

Aesthetic and Ethical Dimensions of Bugis Rituals: Cultural Reflections from Maddoja Bine in South Sulawesi

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the aesthetic and ethical dimensions embedded in the *Maddoja Bine* ritual, a traditional Bugis ceremony practiced in Soppeng, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The research seeks to understand how the ritual functions as a medium for expressing collective identity, moral values, and the interconnection between humans, nature, and spirituality within the Bugis cultural framework.

Method: Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through observation, documentation, and semi-structured interviews with ritual practitioners and community elders in Gattareng Toa Village. The data were analyzed thematically, focusing on symbolic meanings, moral principles, and artistic expressions represented in the ritual performances.

Findings: The *Maddoja Bine* ritual embodies aesthetic beauty through its performative elements—music, gestures, and symbolic offerings—while also transmitting deep ethical messages such as honesty (*lempu*), mutual respect (*sipakatau*), and solidarity (*sipakainge*). These values are reflected in communal participation, respect for ancestral heritage, and the balance between human and environmental harmony. The ritual acts as both cultural preservation and a living ethical system that shapes Bugis identity amid modernization.

Significance: This research highlights the *Maddoja Bine* tradition as an integrated form of art, ethics, and spirituality that contributes to Indonesia's cultural diversity. It emphasizes the need for safeguarding intangible heritage and reinterpreting traditional rituals as sources of ethical reflection and creative expression in contemporary society.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional rituals play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the cultural identity of local communities across Indonesia. These rituals function as social mechanisms that transmit moral values, collective memories, and symbolic meanings through generations (Oriane & Eustache, 2023; Sterchele, 2020; Uro et al., 2019). In many indigenous societies, rituals are not merely spiritual events but also aesthetic and ethical expressions of communal harmony. They provide a framework for understanding the relationship between human beings, nature, and the divine, reflecting a deeply holistic worldview (Ryff, 2021; Zidny et al., 2020). Such ceremonies also serve as performative spaces where art, belief, and ethics intersect, fostering continuity between the tangible and the transcendent. Therefore, the study of traditional rituals becomes essential for understanding the socio-cultural resilience of communities facing modernization.

Among Indonesia's diverse ethnic groups, the Bugis people of South Sulawesi possess a rich tradition of ethical and philosophical thought known as *pangadereng*, a system

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encompassing customs, law, and moral order (Hasyim & Akkase, 2020; Kurniawati et al., 2021). Central to Bugis cultural philosophy are the values of *lemphu'* (honesty), *siri'* (honor and dignity), and *pesse* (compassion), which guide interpersonal relationships and communal responsibilities. These values are often manifested through ritual practices that blend religious devotion with cultural symbolism. The Bugis worldview regards human life as part of a cosmic balance that must be maintained through ethical behavior and respect for ancestral wisdom (Hadawiah et al., 2025). Rituals thus operate as both ethical education and aesthetic expression, reaffirming the spiritual unity between humans and their environment. This interweaving of ethics and aesthetics forms the philosophical foundation of Bugis ritual life.

One of the most significant rituals in Bugis agrarian culture is *Maddoja Bine*, a ceremonial practice performed before the rice-planting season to invoke fertility and protection. The ritual involves offerings, songs, prayers, and symbolic acts that represent gratitude, respect, and interdependence between humans and the natural world (Ohaja & Anyim, 2021). It also reflects the communal ethos of cooperation (*gotong royong*) and the recognition of nature as a living partner in the cycle of life. Through its rhythmic movements and oral chants, *Maddoja Bine* embodies the aesthetic dimension of Bugis cosmology, beauty as harmony between moral conduct and divine order. The ceremony also functions as an ethical reminder that human prosperity depends on honesty, discipline, and social cohesion (Thalgi, 2024; Wu & Zhao, 2024). As such, *Maddoja Bine* represents a living embodiment of both moral philosophy and artistic heritage.

In recent decades, the rapid process of modernization has significantly altered traditional practices and value systems in Indonesian rural communities. Industrialization, digital culture, and urban migration have contributed to the erosion of local wisdom and the simplification of ritual meanings (Qian et al., 2025; Sulianta, 2024). Many younger generations perceive traditional ceremonies as outdated or economically impractical. This shift poses a challenge to the preservation of cultural identity and ethical consciousness that were once sustained through community rituals. However, the persistence of practices such as *Maddoja Bine* demonstrates the adaptive capacity of local cultures to reinterpret tradition in modern contexts. Understanding how these rituals evolve without losing their aesthetic and ethical essence is crucial for sustaining Indonesia's intangible heritage.

