

## The Sacred Myths of Environmental Guardians and the Origins of Clans in the Cosmology of the Biak Community

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between sacred mountains in Biak and the origin of clans, which hold cosmological and cultural significance for the Biak community. In the perspective of the Biak people, each mountain is regarded as the dwelling place of ancestral spirits, guardians of customs, and determiners of kinship identity. Through an ethnolinguistic and cultural anthropology approach, this study found that sacred mountains are not merely geographical symbols, but a knowledge system that governs the social, moral, and ecological behavior of the community. Mountain toponyms reflect the relationship between humans, ancestors, and nature as a harmonious unity of life.

**Keywords:** Sacred mountain; Clan; Toponym; Biak; Cosmology

### 1. Introduction

Mountains hold a very important position in the cosmology of the Biak people. Mountains are not only natural boundaries but also places considered sacred because they are believed to be the dwelling places of ancestral spirits. The Biak people view mountains as sources of life and the origin of several clans living around them. Therefore, mountains often become the center of myths and traditional rituals.

Sacred mountains in the view of the Biak community carry a spiritual meaning that strengthens the relationship between humans and nature. Belief in the power of the mountains also forms the basis for the social system and the division of clans passed down through generations. Thus, understanding sacred mountains can provide insight into the cultural identity and local knowledge system of the Biak people.

### 2. Literature Review

Several previous studies indicate that the concept of the sacredness of nature is part of the belief system of Melanesian communities. In the context of Biak, mountains and the sea hold symbolic meanings that represent the relationship between humans and ancestors (Lapian, 2012; Mansoben, 1995).

Linguistic studies also highlight the importance of toponyms in recording the historical origins of clans as well as the accompanying mythological narratives. According to Geertz (1973), local symbols such as place names are a form of "cultural text" that contain the value systems and knowledge of a community.

Thus, the study of sacred mountains and clans in Biak is an important part of preserving collective memory and cosmological knowledge.

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### 3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Data was obtained through:

- In-depth interviews with customary elders, Mananwir keret (clan leaders), Mananwir Sup mnuk (regional land chiefs), and community figures of Biak.
- Participant observation in ritual and traditional ceremonies related to mountains.
- In-depth linguistic analysis through phonetics and phonemics of mountain names considered sacred and linked to the origins of clans.

The analysis was conducted by interpreting the symbolic meanings and the relationships between mountains, clans, and the value systems that exist within Biak society.

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### 4. Results and Discussion

Research results show that in the snonkaku tradition, the Byak people (Biak humans) use several words to refer to mountains, such as bon and urek, which are considered sacred because they are directly related to the origins of certain clans. In ancient times, the Byak people were identified with five clans: Arwam, Boseren, Kararbo, Kmur, and Makuker. These five clans shared similar characteristics in terms of marriage patterns, livelihoods, the native Biak language, songs (wor), and warfare skills. They mastered the Biak forests and were the inhabitants of Miosido Byak (the interior of Biak).

#### 4.1. Arwam

Arwam is associated as the clan of one of the main inhabitants of Meos Aimando Byak, identifying itself as inhabitants of Sup Arwam, Wouna, Sarwa, Marur, Dwar, Sosmai, Wirmaker, Swambes, Manswabawar. The clan Arwam consists of two words forming a phrase and inadvertently becomes a lexical unit that is difficult to interpret separately. Its original meaning is dissected to be explained in depth to understand its literal meaning. 'Ar' means part, while 'wam' means wind. The meaning of **Arwam: part of the wind**.

##### 4.1.1. *The Origin of the Arwam Clan*

The Arwam clan is considered one of the main clans on Biak Island. In oral tradition, this clan is believed to originate from sacred ancestors, who are thought to have passed down social values, customary laws, and responsibilities toward the environment. Some versions mention that the Arwam ancestors came from sacred mountains or specific islands, which became the starting points for the spread of their descendants.

##### 4.1.2. *The Meaning of the Name "Arwam"*

Etymologically, the literal meaning of the word Arwam in the Biak language comes from two components: ar: part, wam: wind. According to Hermanus Arwam in 2007 in his book *\*Sejarah Marga Arwam\** (History of the Arwam Clan), previously the Arwam clan name came from the word karwam, which means: kar: split, wam: wind, so Karwam means "split wave." It is clear because clan names often have symbolic and historical significance. However, traditionally and culturally, this name symbolizes two types of plants: arwamdam (a type of grass that grows on land) and arwamkor (a type of grass that grows in the sea). Arwamdam and Arwamkor indicate that one possesses supernatural power over the surrounding nature.

