responsive, restrained change or erodes its authenticity via standardization and excessive commercial packaging. This inquiry is imperative; Chen et al. (2024) confirmed that the field remains conceptually underdeveloped and is marked by a pervasive paradigm shift away from collective religious obligations toward individualized consumer experiences that threaten to reduce sacred purification to a secularized tourist commodity.

Ghafur (2024) demonstrated that converting the ceremony from an agricultural rite into a commodified tourism spectacle fractured its cultural ecology and compromised ritual authenticity. However, selective reintegration into traditional practice partially restored its spiritual continuity.

Similarly, Basir et al. (2025) exposed how sanitizing sacred rites into staged public performances erodes cosmological knowledge among youth and triggers ongoing negotiations between customary elders and government actors over spiritual integrity versus economic pragmatism. Samarathunga et al. (2025) explicitly corroborated this nexus between existential authenticity and commercialization, highlighting how market-driven provision complicates sustainable development.

Collectively, these investigations underscore the critical need to evaluate whether commercial packaging, fixed scheduling, and digital promotion dilute *melukat* by separating purification from Hindu cosmology and customary authority. Crucially, they indicate that tourism adaptation does not inherently destroy authenticity, provided that *pemangku* and customary villages retain ultimate jurisdiction over ritual boundaries and commercial interventions.

This study introduces a novel Daoist interpretive framework grounded in harmony, balance, and simplicity to evaluate how ritual adaptation can accommodate tourism without compromising spiritual integrity. Thompson and Xu (2023) articulate that Daoist thought frames humanity and nature as interdependent participants within a unified whole, conceptualizing *wu wei* as a reflective, restrained, and non-coercive mode of engagement that rejects exploitative intervention in favor of simplicity, spiritual enrichment, and humility toward sacred habitats. Applied to *melukat*, these principles determine whether tourism services respect the organic flow of sacred water, customary rhythm and commercial excess.

The structural dynamics of this framework are further refined by environmental philosophy. Liu (2023) clarifies that *ziran* represents the spontaneous, self-so unfolding of processes, dictating that human action must follow rather than dominate environmental boundaries, thereby suggesting that *melukat* remains authentic only when it resists market-driven reconstructions. Similarly, Wang (2023) argues that the *Dao* eschews external coercion, allowing entities to develop according to their intrinsic propensities and demanding self-restraint and harmony over enforced commercial uniformity.

The empirical imperative for this philosophical framework is corroborated by Chen et al. (2024), who concluded that the field is conceptually underdeveloped, marked by a pervasive paradigm shift away from collective religious practices toward individualized visitor experiences. Introducing these harmony-centric Daoist principles directly answers their call for comprehensive frameworks, offering an evaluative metric to distinguish balanced, place-responsive adaptation from excessive commercial transformations that subordinate sacred communal obligations to individual consumption.

The practical utility of this distinction is demonstrated by Basir et al. (2025), who identified three interconnected developments. Rather than framing this transformation as binary preservation or

absolute cultural loss, they described a hybrid space where authenticity is perpetually renegotiated, thereby supporting the deployment of Daoist harmony and balance to assess whether adaptations maintain proportionate relationships between sacred obligations and economic pragmatism or libidonomy.

Collectively, these studies substantiate an evaluative framework in which harmony weighs competing religious, socio-ecological, and tourism vectors; balance gauges economic proportionality relative to communal needs; *ziran* monitors whether changes respect the ritual's culturally grounded trajectory; and *wu wei* determines whether tourism development remains restrained and non-coercive. Under this paradigm, structured visitor guidance, accurate digital interpretation, circumscribed commercial facilities, and culturally authorized adjustments facilitate sustainable participation. Conversely, excessive staging, truncated rituals, compulsory photographic execution, and market-driven standardization signal authentic erosion that remains fundamentally grounded in Balinese Hindu theology and customary institutional authority. It therefore aims to explain how religious actors, customary institutions, tourism managers, and visitors negotiate ritual authenticity and to formulate culturally sensitive principles for sustainable Balinese purification tourism.

METHODS

This study combined qualitative ethnographic fieldwork with comparative hermeneutics to examine how *melukat* at Taman Mumbul is transformed into a tourism experience and how its ritual authenticity is maintained, contested, and selectively adapted. This design is consistent with Thouki's (2024), which integrated interviews with institutional actors and visitors, document analysis, reflective field notes, and thematic coding to reveal differences in authority and authenticity. It is also supported by Rosalina et al. (2023), who used multiple qualitative methods and thematic analysis in two Balinese tourism villages to investigate customary participation, local resource control, spirituality, and community-based tourism management. These studies demonstrate the suitability of combining ethnographic, documentary, and interpretative evidence when examining religious practices situated within tourism and customary governance.

The study adopted a constructivist and synchronic orientation, focusing on contemporary ritual practices, customary authority, visitor participation, commercial mediation, and environmental relations rather than reconstructing the complete of Balinese purification. Taman Mumbul was approached as a living ritual environment in which sacred water, religious practices, customary governance, ecological relations, and tourism encounters continuously shape one another. The Daoist standpoint functioned as a comparative interpretive framework rather than as a theological explanation of *melukat*. Thompson and Xu's (2023) biocultural dialogue between Thoreau and Daoist thought provides a methodological precedent for using intercultural comparison to identify philosophical resonances without erasing the historical and conceptual distinctiveness of the traditions being compared. Accordingly, *dao* 道, *ziran* 自然, *wuwei* 無為, harmony, and water imagery were placed in analogical dialogue with the local genius categories of *tirta*, *melukat*, *awig-awig*, sacred space, customary authority and *Tri Hita Karana*, without assuming genealogical connection or doctrinal equivalence.

Participants were purposively recruited based on their knowledge of, responsibility for, or direct involvement in purification rituals and tourism. They included *pemangku* and other ritual specialists, customary leaders, residents, tourism managers, guides, and visitors. Snowball sampling was subsequently used to reach additional participants whose accounts confirmed, qualified, or challenged the initial interpretations. This combination is methodologically appropriate because Thouki (2024) employed snowball sampling to identify institutional decision-makers and heterogeneous purposive sampling to capture diverse visitor experiences at religious heritage sites. The final sample should not be justified only by a predetermined number but by the adequacy and diversity of the information obtained. Wutich et al.'s (2024) integrative review found approximate thresholds of 9 interviews for thematic saturation, 24 for meaning saturation, and 20–30 for theoretical saturation, while noting that ethnographic adequacy may involve approximately 50–81 qualitative documents, depending on the

analytical purpose and complexity of the setting. The manuscript should therefore report the final number and distribution of participants, fieldwork period, interview languages, duration of interviews, and the basis for concluding that sufficient thematic and interpretive depth had been achieved.

