

## Perceptions of *Rambu Solo'* as a Torajan Cultural Identity in the Era of Globalization

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the perceptions of Torajan youth, particularly members of the PPGT Marante Congregation, toward the traditional *Rambu Solo'* ceremony. The research employed a qualitative approach with three respondents selected based on the following criteria: active involvement in PPGT, understanding of *Rambu Solo'*, willingness to participate as respondents, and Torajan cultural background. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically, emphasizing three main dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative. The findings reveal that, cognitively, *Rambu Solo'* is perceived as a customary obligation with profound spiritual meaning—not merely a funeral ritual but also a means of honoring ancestors and symbolizing cultural identity. Affectively, the respondents' emotional attachment is reflected in their motivation to preserve the tradition through solidarity, mutual cooperation, kinship, and church support that strengthens the spiritual aspect. Meanwhile, in the conative dimension, respondents demonstrate determination and orientation to sustain *Rambu Solo'* through concrete actions such as integrating customary values with Christian faith, digital documentation, social media utilization, and cultural education among the younger generation. These findings affirm that Torajan youth's perceptions of *Rambu Solo'* are influenced by internal factors—such as cultural identity, personal experience, and preservation commitment—and external factors, including family, church, PPGT community, formal education, digital media, and the challenges of globalization. Thus, *Rambu Solo'* is not merely regarded as a traditional ritual but as a symbol of cultural identity that reinforces social solidarity and cultural resilience among the Torajan people in the modern era.

**Keywords:** *Rambu Solo'*, youth perception, cultural identity, Toraja, PPGT Marante Congregation



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**INTRODUCTION**

In practice, *Rambu Solo'* involves various distinctive Torajan cultural symbols such as *Tongkonan* (traditional houses), *tau-tau* (wooden effigies of the deceased), buffalo sacrifices, as well as traditional dances and rituals. All these elements embody profound religious, social, and cultural meanings. However, amid the currents of modernization, globalization, and the rapid development of information technology, the existence of *Rambu Solo'* faces significant challenges. Critical questions have emerged among the younger generation regarding its relevance, high economic costs, and the social stratification embedded within the tradition. While many continue to regard *Rambu Solo'* as a valuable heritage that must be preserved, others perceive it as a potential burden—both economically and in relation to certain religious teachings.

Perception is a cognitive process that enables individuals to recognize, understand, and interpret phenomena based on their experiences, knowledge, and specific psychological factors. In the context of Torajan society, perceptions of the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony carry a deeply complex meaning. *Rambu Solo'* serves not merely as a funeral ritual but also encompasses social, economic, and spiritual dimensions that reinforce community solidarity. Rooted in the *Aluk Todolo* belief system, the ceremony has evolved to coexist harmoniously with Christianity, which is now embraced by the majority of the Torajan population.

North Toraja is one of the regencies in South Sulawesi widely recognized for the richness and uniqueness of its cultural heritage. Among the various traditions that continue to be practiced today, *Rambu Solo'* holds a particularly significant place. This traditional funeral ceremony is not merely viewed as a biological event but as a sacred procession representing the final act of respect toward ancestors. Beyond its ritualistic aspect, *Rambu Solo'* serves as a means of strengthening social bonds, affirming community solidarity, and preserving the continuity of cultural values passed down across generations.

This phenomenon becomes even more intriguing when examined in relation to the role of the Toraja Church Youth Fellowship (PPGT). As a church-based youth organization, PPGT occupies a strategic position at the intersection between Christian faith and ancestral culture. Its members face the dilemma of how to preserve and sustain their cultural identity while simultaneously aligning it with their religious beliefs. This process generates a complex dynamic of perceptions, in which PPGT can act both as an agent of cultural preservation and as a critical voice toward traditional practices that may be perceived as incompatible with contemporary values.

Research conducted by Hidayat (2023) indicates that young people often experience cultural and identity stress when trying to balance ancestral traditions with the demands of modernity. This situation is also experienced by Torajan youth, including members of the PPGT Marante Congregation. They are expected to honor their ancestral culture while simultaneously navigating rapid social changes and global developments.

For the younger generation, particularly members of the Toraja Church Youth Fellowship (PPGT), *Rambu Solo'* lies at the intersection of culture and faith. As a church-based youth organization, PPGT not only focuses on spiritual development but also plays an important role in preserving local wisdom. This makes Toraja youth within the church a vital bridge connecting ancestral cultural values with their Christian beliefs. Consequently, their perception of *Rambu Solo'* reflects how Torajan youth strive to balance cultural identity and religious life.

Findings from interviews with two informants reveal differing perspectives on *Rambu Solo'*. A traditional leader views *Rambu Solo'* as a cultural heritage of high social and spiritual value, functioning to strengthen communal bonds and serving as a tourism attraction that contributes to the local economy. Conversely, a youth representative argues that although the tradition holds significant meaning, the high cost of its implementation often becomes a

financial burden on families, sometimes forcing them into debt. He further emphasized that for many young people, *Rambu Solo* is perceived more as a social obligation than a source of cultural pride. From these differing viewpoints, it can be concluded that while *Rambu Solo* continues to be respected, its practice requires adaptation to align more closely with the current social and economic conditions of the community.