- Ancestral power (Mambri): serves as the guardian of the community and a symbol of steadfastness in facing natural and social challenges.
- Connection with nature: this clan has a special relationship with certain places, such as mountains or islands considered sacred.
- Social identity: indicates a clear lineage within the Biak society structure, important in marriage and traditional rituals.

##### 4.1.3. *Social Function of the Arwam*

Clan In Biak society:

Members of the Arwam clan participate in traditional rituals, such as birth ceremonies, funerals, and naming ceremonies.

This clan has certain rights and responsibilities over specific lands, seas, or territories according to customary law.

Being part of an extensive kinship network, especially the Kongsi Clan, namely: Boseren, Kararbo, Kmur, Makuker, which governs social relationships, solidarity, and conflict resolution.

#### 4.1.4. *Symbolism and Cosmology*

In Biak cosmology:

- Each clan, including Arwam, has an icon or ancestral symbol believed to provide protection and blessings
- Clan names serve as a link to history and myths; for example, stories about the Arwam ancestors who undertook long journeys to save the community or maintain the order of nature.

Here is a systematic table of the Arwam clan along with important information related to their origins, cosmological symbols, and social-ritual roles in Biak society:

- Aspect : Description
- Family Name : Arwam
- Foremost Ancestor: The Primary Ancestor Arwam is believed to be a sacred figure who is the founder of this clan's lineage. Some versions of oral tradition mention that this ancestor originates from a certain sacred mountain or island, or from Sup Arwam in Biak.

<b>Origin/ Location</b>	Sacred mountains on Biak Island or the surrounding islands (according to the oral myth version). This location serves as a symbol of protection and the starting point for the spread of the Arwam descendants.
Meaning of the Name	The name "Arwam" is symbolic, representing ancestral power, a connection with nature, and a clear social identity within the Biak community structure.
<b>Cosmological Symbol</b>	The Arwam clan is associated with certain natural elements, such as mountains, the sea, or guiding stars, which are believed to provide protection.
<b>Social Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being a member of a kinship is important in Biak society.</li> <li>- Maintaining relationships between clans and social order.</li> <li>- Providing support in resolving customary conflicts.</li> </ul>
<b>The Role of Ritual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating in and leading ceremonies for birth, death, naming, and environmental rituals.</li> <li>- Preserving ancestral traditions through symbols, myths, and sacred rituals.</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kinship solidarity.</li> <li>- Preservation of the environment and nature.</li> <li>- Maintenance of historical heritage and clan myths.</li> </ul>

#### 4.2. **Boseren**

Boseren is associated with the Boseren clan as one of the inhabitants of Meos Aimando Byak, identifying themselves as residents of Sup Boseren (sacred mountain land). The clan name consists of two words forming a phrase and inadvertently becomes a lexical unit that is difficult to interpret separately. In its original meaning, it can be dissected to be explained in depth to understand its literal meaning. 'bo' means above/referring to a mountain and also often describes positions, something higher, something placed on top. Meanwhile, the word 'seren' contains the sound {s} which changes the lexeme 'eren': calendar, which means a traditional calendar. The meaning of Boseren: 1) a place to start counting; 2) 'bo' refers to above and also serves as a substitute for 'bon': mountain, whereas 'se' means they, and 'ren' means they perform worship ceremonies/they cleanse.

##### 4.2.1. *The Origin of the Boseren Clan*

The Boseren clan is one of the main clans on Biak Island. According to oral tradition, this clan is believed to originate from a sacred ancestor, who is thought to have imparted social values, customary law, and a sense of environmental responsibility. Some versions mention that the Boseren ancestor came from a sacred mountain or was considered holy, which became the starting point for the spread of their descendants.

#### 4.2.2. *The Meaning of the Name "Boseren"*

Etymologically, the literal meaning of the word Boseren in the Biak language comes from two concepts: bo:atas, seren: they anoint / they purify, they schedule. According to Boseren, the clan was previously clear because clan names are often symbolic and historical. However, traditionally and culturally, this name symbolizes a mountain, indicating that it possesses supernatural power over the surrounding nature

Ancestral power (Mambri): serves as the guardian of the community and a symbol of steadfastness in facing natural and social challenges.

Connection with nature: this clan has a special relationship with certain places, such as mountains or islands considered sacred.

Social identity: indicates a clear lineage within the Biak society structure, important in marriage and traditional rituals.