Data were generated through participant-oriented field observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observation covered ritual preparation, offerings, prayer sequences, bodily movement through sacred space, the use of holy water, clothing requirements, visitor guidance, photography, commercial services, and interactions among religious authorities, residents, managers, guides, and tourists. The ecological and material environment was also documented. This strategy is supported by Wang et al. (2023), which connects spirituality, nature, philosophical interpretation, and tourism experience. Their interviews lasted between 24 and 130 minutes, were conducted in Chinese, transcribed by a bilingual researcher, and returned to participants for correction. Such procedures demonstrate the importance of stakeholder variation, detailed language reporting, transparent translation, and participant verification in cross-cultural spiritual-tourism research.

Observation was not treated merely as a supporting illustration for interview testimony. Dado et al. (2023) found that prolonged engagement, observation, and reflexive journaling revealed contradictions between what participants said in interviews and their behavior in natural settings. Accordingly, field notes should record not only formal ritual procedures but also discrepancies among stated customary rules, actual visitor behaviour, commercial practices, photographic activities, and the everyday enforcement of spatial and ecological restrictions. A reflexive journal and audit trail should document emerging interpretations, researcher assumptions, methodological decisions, and instances in which observational evidence confirms or challenges interview statements.

All interviews were conducted with informed consent and audio-recorded only with permission. Participants were informed about the research purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality arrangements, and their right to withhold information or withdraw statements considered religiously sensitive. Potthoff et al. (2023) emphasise that ethics must supplement formal or procedural ethical approval **in practice**, because ethical issues involving voluntariness, privacy, internal confidentiality, participant vulnerability, and contextual circumstances may arise during fieldwork and cannot always be anticipated beforehand. Applied to Taman Mumbul, consent should therefore be understood as an ongoing and context-sensitive process, particularly when conversations concern restricted ritual knowledge, sacred formulas, customary disputes, and information unsuitable for public circulation.

Participant verification should likewise be undertaken carefully rather than treated as a mechanical confirmation procedure. Erdmann and Potthoff (2023) developed seven criteria for choosing an ethically appropriate member-checking method, including beneficence, justice, scientific quality, informed consent, avoidance of harm, and attention to participants' wishes and concerns. The study may therefore return translated quotations, culturally sensitive interpretations to selected participants while allowing them to correct factual inaccuracies, clarify meaning, and contest the researcher's interpretation. The manuscript should clearly indicate whether participants are identified by name, social role and how quotations translated from Balinese were checked for linguistic and cultural accuracy.

Analysis proceeded through a systematic combination of inductive and theoretically informed interpretation. First, field notes, transcripts, documents, photographs, and digital materials were organised and coded inductively to identify emic categories related to sacredness, purification, authority, ritual access, adaptation, commercialisation, visitor conduct, and ecological order. Second, related codes were grouped into broader themes, including ritual continuity, customary regulation, cultural mediation, conditional visitor participation, commodification, and ecological restraint. Naeem et al. (2023) recommend a six-step thematic process that is adaptable to constructivist, ethnographic, and interpretive research and that makes explicit the movement from descriptive data and codes toward categories, themes, and conceptual interpretation.

Third, the analysis combined inductive findings with deductive concepts through memo writing and analytic questioning. Bingham's (2023) five-phase model demonstrates that integrating inductive and deductive coding, guided memoing, systematic data organisation, and an explicit audit trail improves analytical transparency and shows how researchers move from codes to themes, findings, and explanations. In the present study, Balinese categories were therefore developed before the Daoist framework was introduced. Only after the emic analysis were *dao*, *ziran*, *wuwei*, harmony, and water imagery used to examine naturalness, restraint, cosmological relationality, and non-coercive adaptation. This order prevents Daoist terminology from predetermining or replacing participants' understandings of *melukat* at *Taman Mumbul*.

Fourth, interpretations were compared across stakeholder groups and data sources to identify agreements, disagreements, omissions, and contradictions. Statements by religious and customary actors were compared with those of managers, guides, residents, and visitors. At the same time, interviews were triangulated with direct observation, customary regulations, promotional texts, photographs, and digital media. Practice theory, power-knowledge relations, and structuration theory were used as secondary cultural-studies perspectives to explain how ritual knowledge becomes authoritative, how customary rules constrain and enable tourism, and how repeated social practices reproduce or alter institutional arrangements. These theoretical perspectives remained subordinate to the ethnographic evidence and Daoist-Balinese comparative dialogue.

The researcher's reflexivity was maintained throughout the inquiry. The researchers recognised that Daoist concepts were analytical categories rather than Indigenous terms employed by Balinese participants and therefore avoided attributing Daoist beliefs to *pemangku*, residents. Reflexive journaling was used to identify how the researchers' disciplinary backgrounds, philosophical interests, social positions, and expectations might influence observation, translation, coding, and comparison. This methodological separation allowed cross-cultural resonances concerning water, balance, restraint, naturalness, and cosmological harmony to be explored without collapsing the theological distinctions between Daoism and Balinese Hinduism. The result is an interpretive framework in which the cultural legitimacy of *melukat* remains grounded in Hindu and customary authority, while Daoist thought provides a carefully delimited comparative perspective.

RESULTS

3.1 Negotiating Ritual Authenticity among Religious, Customary, Tourism, and Visitor Actors

Negotiating ritual authenticity among diverse actors constitutes a continuous process through which the meanings, procedures, boundaries, and representations of *melukat* are actively maintained, contested, and selectively adapted within the tourism arena. Thouki (2024) provides compelling comparative evidence that authenticity at a living religious site is never unilaterally determined; it revealed that clergy, policymakers, pilgrims, and secular tourists interpret authenticity based on divergent priorities. While religious actors emphasized the continuity of living faith, institutional authorities privileged material conservation, and visitors formed varied interpretations based on piety and historical immersion. That authenticity is a co-produced outcome of institutional regulation, material heritage, and visitor interpretation rather than an intrinsic attribute of a site.