The aesthetic dimension of ritual is not limited to visual or performative beauty but extends to moral harmony and symbolic coherence. As argued by Black (2018) and later by Brinck (2018), aesthetics in human practice emerges from the lived experience of meaning, emotion, and ethical reflection. Within Bugis culture, aesthetic beauty is inseparable from the moral order of society because art serves as a medium for ethical communication. The graceful gestures, collective chants, and material symbols in *Maddoja Bine* manifest a spiritual aesthetics that reinforces social solidarity. These artistic expressions sustain not only aesthetic appreciation but also communal morality, transforming art into a lived ethical practice (Pless et al., 2017; Riggle, 2024; Sherman & Morrissey, 2017). Consequently, analyzing Bugis rituals through an aesthetic-ethical lens provides insight into the holistic cultural logic underlying their endurance.

Despite a growing body of research on Indonesian cultural traditions, few studies have examined Bugis rituals from both aesthetic and ethical perspectives simultaneously.

Previous works often focused either on sociological functions or on anthropological symbolism without integrating the dimensions of art and morality (Asrawijaya, 2024). Furthermore, most ethnographic studies tend to describe ritual forms rather than interpret their philosophical meanings or contemporary relevance. This gap highlights the need for interdisciplinary approaches that combine cultural anthropology, philosophy of art, and ethics. By addressing this void, the present study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of rituals as dynamic moral-aesthetic systems. It positions Bugis ritual traditions as crucial frameworks for cultural sustainability and ethical education in the twenty-first century.

This study aims to interpret the *Maddoja Bine* ritual as an integrated expression of Bugis aesthetics and ethics that continues to shape cultural identity in South Sulawesi. It explores how ritual practices embody artistic creativity while transmitting moral wisdom through symbolic performance. By employing an ethnographic qualitative approach, this research uncovers the interrelation between beauty, virtue, and social harmony in Bugis ritual life. The findings are expected to expand scholarly perspectives on the interconnectedness of art, culture, and ethics in Southeast Asian traditions. Moreover, the study emphasizes the significance of preserving intangible heritage as a moral compass for contemporary society facing cultural homogenization. Ultimately, it aspires to position traditional rituals not as remnants of the past but as living philosophies guiding ethical coexistence and aesthetic awareness in modern Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic research design to explore the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of the *Maddoja Bine* ritual within the Bugis cultural context. Ethnography was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of social meanings, cultural expressions, and symbolic practices embedded in community traditions (Creswell, 2009). The research focused on the interpretive dimensions of art, ethics, and spirituality as experienced and expressed by participants during the ritual process. The study did not attempt to generalize findings but sought to reveal the internal logic and moral-aesthetic coherence of the ritual as understood by the community. The ethnographic approach involved long-term engagement, participant observation, and interpretive reflection to capture the lived experiences of ritual actors. This design aligns with the goal of preserving and interpreting intangible cultural heritage through contextualized, human-centered inquiry.

Participant

Participants in this study consisted of 15 individuals representing diverse roles within the *Maddoja Bine* tradition in Gattareng Toa Village, Marioriwawo District, Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi. They included two ritual specialists (*sanro*) who lead the ceremonial process, five community elders with deep knowledge of local customs, and eight villagers who actively participate in ritual performances and preparations. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their cultural involvement and experiential knowledge of the ritual. The inclusion criteria emphasized individuals who had either performed or inherited the ritual practice across generations. Ethical

consent was obtained verbally and in writing, respecting local norms of communication and community decision-making. This selection ensured the data captured both the spiritual authority and the communal participation that characterize Bugis ritual culture.