According to Smith (2022), this condition has become increasingly complex as social media and information technology accelerate the process of globalization, influencing how young people perceive traditional practices. Torajan youth today face a dilemma: on one hand, they wish to preserve their cultural identity through the continuation of *Rambu Solo*; on the other, they are becoming more critical of certain aspects, such as the high costs and social stratification associated with the ceremony.

However, Hidayat (2023) notes that amid the rapid flow of globalization and modernization, the perceptions of young people toward *Rambu Solo* have begun to shift. Some regard it as a valuable cultural heritage that must be preserved, while others see it as an economic burden or even as conflicting with certain religious beliefs. This phenomenon reflects the presence of cultural stress and even identity stress, as the younger generation is expected to honor ancestral traditions while simultaneously adapting to modern values.

Therefore, it is essential to examine the perceptions of the PPGT Marante Congregation regarding *Rambu Solo* in relation to their cultural identity. By gaining a deeper understanding of both internal factors (beliefs, personal values, experiences) and external factors (social environment, religion, modernization), this study seeks to reveal how young people interpret *Rambu Solo* and how these perceptions influence the continuity of Torajan cultural identity amid the dynamics of modern life.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using the ethnographic method. The choice of this method was based on the study's focus, which emphasizes an in-depth exploration of a specific culture or community through direct observation and the researcher's active participation in their daily activities. Data collection techniques in qualitative research are varied and adjusted to the research questions, objectives, and the characteristics of the study subjects.

The research was conducted at the PPGT Marante Congregation, located in North Toraja Regency. The research subjects were determined using a purposive sampling technique, with criteria selected to align with the study's objectives. The participants met the following criteria:

1. They are active members who consistently participate in various activities of the PPGT Marante Congregation, ensuring genuine engagement in the organization's life.
2. They possess knowledge or firsthand experience related to the *Rambu Solo* traditional ceremony, which serves as the main focus of this research.
3. Their willingness to participate was demonstrated through informed consent and a written agreement to take part in the study.
4. The respondents have a strong Torajan cultural background, reflected in their attachment to and deep understanding of traditional values and practices, enabling them to provide comprehensive insights into the relationship between *Rambu Solo* and Torajan cultural identity.

**Table 1.** An overview of the research subjects

No.	Name/Initial	Gender	Age	Education	Note
1	RAT	Female	23	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	Active PPGT Member
2	DJ	Female	28	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	Active PPGT Member
3	MT	Male	32	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	Active PPGT Member

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. After the data collection process, analysis was conducted using a phenomenological approach, which aims to describe and deeply understand the participants' lived experiences related to a particular phenomenon or event. This approach enables the researcher to explore the subjective meanings and interpretations that participants attach to their experiences with *Rambu Solo* ' as part of their cultural identity.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This study highlights the perceptions of young members of the PPGT Marante Congregation toward the *Rambu Solo* ' ceremony as a symbol of Torajan cultural identity. Based on in-depth interviews and participatory observations, data were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The findings derived from the interviews with the three respondents are summarized in the following table:

**Table 2.** Theme

No.	Main Theme	Sub-Themes
1	Cognitive Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receiving information</li> <li>• Understanding information</li> <li>• Interpreting information</li> </ul>
2	Affective Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observable attitudes</li> <li>• Emotional values</li> </ul>
3	Conative Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavioral responses toward cultural values</li> <li>• Attitudinal responses to cultural values</li> </ul>

### Discussion

#### 1. Cognitive Theme

Based on the results of the interviews, it can be concluded that all three respondents perceive *Rambu Solo* ' as a customary ceremony that must be carried out by the Torajan people because it holds a profound meaning as the final tribute to the spirits of ancestors. The informants emphasized that the ceremony is not merely a funeral ritual but a sacred transition process to *puya* (the afterlife), as believed in the Torajan system of faith. This view aligns with Koentjaraningrat's (2009) theory, which states that traditional ceremonies represent one of the manifestations of culture that serve to connect humans with the spiritual world while maintaining social order.

Furthermore, the emphasis on collective preparation, such as family deliberation, the provision of sacrificial animals (pigs and buffaloes), and the construction of *lantang* (traditional ceremonial structures), demonstrates the strong social dimension of *Rambu Solo* '. This is consistent with Inzlicht's (2018) view that shared rituals strengthen group experience and solidarity. In this context, *Rambu Solo* '—which involves large-scale ceremonies, long preparation periods, and deep social and emotional commitment—can be categorized as an imagistic ritual, that is, a ritual performed infrequently but one that has a significant impact on community identity and cohesion.

Thus, based on the interviews and supported by relevant theories, it can be concluded that, in the respondents' perception, *Rambu Solo* ' is not merely a cultural obligation, but a collective ritual rich in meaning—a form of spiritual reverence for ancestors, a medium for strengthening social solidarity, and a powerful symbol of cultural identity within Torajan society.