Consequently, while Balinese religious actors retain spiritual and epistemic authority over sacred water, prayers, and theological sequences, customary institutions codify these principles through *awig-awig* and spatial restrictions. The decisive nature of this community-recognized authority is illuminated by Tuyen and Noseworthy (2023); demonstrated that the Indigenous community rejected government-imposed visitor adaptations as severe violations of customary practice. This proves that external, administrative interventions undermine ritual legitimacy when they bypass local religious custody. Applied to sacred sites like *Taman Mumbul*, any procedural, aesthetic modification remains authentic only when verified by *pemangku* and customary custodians rather than when executed for commercial marketability.

Rosalina et al. (2023) provide direct, Bali-specific evidence for the centrality of customary control. Utilizing multiple qualitative methods and thematic analysis across two tourism villages, they demonstrated that local storytelling, co-created experiences, and robust community involvement are imperative for maintaining sovereignty over assets. Although these villages exhibited divergent interpretations of infrastructure and varying degrees of customary jurisdiction over external assets, both underscored the necessity of a conservation-oriented reinterpretation and adherence to *Tri Hita Karana*. This confirms that traditional bodies must function as institutional custodians with definitive authority over ritual access, environmental limits, and commercial interventions, rather than as mere cultural performers.

Consequently, tourism managers and guides serve strictly as cultural mediators whose legitimacy depends on clarifying, rather than replacing, community-authorized meanings. Lu et al. (2024) empirically validated this structural boundary through a comprehensive five-stage mixed-method investigation of contextual elements, ritual symbols, scripted processes, and shared emotions. Their nomological testing revealed that these interdependent dimensions collectively catalyze participant engagement and existential meaning, demonstrating that authentic ritual interaction requires an understanding of spatial contexts and prescribed sequences. In *melukat* at Taman Mumbul, while guides may optimize schedules, they cannot strip purification of its Hindu cosmology, prayer sequences, and ethical preparation without eroding its authenticity, framing visitors as conditional guests rather than sovereign consumers. Field observations showed that visitors were guided through ritual preparation, appropriate dress, prayer sequences, and purification at sacred water sources, while commercial services were also present around the ritual setting.



Figure 1. Visitors at Taman Mumbul (Doc. Yoga, 2025)

From the image above, visitors at Taman Mumbul are engaging in tourism activities in an orderly and disciplined manner, having been carefully guided. Their expectations of healing, spirituality, accessibility, convenience, and visual experience may be accommodated only insofar as their conduct remains consistent with locally authorised ritual and customary norms. The field data from Taman Mumbul demonstrate this conditionality. An informant stated that tourists were permitted to participate in *melukat*, but they were required to behave appropriately, comply with ritual and customary norms, and maintain order. Other evidence from the field shows that legends, mythology, and ritual language were presented in more accessible forms for tourists. At the same time, visitor conduct continued to be guided and corrected so that the cultural values upheld at Taman Mumbul would not become meaningless. As stated by Gede Adi, a local tourism practitioner at Taman Mumbul on 25 May 2025 :

“...the legends, mythology, and language used to explain the site are prepared in advance so that they are engaging and understandable to tourists. Visitor conduct must also be carefully guided so that the cultural values upheld at Taman Mumbul do not become meaningless..”.

Tourism increased public awareness and generated economic benefits, but it also raised concerns that simplified explanations, hurried participation, and entertainment-oriented behaviour could weaken ritual solemnity. This testimony indicates that *melukat* continues to be regarded as a sacred purification practice, even though its procedures and modes of explanation are increasingly adapted to facilitate and accommodate tourist participation.

Authenticity is constructed through filtering, reduction, and selective adoption, allowing local custodians to control which elements enter the tourism arena, simplify theology in an accessible way, and integrate appropriate tourist infrastructure without disrupting the ritual's core structure. This negotiation avoids desacralization unless commercial syndicates usurp interpretive authority. Visitors claim that oversimplification severs the vital linkage between purification, sacred water, prayer, and customary legitimacy.

From a comparative Daoist standpoint, this negotiation preserves authenticity by mirroring harmony, balance, naturalness, and *wu wei*. Thompson and Xu (2023) articulate that Daoist philosophy positions humanity and nature as interdependent co-inhabitants within the *Dao*, framing *wu wei* as a restrained, reflective mode of engagement that rejects exploitative intervention. Applied to *melukat*, this dictates that tourism development must not distort sacred resources, environmental capacities to satisfy commercial schedules; instead, adaptations must remain place-sensitive, community-authorized, and ecologically constrained.

Ultimately, ritual authenticity at Taman Mumbul is neither statically preserved nor inevitably eroded by tourism. It is maintained through an asymmetrical, collaborative negotiation where religious and customary actors dictate sacred meanings and ecological regulations, managers provide culturally accountable mediation, and visitors participate as conditional guests. Guided by the proposed Daoist framework, this negotiation remains authentic because tourism is accommodated through limited, non-coercive adjustments, ensuring that local institutional authority and the cosmological significance of sacred water remain absolute. While five external studies provide robust comparative and empirical approval, the integrated application of Daoism to *melukat* at Taman Mumbul constitutes the unique interpretive contribution of this study.

3.2 Cultivating Culturally Sensitive Practices for Sustainable Balinese Purification Tourism

Cultivating culturally sensitive practices for sustainable Balinese purification tourism requires an ongoing institutional process that accommodates visitors without displacing the religious authority, customary regulations, ecological foundations, and spiritual essence of *melukat*. Crucial Bali-specific evidence from Rosalina et al. (2023) demonstrates that customary practices and community involvement are indispensable for retaining local sovereignty over resources. Their findings show that storytelling, co-created experiences, and conservation are optimized when traditional bodies retain definitive jurisdiction over sacred water meanings, spatial boundaries, and visitor conduct within the harmony among spirituality, humanity, and nature framework, rather than acting as mere cultural performers.

Furthermore, generating meaningful visitor experiences requires robust ritual literacy. Lu et al. (2024) empirically validated this structural depth through a five-phase mixed-method study to construct a 17-item ritual-interaction scale spanning four dimensions. Nomological testing revealed that these interdependent dimensions collectively catalyze participant engagement and existential meaning, proving that physical imitation must be anchored by an understanding of Hindu cosmology and prayer sequences to prevent modern commercial distortion. Concurrently, supporting commercial services must remain strictly subordinate to customary regulations. This highlights the necessity of anchoring *melukat* within the local holistic definition of wellness rather than transforming it into a superficial, photogenic healing commodity.