Instrument

Data were collected using three primary instruments: observation protocols, semi-structured interview guides, and documentation sheets. The observation protocol captured nonverbal behaviors, ritual sequences, spatial arrangements, and aesthetic elements such as sound, costume, and gesture. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' perceptions of the moral and artistic significance of the *Maddoja Bine* ritual. Interviews were conducted in the Bugis and Indonesian languages, then translated into English with the assistance of bilingual cultural interpreters to ensure accuracy and contextual integrity. The documentation sheet included photographs, field notes, and secondary data from local archives and previous studies on Bugis traditions. Triangulation among these instruments enhanced the reliability and credibility of the qualitative findings. The researcher's reflexive notes also served as a meta-instrument, capturing interpretive insights during field immersion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic and interpretive approach, consistent with qualitative ethnography. The process began with data reduction, where transcripts, field notes, and visual records were reviewed and organized according to emerging themes. Codes were then developed inductively to identify recurring patterns related to aesthetic expression, moral values, symbolic representation, and communal interaction. These codes were clustered into broader categories, such as *ritual performance aesthetics*, *ethical conduct*, and *spiritual symbolism*. Through iterative interpretation, the researcher synthesized these categories into core themes reflecting the interdependence between beauty (*keindahan*) and virtue (*kebaikan*) in Bugis cultural thought. To ensure validity, the findings were cross-verified with participants through member checking and interpretive dialogues. The final stage involved crafting a cultural narrative, integrating textual, visual, and performative dimensions into an analytical framework linking art, ethics, and spirituality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Overview of the Maddoja Bine Tradition

The *Maddoja Bine* ritual is a pre-planting ceremony conducted by Bugis farmers in Gattareng Toa Village, South Sulawesi, to express gratitude and seek divine blessings for fertile land and abundant harvests. The ceremony typically takes place after the first rainfall, symbolizing the beginning of a new agricultural cycle. It involves various symbolic acts such as soaking rice seeds for three nights, chanting ancestral prayers (*doa turun tana*), and performing collective meals (*maccera*). These acts embody a cosmological understanding that connects humans, nature, and the divine realm in an aesthetic cycle of life. The ritual space becomes a microcosm of Bugis ethical values and artistic representation, uniting beauty (*le'te*) with virtue (*ade*).

2. Structural Phases and Symbolic Aesthetics

Field observations identified three main phases in the *Maddoja Bine* ritual, each characterized by distinct aesthetic expressions and ethical messages.

Ritual Phase	Main Activities	Aesthetic Elements	Ethical Values Expressed
Phase I: Preparation <i>(Mappatettong Bine)</i>	Selecting and soaking the rice seeds for three nights, led by a ritual specialist (<i>sanro</i>).	Rhythmic repetition, silence, use of natural objects (water, banana leaves, and clay pots).	Honesty (<i>lempu'</i>), purity, and spiritual discipline.
Phase II: Performance <i>(Maddoja Bine)</i>	Chanting prayers, offering food, and invoking blessings from ancestors and Dewata Seuwae (the Supreme God).	Collective chanting, coordinated gestures, traditional music, and ritual garments.	Mutual respect (<i>sipakatau</i>), cooperation (<i>getteng</i>), and humility before divine order.
Phase III: Post-Ritual <i>(Mappadandang Ase)</i>	Communal feast and thanksgiving after the ceremony, involving villagers and elders.	Collective harmony, music using <i>gendrang</i> (drum) and <i>puik-puik</i> (flute), joyful movements.	Solidarity (<i>sipakainge'</i>), gratitude, and shared responsibility.

Source: Field data, *Gattareng Toa*, 2024.

Each phase exhibits a symbolic rhythm that integrates aesthetics (music, movement, spatial arrangement) with moral expression (respect, discipline, humility). The repetition of gestures and chants not only creates artistic beauty but also reaffirms the ethical codes of Bugis society, turning ritual performance into a form of moral pedagogy.

3. Aesthetic Dimensions of Ritual Performance

The aesthetic aspect of *Maddoja Bine* manifests in its performative elements, particularly in rhythm, symbolism, and spatial harmony. Observations revealed that participants move synchronously, maintaining calmness and balance—an embodiment of Bugis aesthetic philosophy where *beauty reflects moral harmony*. The attire worn by participants uses natural colors (brown, white, green) to represent the earth, purity, and fertility. The sound of *gendrang* and *puik-puik* provides a melodic rhythm symbolizing the continuity between human labor and divine providence. Interviewed participants expressed that the ritual's beauty lies not in luxury or spectacle but in simplicity, sincerity, and collective devotion. As one *sanro* stated:

“*Maddoja Bine* is beautiful because it reminds us that all work begins with intention and respect for nature.” (Interview, August 2024)

Hence, aesthetic experience in this ritual is not ornamental but ethical, fostering mindfulness, gratitude, and social cohesion through shared artistic action.