#### 4.2.3. *Social Function of the Boseren Clan*

In Biak society:

Members of the Boseren clan play a role in traditional rituals, such as birth ceremonies, funerals, and naming ceremonies.

This clan has certain rights and responsibilities over specific land, seas, or territories according to customary law.

Being part of a broad kinship network, especially the Kongsi Clans, namely: Boseren, Kararbo, Kmur, Makuker, Arwam, which regulate social relationships, solidarity, and conflict resolution.

#### 4.2.4. *Symbolism and Cosmology*

In Biak cosmology:

- Each clan, including Boseren, has an icon or ancestral symbol believed to provide protection.
- Clan names serve as a link to history and myth; for example, stories about Boseren ancestors who undertook long journeys to save the community or maintain the natural order.

Here is a systematic table of the Boseren clan along with important information related to their origins, cosmological symbols, and social-ritual roles in Biak society:

Aspect	Description
Family Name	Boseren
Main Ancestor	The ancestor Boseren is believed to be a sacred figure who founded the lineage of this clan. Several versions of oral tradition mention that this ancestor came from a certain sacred mountain or island, or from Sup Boseren in Biak.
Origin/ Location	Sacred mountains on Biak Island or the surrounding islands (according to the oral myth version). This location serves as a symbol of protection and the starting point for the spread of the Boseren descendants.
Meaning of the Name	The name "Boseren" is symbolic, representing ancestral power, a connection with nature, and a clear social identity within the Biak community structure.
Cosmological Symbol	The Boseren clan is associated with certain natural elements, such as mountains, the sea, or guiding stars, which are believed to provide protection
Social Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being a member of a kinship is important in Biak society</li> <li>- Maintaining relationships between clans and social order</li> <li>- Providing support in resolving customary conflicts</li> </ul>
The Role of Ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating in and leading ceremonies for birth, death, naming, and environmental rituals.</li> <li>- Preserving ancestral traditions through symbols, myths, and sacred rituals.</li> </ul>

Cultural Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kinship solidarity.</li> <li>- Preservation of the environment and nature.</li> <li>- Maintenance of historical heritage and clan myths.</li> </ul>
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#### 4.3. Kararbo

Kararbo is associated with the Kararibo clan as its first inhabitants and is related to the origin of their ancestors. The Kararbo clan spread to several villages, such as Napdori and Ramdori. Kararbo consists of the Kararbo clans Korfius, Kararbo Serwaf, and Mandorba. The origin of a mountain named Kararbo is made up of a group of words (phrases), and when segmented word by word, it becomes like this: Karar: Larang, i: in/this, bo: above/mountain. The word 'bo' refers to above or something higher/on top. Therefore, in naming a place, for example, a mountain, 'bo' serves as a substitute for 'bon,' meaning mountain. Hence, Kararbo, Kmурbo, Boseren Sarwambo, Makuker, and Arwam refer to mountains.

##### 4.3.1. *The Origin of the Kararbo Clan*

The Kararbo clan is one of the clans that inhabit the interior of Biak Island. According to oral tradition, this clan is believed to originate from sacred ancestors, who are thought to have passed down social values, customary law, and responsibilities towards the environment. Some versions mention that the Kararbo ancestors came from a sacred mountain or were considered holy, making it forbidden and serving as the starting point for the spread of their descendants.

##### 4.3.2. *The Meaning of the Name "Kararbo"*

Etymologically, the literal meaning of the word Kararibo in the Biak language comes from two understandings of Kararbo: prohibition, karar: prohibition, i: on, bo: above. In full, Kararibo literally means 'prohibition above,' and there is also the loss of the phoneme [i], hence it is called Kararbo. According to Kararbo, the clan was previously clear because clan names were often symbolic and historical. However, in tradition and culture, this name symbolizes a mountain, indicating that it possesses supernatural power over the surrounding nature.

- Ancestral power (Mambri): serves as the guardian of the community and a symbol of steadfastness in facing natural and social challenges.
- Connection with nature: this clan has a special relationship with certain places, such as mountains or islands considered sacred.
- Social identity: indicates a clear lineage within the Biak society structure, important in marriage and traditional rituals

##### 4.3.3. *The Social Function of the Kararbo Clan*

In Biak society:

- Members of the Kararbo clan play a role in traditional rituals, such as birth ceremonies, funerals, and naming ceremonies.
- This clan has certain rights and responsibilities over specific land, sea, or territorial areas in accordance with customary law.
- Being part of a wider kinship network, especially the Kongsi Clans, namely: Kararbo, Kmурbo, Makuker, Arwam, Boseren, which governs social relationships, solidarity, and conflict resolution.