Finally, ecological integrity is inextricably linked to ritual legitimacy. Geria et al. (2023) obtained a high sociocultural sustainability score of 71.11% but lower economic (56.12%) and ecological (63.34%) scores. This quantitative disparity proves that cultural faith alone cannot guarantee environmental resilience, validating the urgent need to regulate carrying capacities, waste disposal, and commercial infrastructure. Collectively, these studies dictate that sustainable *melukat* destinations must leverage *awig-awig* and collective responsibility to preserve sacred ecosystems, ensuring that environmental protection remains an absolute prerequisite of ritual authenticity.

Cultivating sustainable purification tourism requires meaningful community participation and equitable distribution of benefits, managed by customary institutions that structurally include the preparation of *upakara*, local groups, and collaborative local networks. This framework ensures that local communities retain absolute sovereignty over tourism planning, resource allocation, and revenue distribution.

From a comparative Daoist standpoint, these culturally sensitive practices preserve authenticity by adhering to the principles of harmony, balance, *ziran*, and *wu wei*. As Thompson and Xu (2023) articulate, Daoist philosophy framing humanity and ecosystems as interdependent co-inhabitants demands reflective self-restraint and humility, rejecting the degradation of nature for human consumption. Applied to *melukat*, harmony mandates alignment among spiritual, ecological, and visitor vectors; balance ensures commercial yields remain strictly proportionate to ritual duties; naturalness requires adaptations to honor site-specific trajectories; and *wu wei* dictates that tourism interventions remain restrained, place-sensitive, and free from coercive market scheduling.

Ultimately, these five secondary studies empirically and philosophically corroborate that ritual authenticity transcends outward aesthetic preservation. It demands the institutionalization of customary authority, absolute commercial restraint, participatory governance, and ecological vigilance. While these external literatures provide comprehensive conceptual grounding, the precise operational standards for destinations like Taman Mumbul must remain dynamically validated by *pemangku*, customary villages, and local stakeholders to ensure that *melukat* remains anchored in Balinese Hindu theology rather than secularized visual consumption.

DISCUSSIONS

These findings systematically address the identified research gap by demonstrating that ritual authenticity within Balinese purification tourism, especially *melukat at Pancoran Solas Taman Mumbul*, is neither statically preserved nor inevitably lost; rather, it operates as a dynamic frontier continuously negotiated among Balinese Hindu priests, tourism managers, local communities, and visitors. This fluid paradigm is empirically substantiated by Basir et al. (2025), who revealed that tourism restructuring transformed sacred post-burial rites into staged and sanitised performances, while weakening cosmological knowledge among younger generations. Nevertheless, continuous mediation among traditional elders, diaspora returnees, and government actors transformed Mangngaro into a hybrid ritual space in which spiritual integrity and economic pragmatism were continually balanced. Such institutional friction is further illuminated by Thouki's (2024) study, which demonstrated that authenticity is a co-produced outcome of pluralistic negotiation rather than an intrinsic and permanently fixed attribute of a site.

The institutional authority of the Balinese customary community is additionally supported by Atmaja et al. (2019), a study included in the attached bibliography. The study showed that Bali maintains a dual village structure in which *adat* leaders administer customary and religious affairs, whereas *desa dinas* primarily manages governmental and population administration. The authors concluded that maintaining these differentiated institutional functions contributes to social harmony and the preservation of Balinese culture under contemporary legal and global conditions. Applied to Taman Mumbul, this institutional arrangement confirms that the authority of *adat leaders* over *melukat* is not merely symbolic. It has a legally and socially recognised basis in the regulation of customary and

religious life. Consequently, decisions regarding sacred-water meanings, ritual sequences, participant eligibility, spatial boundaries, visitor behaviour, and acceptable commercial intervention should remain within the jurisdiction of customary and religious custodians.

Furthermore, the decisive nature of local interpretive authority over external administrative intervention is powerfully illustrated by Tuyen and Noseworthy (2023). Their historical and anthropological research at Cham living-heritage sites, based on interviews in Cham and Vietnamese and participant observation, revealed that government authorities introduced joss-stick incense to make sacred sites more familiar and attractive to tourists. Although external administrators considered this intervention relatively minor, the Indigenous Cham community rejected it as a violation of customary religious practice and therefore as inauthentic. The case demonstrates that even apparently simple visitor-oriented modifications can undermine ritual legitimacy when they bypass local religious custody. Total cultural degradation, however, is not inevitable under commercial pressure. Ghafur's (2024) qualitative, phenomenological, and hermeneutical analysis showed that, although tourism policy initially separated the ceremony from its agricultural and communal setting and transformed it into a commodified public spectacle, its selective reintegration with the original tradition created a more context-responsive balance.

A comparable Balinese case appears in Ruastiti and Pradana's (2020), which found that the customary community continued to preserve local cultural elements despite substantial tourist interest and showed little willingness to commercialise them as ordinary tourism performances. Its continuity was instead sustained through religious ideology, self-actualisation, and a commitment to cultural preservation. This case demonstrates that community custodians may consciously limit market incorporation when commercialisation is considered inconsistent with the religious purpose of a cultural practice. For *melukat*, the implication is that visitor demand, photographic attractiveness or financial profitability cannot independently determine which ritual components may be displayed, shortened, reproduced or incorporated.

Quang et al. (2024) found that unequal and exclusionary distribution of tourism benefits marginalised religious custodians and limited their capacity to perform communal heritage responsibilities. This evidence indicates that ritual authenticity requires more than the mere preservation of outward symbols and performances; local religious actors must exert substantive influence over governance, cultural interpretation, financial distribution, and resource allocation. Applied to Taman Mumbul, *pemangku* and *adat* leaders must not be reduced to symbolic legitimizers of tourism products while commercial actors control access, promotion, revenue, and visitor experience. Their authority should extend to determining the acceptable forms of ritual participation, destination development, commercial services, and environmental management.

Rai et al. (2023) provide additional Bali-specific evidence that a sacred tradition may generate several social benefits without necessarily losing its religious legitimacy. Local cultural elements remained essential to the sacred-art activities of the Indigenous community because they generated interconnected religious, social, artistic, and cultural capital benefits. Its authenticity was not based exclusively on the preservation of its physical form. It arose from its continued use in customary ceremonies, sacred places, collective worship, and locally authorised cultural practices. This evidence directly supports the argument that *melukat* may acquire educational, social, aesthetic and limited economic functions without automatically becoming desecralised, provided that these secondary functions remain embedded within Hindu cosmology, ritual obligations, and sacred spatiality.