4. Ethical Dimensions and Moral Symbolism

The ethical dimension of *Maddoja Bine* is deeply intertwined with Bugis moral philosophy (*pangadereng*), emphasizing honesty, respect, and communal solidarity. The ritual reinforces ethical discipline through symbolic behavior—silence during prayer, orderly movements, and sincere cooperation. Participants internalize values such as honesty (*lempu'*), mutual respect (*sipakatau'*), and responsibility (*getteng'*) as moral obligations embedded in ritual acts.

Table below summarizes the core ethical themes identified from field data:

Ethical Theme	Ritual Expression	Cultural Meaning
Honesty (Lempu')	Transparent division of harvest offerings and sincerity in prayer.	Reflects personal integrity and moral accountability.
Mutual Respect (Sipakatau')	Equal treatment among participants regardless of status.	Represents recognition of human dignity as divine creation.
Cooperation (Getteng')	Collective preparation and participation in ritual process.	Symbolizes social unity and mutual dependence.
Responsibility (Amanah)	Care for seeds, land, and tools throughout the process.	Demonstrates stewardship ethics over nature.

These ethical dimensions demonstrate that the *Maddoja Bine* ritual operates as a moral ecosystem, where beauty and virtue are experienced simultaneously. The ritual teaches ethical behavior not through instruction but through embodied performance, reflecting the Bugis principle that “art and ethics are inseparable forms of truth”.

5. Interrelation of Aesthetic and Ethical Values

Analysis revealed that aesthetic and ethical aspects are mutually reinforcing rather than separate categories. The harmony of movement and sound reflects moral discipline; aesthetic calmness embodies ethical restraint. For instance, the symmetrical arrangement of participants during prayers symbolizes social equality, while the collective rhythm of drumming represents communal harmony. These aesthetic principles serve as ethical metaphors, the beauty of coordinated action mirrors the virtue of cooperation.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that without sincerity (*niat tulus*), the ritual loses its beauty, suggesting a moral aesthetic paradigm where inner virtue determines external beauty. This interdependence transforms *Maddoja Bine* into a cultural system that simultaneously preserves artistic expression and moral integrity.

6. The Role of Ritual in Community Cohesion

The *Maddoja Bine* ceremony continues to strengthen intergenerational bonds and community solidarity in the face of modernization. Despite declining participation among younger generations, the ritual remains a vital educational space for transmitting values. Elders use the ceremony to teach moral conduct, ecological awareness, and respect for heritage. The communal involvement, from preparing seeds to sharing meals, creates a tangible sense of belonging and collective responsibility.

This finding aligns with notion that aesthetic experiences are inherently social and transformative, producing ethical awareness through participation. In *Maddoja Bine*, the integration of sound, gesture, and emotion generates shared affective energy that unites the community spiritually and socially. The ritual, therefore, functions as a cultural pedagogy, teaching values through embodied art and collective emotion.

7. Summary of Thematic Findings

Thematic Focus	Key Findings	Interpretive Meaning
Aesthetic Expression	Harmony of rhythm, gesture, and color representing unity of human–divine relations.	Aesthetics as moral reflection and communal beauty.
Ethical Values	Emphasis on honesty, cooperation, and mutual respect in ritual practice.	Ethics as performative discipline shaping character.
Cultural Sustainability	Ritual serves as living moral education and resistance to cultural erosion.	Continuity of Bugis identity through embodied art.

Thematic Focus	Key Findings	Interpretive Meaning
Art–Ethics Integration	Beauty and virtue coexist as interdependent cultural expressions.	Aesthetic ethics as foundation of Bugis worldview.

These findings demonstrate that the *Maddoja Bine* ritual is a socio-aesthetic system—a living art form that sustains ethical consciousness and collective identity. It merges aesthetic performance with moral responsibility, reaffirming that in Bugis culture, the beautiful is the good, and the good is the harmonious.