##### 4.3.4. *Symbolism and Cosmology*

In Biak cosmology

- Each clan, including Kararbo, has an icon or ancestral symbol believed to provide protection.
- Clan names serve as a binding of history and myth; for example, the story of the Kararbo ancestors who undertook long journeys to save the community or maintain the natural order.

Here is a systematic table of the Kararbo clan along with important information related to their origins, cosmological symbols, and social-ritual roles in Biak society:

Aspect	Description
Family Name	Kararbo
Main Ancestor	The ancestor Kararbo is believed to be a sacred figure who founded the lineage of this clan. Several versions of oral tradition mention that this ancestor came from a certain sacred mountain or island, or from Sup Kararbo in Biak.
Origin / Location	The sacred mountains on Biak Island or the surrounding islands (according to the oral myth version). This location serves as a symbol of protection and the starting point for the spread of the Kararbo descendants.
Meaning of the Name	The name "Kararbo" is symbolic, representing the power of ancestors, connection with nature, and a clear social identity within the Biak community structure.
Cosmological Symbol	The Kararbo clan is associated with certain natural elements, such as mountains, the sea, or guiding stars, which are believed to provide protection.

#### 4.4. Kmur

Kmurbo is associated with the Kmur clan as the place of residence of its first ancestors. The Kmur clan spread to the villages of Krisdori, Swandewe, to Womboda (Supiori), and to the villages of Marsram, Yendoker, with some moving northward (Bar Napa/Barisen = part of the waves) to the village of Komboi. In fact, the Kmur clan's origin is said to be in the original Biak language, consisting of a group of words (phrases). To facilitate understanding for RUMURI, segmentation was done as follows: rum = house, ur = group/herd, i = them (i as a particle indicating the subject or object). Considering verbs in the Biak language, verbs are not free morphemes and do not stand alone; the meaning depends on the subject and object. Therefore, rumuri in its literal sense means 'house that shelters a community/group.' The ancestral lineage from Apus RUMURI gave rise to Apus Bernsrik, Funman, Embrai (Siryowin). In the context of clan or Biak society cosmology, 'Kmur' is usually understood as a clan name. Each clan in Biak has its origin.

##### 4.4.1. Origin of the Kmur Clan

The Kmur clan is one of the clans that inhabit the interior of Biak Island. In oral tradition, this clan is believed to originate from sacred ancestors, who are thought to have passed down social values, customary law, and responsibilities toward the environment. Some versions mention that the Kmur ancestors came from a sacred mountain or are considered holy, making them forbidden, and that point marks the beginning of the spread of their descendants.

##### 4.4.2. The Meaning of the Name "Kmur"

Etymologically, the literal meaning of the word Kmurbo in the Biak language comes from two understandings of Kmur: pelarangan (prohibition), bur (to go), bo (above). In full, Kararibo literally means to go away from problems. According to Kmur, the family lineage was clear because clan names often have symbolic and historical significance. However, traditionally and culturally, this name symbolizes a mountain, indicating that it possesses supernatural power over the surrounding nature.

Etymologically, the literal meaning of the word Kmurbo in the Biak language comes from two understandings: Kmur: prohibition, bur: go, bo: up. Fully, Kararibo literally means 'to go away from troubles.' According to Kmur, the origin of the clan was clear because clan names are often symbolic and historical. However, traditionally and culturally, this name symbolizes a mountain, indicating that it possesses supernatural power over the surrounding nature.

- Ancestral power (Mambri): serves as the guardian of the community and a symbol of steadfastness in facing natural and social challenges.
- Connection with nature: this clan has a special relationship with certain places, such as mountains or islands considered sacred.
- Social identity: indicates a clear lineage within the Biak society structure, important in marriage and traditional rituals.

##### 4.4.3. Social Function of the Kmur Clan

In Biak society:

- Members of the Kmur clan play a role in customary rituals, such as birth ceremonies, funerals, and naming ceremonies.
- This clan has certain rights and responsibilities over specific land, sea, or territories according to customary law.
- Being part of a wide kinship network, especially the Kongsi Clans, namely: Kmur, Arwam, Boseren, Makkuker, Kararbo, which regulate social relationships, solidarity, and conflict resolution.

#### 4.4.4. Simbolisme dan Kosmologi

In Biak cosmology:

- Each clan, including the Kmur, has an ancestral icon or symbol believed to provide protection.
- Clan names serve as a link between history and myth; for example, stories of Kmur ancestors who traveled long distances to save the community or maintain the natural order.