Collectively, the evidence confirms that the transformation of sacred rituals into contemporary tourism experiences produces a complex interplay between the erosion of authenticity and culturally grounded adaptation. The survival of *melukat*, therefore, depends upon the capacity of local custodians to retain ultimate interpretive and regulatory authority over prayers, offerings, purification sequences, sacred-water use, visitor eligibility, spatial access, photography, digital representation, ritual schedules, and commercial intervention. Legitimacy is maintained when adaptation remains authorised by *pemangku*

and customary institutions, but it is weakened when external institutions simplify, standardise, or reconstruct purification primarily in response to market convenience.

From a comparative Daoist standpoint, authenticity is maintained when adaptation aligns with harmony, balance, *ziran*, simplicity, and *wu wei* action. Thompson and Xu (2023) provide a principal conceptual basis for harmony by presenting humans, other beings, and their environments as interdependent co-inhabitants rather than as separate entities organised solely around human interests. Their interpretation frames *wu wei* as reflective self-restraint that rejects the exploitative subordination of nature to human convenience. Liu (2023) further clarifies *ziran* as the spontaneous, or “self-so,” development of entities in accordance with their inherent character, implying that human intervention should support rather than dominate environmental and cultural processes. Applied to *melukat*, these principles require tourism adaptations to emerge from the ritual’s own cultural rhythm, customary deliberation, ecological conditions, and sacred-water cosmology rather than from externally.

Wang (2023) strengthens this interpretation by explaining that the Dao enables entities to develop according to their intrinsic propensities and that power-holders should practise *ziran wuwei* through self-restraint, limited intervention, and respect for others’ living space. For *melukat* at Taman Mumbul, this means that tourism operators should not impose identical purification packages across temples and sacred springs with distinct histories, ritual rules, environmental capacities, and customary jurisdictions. Structured visitor guidance may be legitimate, but compulsory staging, accelerated ritual schedules, unlimited photography, and commercial uniformity violate site-specific cultural trajectories. The risks of failing to maintain such restraint are demonstrated by Ghafur (2024), whose study found that tourism development initially removed Hudoq from its agricultural ecology, and by Basir et al. (2025), whose research documented the dilution of Mangngaro cosmological knowledge following its restructuring into sanitised tourist performances. Nevertheless, both cases also demonstrate that selective, culturally authorised negotiation can generate a hybrid space in which economic participation is not completely.

The ecological relevance of restraint is also reinforced by Dharmika et al.’s (2022) study of management and community resistance in Bali. The researchers found that the conversion of protected environments to plantations was associated with community marginalisation, institutional neglect, political interests, and inadequate stakeholder engagement, ultimately reducing the natural area and ecological function. The study demonstrates that cultural values and local-wisdom narratives alone are insufficient to protect an environment when participatory governance, institutional accountability, and effective regulation are absent. For Taman Mumbul, the lesson is that the cosmological meaning of sacred water must be supported by concrete regulation of visitor capacity, waste, water quality, construction, vegetation, fish habitats, ritual cleanliness, and commercial.

Collectively, these studies substantiate a four-part evaluative framework. **Harmony** balances religious, communal, ecological, visitor, and market interests without allowing commercial forces to dominate. **Balance** maintains proportionality between economic benefits and the community’s ritual, social, and environmental obligations. **Ziran** ensures that adaptation respects the site’s organic cultural development, inherited meanings, and locally specific conditions. **Wu wei** requires restrained and non-coercive tourism development that facilitates participation without forcing rituals and customary institutions to conform excessively to market schedules and visual consumption. Within this framework, culturally authorised guidance, limited facilities, respectful clothing requirements, accurate explanations, and carefully regulated digital representation may support sustainable visitor participation. Conversely, compulsory staging, ritual acceleration, unrestricted access, and standardised commercial packaging indicate the erosion of authenticity.

Sudirga et al. (2025)’s demonstrates that cultural communication and intergenerational adaptation do not automatically eliminate inherited meaning. The study found that younger Balinese people increasingly used local cultural elements to communicate ancient Balinese culture, mark *piodalan*,

From Sacred Practice to Tourist Experience: Daoist
Standpoint on Ritual Authenticity and Balinese
Purification Tourism

weddings, and other important cultural events, and express social identity and prestige. This communicative expansion shows that a cultural form may enter new social contexts while continuing to transmit inherited knowledge. Applied to *melukat*, accessible interpretation, youth involvement, multilingual communication, and digital media may strengthen cultural transmission, provided that such representation remains connected to religious meaning and does not transform sacred purification into an aesthetic or commercial image.

The coexistence of sacred procedures and commercialised elements consequently indicates that *melukat* has evolved into a hybrid religious–tourism experience whose legitimacy ultimately rests with the regulatory authority of *pemangku* and customary institutions. Basir et al. (2025) demonstrate that commercial coexistence remains culturally defensible only when elders and other local actors continue negotiating the relationship between cosmological integrity and economic pragmatism. Thouki (2024) similarly shows that material-focused heritage governance may marginalise living religious perspectives when clergy lose influence over the religious functions and meanings of sacred sites. However, Rai et al. (2023) demonstrate within Bali that sacred traditions may simultaneously carry religious, social, aesthetic, and cultural-capital functions without surrendering their legitimacy, while Ruastiti and Pradana (2020) show that communities may also refuse commercial incorporation when it conflicts with religious and cultural.

The findings, therefore, establish that ritual commodification is not inevitably equivalent to desacralisation. Its consequences depend on who authorises transformation, which meanings and procedures are retained, how benefits are distributed, whether environmental boundaries are protected, and whether visitors enter as respectful participants or unrestricted consumers. Balinese legal and cultural structures recognise *adat* leaders as responsible for customary and religious affairs. At the same time, the sacred practices remain viable when community authority, religious ideology, ceremonial context, and intergenerational participation continue to govern their development. From the proposed Daoist standpoint, *melukat* remains authentic when tourism operates in harmony, with proportional balance, *ziran*, and *wu wei*, allowing careful adaptation without displacing Balinese Hindu theology, customary legitimacy, and sacred-water cosmology of Taman Mumbul.

Furthermore, digital mediation actively shapes these contemporary spiritual trajectories, as evidenced by Hussain and Wang (2024). That digital media dynamically constructs spiritual expectations before physical arrival, demanding that online narratives respect authentic Hindu meanings rather than secularizing the ritual into a superficial wellness activity. However, this virtual landscape is highly vulnerable to distortion. Zhou et al. (2023) utilized netnography and stakeholder interviews to expose how digital beautification and commercial travel photography induce virtual landscape alienation to maximize economic benefits. This highlights a critical threat to *melukat*, in which selectively staged imagery often emphasizes exotic aesthetics while omitting mandatory prayer sequences, ethical preparation, and the underlying theology of purification.