## 2. Affective Theme

The results of the interviews with all three respondents indicate that the motivation to preserve *Rambu Solo* ' is strongly tied to an emotional attachment to ancestral values, reflected in the spirit of solidarity, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), kinship, and reverence for the departed. This finding can be explained through the concept of Affective-Cultural Commitment proposed by Cheng & Chen (2022) which emphasizes that an individual's emotional bond with cultural traditions arises from a sense of pride, love, and responsibility toward ancestral heritage.

The church's role in providing spiritual and pastoral support to bereaved families further demonstrates the element of spiritual-affective support, as explained in Faith-Based Social Support Theory (Park & Slattery, 2013), which posits that religious communities can enhance emotional resilience when individuals face social or spiritual challenges.

Moreover, the relevance of *Rambu Solo* ' in the modern era reflects the concept of cultural resilience (Ungar, 2019), namely, the ability of younger generations to preserve their cultural identity while adapting to social and technological change. The Torajan youth view this tradition with positive affective responses—expressed as pride, a sense of belonging, and critical awareness toward the challenges of globalization. In the context of global cultural flows, *Rambu Solo* ' not only contends with shifting values and lifestyles but also with the penetration of global culture, which often reshapes young people's priorities. Nevertheless, globalization also provides new opportunities: local traditions can now be promoted through digital media, serving as symbols of identity and expressions of Torajan cultural heritage on the international stage.

## 3. Affective-Conative Dimension

The results of the interviews with the three participants indicate that the young generation, particularly members of PPGT (Youth Fellowship of the Toraja Church), perceive *Rambu Solo* ' not merely as a funeral ritual but as a final act of respect as well as a symbol of Torajan cultural identity. From a conative perspective, this finding aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; revised 2020), which emphasizes that behavioral intention is influenced by individual attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. The intention of young people to continue performing or supporting *Rambu Solo* ' arises from their religious faith, awareness of cultural identity, and the support of family, church, and community environments.

The respondents also highlighted the socio-economic and spiritual aspects of *Rambu Solo* ', emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balance between tradition and Christian faith. This corresponds to the concept of Cultural Continuity (Kirmayer et al., 2011), which posits that the preservation of tradition depends on a community's ability to adapt cultural values to modern and religious norms. Furthermore, the involvement of families, churches, formal education, and social media in encouraging young people to preserve traditions reflects the cultural learning process (Rogoff, 2021), in which collective actions are directed toward adapting traditional practices to remain relevant in modern contexts.



Initiatives such as digital documentation, the use of social media, and cultural education represent forms of collective conation, demonstrating the concrete commitment of the younger generation to maintain the continuity of *Rambu Solo* amid globalization. Thus, the conative theme in this study underscores that the perceptions of Torajan youth toward *Rambu Solo* motivate them to take active roles in preserving the tradition through the adaptation of cultural practices to religious values and contemporary demands, thereby maintaining it as a living and evolving cultural identity.

The perceptions of Torajan youth, particularly members of PPGT Jemaat Marante, affirm that *Rambu Solo* is not merely a funeral ceremony but a symbol of cultural existence that fosters pride, responsibility, and a sense of stewardship in cultural preservation. The conative dimension is evident in their determination and orientation to maintain, adapt, and transmit *Rambu Solo* in harmony with Christian values and modern challenges.

The factors influencing cultural perception in the era of globalization can be categorized as follows:

1. Internal Factors:
  - a. Cultural identity: Self-awareness as Torajans who inherit ancestral traditions.
  - b. Personal experience: Early involvement in attending or witnessing traditional ceremonies.
  - c. Religious awareness: The belief that traditional customs can coexist with Christian faith.
  - d. Preservation commitment: The intention of young people to uphold values of solidarity, mutual cooperation, and respect for ancestors.
2. External Factors:
  - a. Family: Parental and kinship support in maintaining and transmitting tradition.
  - b. Church: Active involvement in providing spiritual guidance and ensuring alignment between tradition and faith values.
  - c. PPGT community: A platform for youth to learn, dialogue, and participate in cultural preservation.
  - d. Formal education: Transmission of cultural values through curriculum and school activities.
  - e. Media and digital technology: Utilization of social media and digital documentation as tools for preserving and promoting *Rambu Solo* globally.
  - f. Globalization: The challenges of modernity that encourage young people to adapt traditions to remain relevant without losing their essential meaning.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study on the perceptions of Torajan youth in PPGT Jemaat Marante, three main themes were identified: cognitive, affective, and conative. Cognitively, *Rambu Solo* is perceived as a mandatory traditional ceremony imbued with spiritual, social, and cultural identity values, reflected through ancestral reverence and collective solidarity in its preparation.

From the affective dimension, the younger generation demonstrates an emotional attachment expressed through pride, mutual cooperation, and respect for the departed, strengthened by the role of the church. This emotional bond also represents a form of cultural resilience in the era of globalization. Conatively, they exhibit intentions and concrete actions to preserve *Rambu Solo* through active participation, adaptation of traditional values to religious principles, and the utilization of digital media and formal education as means of cultural transmission.

Thus, *Rambu Solo* ' is not merely regarded as a funeral ritual but as a symbol of Torajan cultural identity that remains relevant, adaptive, and continuously evolving amidst modern challenges.

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