Discussion

The findings reveal that the *Maddoja Bine* ritual embodies a profound integration between aesthetic performance and ethical behavior within Bugis society. The harmony of sound, gesture, and spatial arrangement reflects not only artistic beauty but also moral discipline and social balance (Cao & Kong, 2014). This aesthetic-ethical unity corresponds to what Dewey describes as “art as experience,” where beauty emerges from purposeful human action and shared meaning. In the Bugis context, aesthetic form serves as an ethical medium, each movement, chant, and offering represents an internalized moral value such as honesty (*lempu’*) or mutual respect (*sipakatau’*). Ritual performance thus transforms ethical values into tangible sensory experiences that are collectively felt and emotionally sustained. Such interrelation aligns with the idea that art in indigenous cultures is not separate from moral life but is its living expression (Gould et al., 2019; Teschers & Nieto, 2023). Consequently, *Maddoja Bine* exemplifies how aesthetic expression functions as an embodied moral education rooted in local cosmology and community solidarity.

The *Maddoja Bine* ritual operates as a moral system that integrates belief, behavior, and beauty into a coherent cultural practice. Following Moyaert (2017) and Della Costa (2023) interpretive anthropology, the ritual can be viewed as a “text” through which people communicate shared meanings about the moral order of the world. The collective preparation, silence, and synchronized movements constitute symbolic acts that define ethical boundaries and reinforce communal relationships. This interpretation demonstrates that ritual is not a static tradition but a dynamic process of ethical renewal and social reproduction (Bolton, 2023). Through participation in *Maddoja Bine*, community members internalize Bugis moral philosophy, values of honesty, cooperation, and humility, within the rhythms of daily life. These performative acts ensure the continuation of a moral identity that sustains the integrity of the Bugis worldview amid external change (Susmihara et al., 2025). Therefore, the ritual serves as a cultural grammar of morality, translating abstract ethical norms into emotionally resonant social actions.

From a philosophical standpoint, the Bugis aesthetic worldview positions beauty and goodness as complementary dimensions of the same spiritual order. The ritual’s artistic features (music, colors, and choreographed gestures) symbolize ecological and cosmic harmony that mirrors ethical equilibrium (G. Li, 2024). Each aesthetic component conveys a moral message: calm rhythm expresses humility, symmetrical formation represents equality, and collective chanting embodies unity. This synthesis resonates with Eastern ethical-aesthetic thought, where harmony between the self, nature, and divinity defines the essence of beauty. In *Maddoja Bine*, art becomes an ecological ethics, teaching humans to act responsibly toward the environment as part of moral and spiritual life. Such practices

reaffirm that cultural rituals are repositories of environmental wisdom embedded in aesthetic form and ethical conduct. Accordingly, the aesthetic ethics of *Maddoja Bine* underscores the interdependence between moral consciousness, artistic expression, and ecological balance.

The persistence of *Maddoja Bine* amid modernization reflects the adaptive resilience of Bugis culture in negotiating tradition and change. While modernization often threatens the continuity of indigenous rituals, this tradition demonstrates how local communities reinterpret heritage to remain meaningful in modern contexts (Q. Li et al., 2023; Ningrum & Abdullah, 2025; Sokk et al., 2024). Younger generations, though less involved in ritual labor, still recognize the moral and aesthetic significance of the ceremony as a marker of identity. Such intergenerational dialogue transforms the ritual into a contemporary medium of cultural education and ethical reflection (Siswayanti et al., 2025). The ritual's survival illustrates that aesthetic and ethical values can coexist with technological progress when framed as complementary rather than oppositional forces. This adaptability suggests that rituals like *Maddoja Bine* offer models of cultural sustainability, integrating art, ethics, and spirituality as moral resources for modern life. In this sense, Bugis ritual traditions remain not relics of the past but evolving systems of moral aesthetics that continue to guide collective consciousness in Indonesia's plural society.

CONCLUSION

The *Maddoja Bine* ritual of the Bugis community in South Sulawesi embodies a profound integration of aesthetic beauty, ethical virtue, and spiritual balance that defines the core of Bugis cultural philosophy. This study demonstrates that the ritual is not merely an agrarian or religious practice, but a living moral-aesthetic system in which artistic expressions—such as rhythm, chant, movement, and symbolic offerings—serve as vehicles for transmitting values of honesty (*lempu'*), respect (*sipakatau'*), and solidarity (*sipakainge'*). Through embodied performance, participants internalize these virtues, transforming art into a medium of ethical education and collective harmony. The persistence of *Maddoja Bine* amid modernization highlights the adaptive resilience of indigenous wisdom in negotiating change while preserving moral and ecological balance. Thus, the ritual represents both a cultural heritage and an ethical compass, illustrating that in Bugis worldview, the beautiful and the good are inseparable forces sustaining human dignity, communal unity, and harmony with nature.

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