Nevertheless, digital transformation does not necessarily eliminate inherited cultural meanings. Swandi et al. (2020) examined the adaptation of an orally transmitted local story into a digital comic. The study found that traditional narratives could be reorganized into short, colourful, digitally accessible illustrated segments while continuing to communicate educational and cultural-character values. This finding suggests that digital communication about *melukat* can remain culturally legitimate when its visual presentation retains explanations of prayer, offerings, ethical discipline, sacred-water cosmology, and customary restrictions rather than displaying only photogenic acts of purification.

Pradana (2021) provides further evidence that contemporary communication can emerge from within an inherited Balinese cultural form. The resulting form conveyed disharmony, cultural revitalization, occupational adaptation, and public health awareness without entirely abandoning its traditional poetic structure. Applied to purification tourism, this suggests that multilingual interpretation, social media communication, and visitor-oriented explanations may constitute legitimate innovation when they

develop within Balinese symbolic and linguistic frameworks rather than replacing them with externally standardized wellness narratives.

The legitimacy of customary and religious authority is also supported by Atmaja et al. (2020), who concluded that cultural plurality can provide a political and philosophical basis for accommodating customary and religious law within state law. Their findings position customary regulation not as an informal remnant that must yield to standardized governance, but as a legitimate component of Indonesia's plural legal and cultural identity. Applied to Taman Mumbul, this provides a normative foundation for recognizing *awig-awig*, temple authority, and *adat* regulations concerning sacred-space access, appropriate clothing, photography, ritual eligibility, environmental conduct, and commercial services.

Furthermore, simplified explanations and hurried execution threaten this fragile equilibrium by separating the ritual from its cosmological depth. Lu et al. (2024) revealed that these interdependent dimensions collectively catalyze participant engagement and existential meaning, proving that physical imitation must be anchored by an understanding of spatial contexts and prescribed sequences to prevent modern commercial distortion.

This need for interpretive depth is reinforced by Arniati et al. (2020). That local cultural element remained meaningful because it communicated moral and religious teachings through a recognized Balinese literary convention. Its continuity was associated with artistic expression, cultural identity, self-actualization, and its role as a medium for local cultural education. The research further identified Hindu philosophical, ethical, and ceremonial teachings within the text, demonstrating that cultural participation becomes meaningful when outward forms remain connected to their moral and religious content. For *melukat at Taman Mumbul*, this means that descriptions of sacred water, offerings, clothing, prayers, and purification movements should communicate theological and ethical meanings rather than operate merely as procedural instructions for tourists.

Concurrently, environmental settings serve as vital mediums for spiritual reflection rather than mere aesthetic assets. Wang et al. (2023) constructed a hierarchical framework of spiritual-tourism achievement, demonstrating that transcendent experiences are co-produced through the interplay between tourists, natural landscapes, and cultural or philosophical mediums that interpret the deeper meaning of nature. Physical presence alone does not guarantee spiritual connection; thus, in *melukat at Taman Mumbul*, sacred water cannot be reduced to a mere secular wellness resource or a photographic backdrop. Its spiritual significance must be meticulously interpreted in light of its connection to Balinese Hindu theology, temple history, and customary authority, ensuring that external visitors understand why the water is sacred rather than merely experiencing it physically.

Thouki (2024) argues that materially focused heritage discourses marginalize living traditions, whereas integrating historical traces with ongoing religious meanings yields immersive visitor reflection. Applied to *melukat at Taman Mumbul*, merely presenting a temple as a visually attractive heritage object while neglecting prayer, moral restraint, and priestly authority reduces a living sacred environment to a superficial exhibition. Ghafur (2024) demonstrates that tourism policies initially removed the ceremony from its agricultural roots and transformed it into a commodified urban spectacle, thereby fracturing its spiritual symbolism. However, Ghafur also noted that the subsequent Festival achieved a more balanced adaptation, and tourist participation can be reconciled with ritual continuity under local custody. This structural vulnerability is further reinforced by Basir et al. (2025), who found that restructuring sacred post-burial rites into staged, sanitized performances for public consumption accelerated the erosion of cosmological knowledge among young people within the cosmology, confirming that repeated simplification can fundamentally alter the long-term transmission of ritual practices.

The continued performance of ritual during the COVID-19 pandemic offers another example of an Indonesian ethnic tradition that has adapted while retaining community-recognized religious meaning.

From Sacred Practice to Tourist Experience: Daoist
Standpoint on Ritual Authenticity and Balinese
Purification Tourism

Dharmika and Pradana (2021) found that villagers in Pringgabaya continued to understand the tradition as a request for divine protection and as an expression of gratitude for the continuity of social life and the environmental conditions supporting the community. Although the ritual was undertaken amid public health restrictions and the deterioration of a tourism-dependent economy, its meaning remained grounded in collective religious belief rather than reduced to a public spectacle. This evidence strengthens the distinction between culturally grounded adaptation and externally imposed simplification. A ritual may respond to changing social conditions without losing authenticity when its community continues to authorize its purpose, interpretation, and form.

Collectively, these studies substantiate that procedural simplification, hurried participation, and entertainment-driven behaviors systematically erode authenticity by compressing scripted processes, disrupting collective emotions, and reducing sacred water to a secular wellness amenity. While these external literatures provide robust cross-checking, direct empirical conclusions about the preservation or erosion of *melukat* must remain firmly grounded in site-specific interviews with *pemangku* and other customary actors, field observations, and local documentary evidence.

The additional literature also indicates that transformation itself should not automatically be equated with cultural loss. Swandi et al. (2020) and Pradana (2021) show that inherited cultural forms may enter digital and contemporary settings while continuing to transmit educational, symbolic, and community-oriented meanings. Arniati et al. (2020) demonstrate that the continuity of a cultural form depends on its ability to communicate moral, religious, and identitarian content, while Dharmika and Pradana (2021) demonstrate that ritual meaning can remain resilient amid social and economic disruption. Together, these cases indicate that the crucial analytical question is not whether *melukat* changes, but whether its changes remain grounded in local theology, collective authorization, ethical discipline, and customary control.

The study proposes culturally sensitive principles for sustainable purification tourism, grounded in customary control, accurate ritual interpretation, respectful visitor preparation, limited commercial intervention, and balanced adaptation. This comprehensive framework is robustly supported by Rosalina et al. (2023), who confirm that robust community and customary involvement is indispensable for retaining local control over resources. Their findings highlighted *Tri Hita Karana* as a crucial management outcome, validating that ultimate authority over *melukat* procedures, spatial boundaries, and holy-water allocation must reside with *pemangku* and *adat* leaders rather than external enterprises. Furthermore, Lu et al. (2024) empirically validated the need for accurate ritual interpretation through a five-stage mixed-method research design integrating interviews, online travelogues, open surveys, expert assessment, and three quantitative samples to construct a validated 17-item ritual-interaction scale. The nomological analysis demonstrated that meaningful ritual experiences rely on four interconnected dimensions, indicating that *melukat* participation requires structured preparation that elucidates prayer, offerings, and sequence rather than mere physical imitation.

The recognition of customary and religious law, as identified by Atmaja et al. (2020), strengthens the institutional dimension of this framework. Customary control should not be limited to ceremonial consultation after tourism products have been designed. It should include substantive decision-making authority over permitted activities, sacred and non-sacred zones, visitor eligibility, interpretation, photography, commercial licensing, environmental use, and sanctions for inappropriate conduct. Such authority ensures that tourism management remains accountable to the community's normative order instead of treating *awig-awig* as an optional cultural display.

Concurrently, generating respectful visitor engagement is not spontaneous but must be actively engineered, as Adam (2024) notes. He demonstrates that respectful visitor engagement must be facilitated through clear pre-visit information, behavioral orientation, and strict governance regarding clothing, photography restrictions, and sacred-water etiquette. Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrated that overcommercialization triggers serious cultural distortion and exerts a significant negative influence on tourists' subsequent behavioral intentions, reinforcing that commercial services in *Melukat* at Taman

Mumbul must remain supportive rather than allowing market forces to standardize distinct traditions, enforce hurried schedules, or reduce purification to a staged photographic product.

The attached studies, therefore, extend the proposed framework in three important directions. First, digital mediation should be culturally curated so that visual innovation retains rather than replaces religious and ethical knowledge, as indicated by Swandi et al. (2020) and Pradana (2021). Second, ritual interpretation should function as moral and religious education, not merely operational instruction, as demonstrated by Arniati et al. (2020). Third, community authorization must be institutionally recognized through customary and religious governance, consistent with Atmaja et al. (2020), while the adaptive resilience documented by Dharmika and Pradana (2021) confirms that ritual continuity can coexist with contemporary challenges. Sustainable purification tourism consequently requires not cultural immobility but community-governed transformation in which digital communication, visitor services, and commercial facilities remain subordinate to sacred-water cosmology, ritual procedure, environmental responsibility, and the final interpretive authority of *pemangku* and *adat leaders*.

Furthermore, digital mediation actively shapes these contemporary spiritual trajectories, as evidenced by Hussain and Wang (2024). Their qualitative analysis, derived from semi-structured interviews with 30 pilgrims, mapped five distinct stages of social media involvement, demonstrating that digital media dynamically construct spiritual expectations before physical arrival. Consequently, online narratives concerning *melukat* should communicate authorised Hindu meanings rather than secularising purification into a superficial wellness activity. However, this virtual landscape is highly vulnerable to distortion. Zhou et al. (2023) utilised netnography and stakeholder interviews to reveal how digital beautification and commercial travel photography produce virtual landscape alienation by encouraging bloggers and commercial actors to manipulate representations for economic benefit. This highlights a critical threat to *melukat*, where selectively staged imagery may emphasise exotic aesthetics while omitting prayer sequences, ethical preparation, behavioural restrictions, and the theology underlying purification.

Nevertheless, digitalisation does not inherently eliminate cultural meaning. Swandi et al. (2020) found that traditional narratives could be reorganised into brief, colourful, internet-accessible visual segments while continuing to transmit educational and national-character values. This finding indicates that digital representations of *melukat* may likewise remain culturally meaningful when accompanied by accurate explanations of sacred water, prayers, offerings, purification ethics, and customary restrictions, even as visual innovation occurs. Conversely, digital content becomes distorting when it preserves only visually attractive movements while excluding the religious knowledge that gives those movements meaning.

Furthermore, simplified explanations and hurried execution threaten this fragile equilibrium by separating the ritual from its cosmological depth. Lu et al. (2024) showed that these interdependent dimensions collectively cultivate participant engagement and a sense of meaning, demonstrating that physical participation must be anchored in an understanding of spatial context, symbolic meaning, prescribed sequence, and emotional atmosphere.

Concurrently, environmental settings serve as vital media for spiritual reflection rather than merely aesthetic assets. Wang et al. (2023) demonstrate that transcendent experiences are co-produced through relationships among tourists, protected natural landscapes, and cultural or philosophical media that interpret the deeper meanings of nature. Physical presence alone, therefore, does not guarantee spiritual connection. In *melukat at Taman Mumbul*, sacred water cannot be reduced to a secular wellness resource or photographic background; its significance must be interpreted through Balinese Hindu theology, temple history, customary authority, and relationships among human beings, divinity, and the natural environment.

The importance of connecting material forms with their cultural and cosmological contexts is reinforced by Rai et al. (2019), who found that the local cultural element functioned not merely as a musical object

but as a symbol of cultural identity, unity, local knowledge, and harmony. Its ritual use also connected communities with God, ancestors, and natural forces. At the same time, particular ceremonial rules governed who could perform it and how its rhythmic patterns interacted with song and dance. The study demonstrates that a sacred object cannot be adequately understood apart from its authorised performers, social rules, environmental materials, inherited narratives, and ceremonial context. Applied to *melukat*, this text–context relationship means that water, *pancuran*, offerings, clothing, and bodily purification should not be interpreted as isolated visual objects; their authenticity derives from their integration with prayer, sacred history, religious authority, environmental relations, and customary regulation.

Thouki (2024) argued that centralised, materially focused heritage discourses tended to marginalise living religious perspectives, whereas integrating historical remains with continuing religious meaning supported more immersive visitor reflection. Applied to *melukat*, presenting a temple merely as visually attractive heritage while neglecting prayer, moral discipline, sacred-water meanings, and priestly authority reduces a living religious environment to a superficial exhibition.

Collectively, these studies substantiate that procedural simplification, hurried participation, and entertainment-oriented behaviour may erode authenticity by compressing scripted processes, disrupting shared emotions, separating visible actions from religious meanings, and reducing sacred water to a secular wellness amenity. Additional evidence on local cultural elements further clarifies that cultural forms derive meaning from relationships among material properties, performers, inherited knowledge, ritual restrictions, community identity, and connections with divine, ancestral, and natural forces. While these comparative studies provide strong conceptual and empirical support, direct conclusions regarding the preservation or erosion of *melukat* must remain grounded in site-specific interviews with *pemangku* and customary custodians, field observations, and local documentary evidence.

The study proposes culturally sensitive principles for sustainable purification tourism based on customary control, accurate ritual interpretation, respectful visitor preparation, limited commercial intervention, and balanced adaptation. This framework is supported by Rosalina et al. (2023), who employed multiple qualitative methods and thematic analysis in two Balinese tourism villages. This evidence supports the argument that authority over *melukat* procedures, spatial boundaries, environmental limits, and sacred-water interpretation should remain with *pemangku*, temple institutions, and *adat leaders* rather than external enterprises.

Lu et al. (2024) similarly validate the need for accurate ritual interpretation. Their four-dimensional ritual-interaction scale demonstrates that meaningful participation requires contextual understanding, symbolic interpretation, prescribed procedures, and shared emotions rather than physical imitation alone. Accordingly, visitor preparation for *melukat* should explain the purpose of prayer, offerings, appropriate clothing, the sequence of purification, behavioural prohibitions, and the religious significance of sacred water.

Respectful visitor engagement is not spontaneous but must be facilitated, as demonstrated by Adam (2024). The findings support clear pre-visit information, culturally competent guidance, and explicit orientation concerning clothing, gestures, social behaviour, restricted areas, photography, and ritual etiquette.

The practical importance of culturally responsive visitor services may also be cautiously informed by Yulansari et al. (2025), whose quantitative research is included in the attached bibliography. Although the research was conducted in the insurance sector and cannot directly determine ritual authenticity, it provides transferable service-design insight for purification tourism. Visitor protocols should create physical safety, interpretive confidence, and responsive assistance through trained local guides, clear pre-visit communication, support in preparing appropriate clothing and offerings, explanation of slippery or restricted spaces, and respectful correction of inappropriate conduct. These services should

facilitate conformity to customary norms rather than modify ritual procedures merely to maximise tourist convenience or satisfaction.

Finally, Zhang et al. (2024) provide a quantitative justification for limiting commercial intervention. Their risk–trust–intention framework demonstrated that cultural-distortion risk has a significant negative effect on tourists' behavioural intentions. Commercial services surrounding *melukat* should therefore remain supportive. They should not permit market forces to standardise distinct temple traditions, impose accelerated schedules, reconstruct sacred symbols primarily for visual consumption, or reduce purification to a staged photographic product.

Collectively, these studies provide a robust empirical foundation for the proposed principles. Customary control preserves institutional sovereignty over sacred assets; accurate interpretation links visible ritual actions to Hindu theology and cosmology; respectful preparation facilitates appropriate visitor conduct concerning clothing, offerings, photography, and sacred-space access; limited commercial intervention prevents supporting services from altering the ritual's spiritual core; and balanced adaptation maintains equilibrium among religious obligations, ecological limits, community needs, visitor safety, and economic benefits. Swandi et al. (2020) add that digital innovation may transmit inherited values when meaning is retained; Rai et al. (2019) demonstrate that sacred forms remain intelligible only through their social, ceremonial, environmental, and cosmological contexts; and Yulansari et al. (2025) indicate that responsive services, comfort, safety, and confidence can improve participant experiences. Together, these findings support a model in which digital media and visitor services strengthen cultural understanding and safe participation but remain subordinate to the interpretive and regulatory authority of *pemangku* and *adat* leaders.

Practically, these insights can guide temple authorities, *adat* leaders, destination managers, and policymakers in formulating visitor protocols that protect ritual solemnity while facilitating culturally respectful participation. Such protocols should establish customary approval of all interpretations and tourism products; culturally accurate digital-content standards; pre-ritual orientation; rules governing clothing, offerings, prayer, photography, and restricted spaces; environmental and visitor-capacity controls; locally trained guides; responsive assistance; and procedures for addressing inappropriate conduct. The service dimension should improve safety and understanding without redefining the ritual according to tourist satisfaction.

Nevertheless, the study is constrained by its qualitative and synchronic design, its limited number of research sites and participants, and its reliance on contextual evidence collected within a specific period. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal methodologies, compare multiple purification destinations, examine changes in religious knowledge and visitor behaviour over time, and analyse how different visitor cohorts interpret authenticity, sacredness, digital representations, service quality, and customary authority. Comparative research should also assess whether culturally curated digital interpretation improves ritual literacy and whether locally controlled visitor services enhance safety and understanding without increasing commodification.

CONCLUSIONS

Ritual authenticity at Taman Mumbul is sustained when *pemangku* and customary institutions retain authority over *melukat*, tourism actors mediate rather than redefine its meanings, visitors respect ritual norms, and adaptations remain community-authorised, ecologically restrained, and guided by harmony, balance, naturalness, and *wu wei*.

Sustainable Balinese purification tourism requires community-authorised ritual governance, accurate cultural interpretation, restrained commercialisation, ecological protection, equitable local participation, and Daoist-informed balance so that visitor access does not displace the sacred meaning and customary authority of *melukat*.

The study contributes a culturally sensitive framework that integrates customary authority, accurate

ritual interpretation, respectful visitor preparation, controlled commercial activity, and responsible digital communication. Theoretically, it extends discussions of ritual authenticity by applying Daoist principles to the interaction among sacred practice, tourism consumption, power relations, and cultural adaptation in Bali.

The study concludes that ritual authenticity in Balinese purification tourism is continuously negotiated rather than simply preserved or lost. Religious actors and customary institutions remain central in determining ritual legitimacy, sacred boundaries, appropriate conduct, and the acceptable extent of tourism-oriented adaptation, while tourism managers and guides mediate these requirements for visitors.

From a Daoist standpoint, sustainable purification tourism should maintain harmony, naturalness, balance, and non-coercive adaptation so that tourism participation does not displace the spiritual meaning of *melukat*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Deep appreciation is extended to the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, as well as to the Rector of the International Institute of Tourism and Business (IPBI), whose collaboration made the research at Taman Mumbul possible.

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From Sacred Practice to Tourist Experience: Daoist
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