The following is a systematic table of the Kmur clans, along with important information regarding their origins, cosmological symbols, and socio-ritual roles in Biak society:

Aspect	Description
Family Name	Kmur
Main Ancestor	The ancestor Kmur is believed to be a sacred figure who founded the lineage of this clan. Several versions of oral tradition state that this ancestor came from a certain sacred mountain or island, or from Sup Kmur in Biak.
Origin / Location	Sacred mountains on Biak Island or the surrounding islands (according to the oral myth version). This location serves as a symbol of protection and the starting point for the spread of Kmur descendants.
Meaning of the Name	The name "Kmur" is symbolic, representing ancestral power, a connection with nature, and a clear social identity within the Biak community structure.
Cosmological Symbol	The Kmur clan is associated with certain natural elements, such as mountains, the sea, or guiding stars, which are believed to provide protection
Social Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being a member of a kinship is important in Biak society.</li> <li>- Maintaining relationships between clans and social order.</li> <li>- Providing support in resolving customary conflicts.</li> </ul>
The Role of Ritual	Participating in and leading ceremonies for birth, death, naming, and environmental rituals. Preserving ancestral traditions through symbols, myths, and sacred rituals.
Cultural Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kinship solidarity.</li> <li>- Preservation of the environment and nature.</li> <li>- Maintenance of historical heritage and clan myths.</li> </ul>

#### 4.5. Makuker

Makukerbo is associated with the Makuker clan as the first inhabitants of their ancestors. The Makuker clan in Makuker village spread, with some migrating northward (Bar napa/barisen = part of the wave) to Mnuberfor village. Actually, the origin of the Makuker clan in the Biak language consists of a phrase or two words: Mak: Star, Kuker: witness. Its literal meaning: Witnessing the stars. To facilitate understanding, it is broken down as follows: Mak = star, Kuker Considering verbs in Biak, verbs are not free morphemes or cannot stand alone; the meaning depends on the subject and object. Therefore, Makuker in its literal sense. The genealogy of their ancestor Apus Makkuker descended. In the context of clans or the cosmology of the Biak people, 'Makkuker' is usually interpreted as a clan name. Each clan in Biak has a mythological origin or ancestor connected to a specific place, such as a mountain, island, or other location.

## 1. Origin of the Makuker Clan

The Makuker clan is one of the clans that inhabit the interior of Biak Island. In oral tradition, this clan is believed to originate from sacred ancestors, who are thought to have passed down social values, customary law, and responsibilities toward the environment. Some versions state that the Makuker ancestors came from a sacred mountain or were considered holy, thus prohibited, and it became the starting point for the spread of their descendants.

### 4.5.1. The Meaning of the Name 'Makkuker'

Etymologically, the literal meaning of the word Makkuker in the Biak language comes from the segmentation of the word Makkuker: bintang (star), kuker: saksi (witness), bo: atas (above), and fully makkukerbo literally means: witnessing the Star. In fact, the Makkuker clan name was previously clearly written, as it currently appears, with the omission of [k] in makuker. Therefore, clan names are often symbolic and historical. However, traditionally and culturally, this name symbolizes witnessing a Star descending from the Sky carrying fire, indicating that one possesses supernatural power over the surrounding nature.

- Ancestral power (Mambri: serves as the guardian of the community and a symbol of steadfastness in facing natural and social challenges.
- Connection with nature: this clan has a special relationship with certain places, such as mountains or islands considered sacred.
- Social identity: indicates a clear lineage within the Biak society structure, important in marriage and traditional rituals.

### 4.5.2. The Social Function of the Makuker Clan

In Biak society:

- Members of the Makuker clan participate in traditional rituals, such as birth ceremonies, funerals, and naming ceremonies.
- This clan has specific rights and responsibilities over certain lands, seas, or territories in accordance with customary law.
- Being part of a wide kinship network, especially the Kongsi Clan, namely: Makuker, Makuker, Makuker, Makuker, Arwam, Boseren, which governs social relationships, solidarity, and conflict resolution.

### 4.5.3. Symbolism and Cosmology

In Biak cosmology:

- Each clan, including Makuker, has an icon or ancestral symbol believed to provide protection.
- Clan names serve as a binding of history and myth; for example, the story of the Makuker ancestors who undertook long journeys to save the community or maintain the natural order.

Here is a systematic table of the Makuker Clans along with important information regarding their origins, cosmological symbols, and social-ritual roles in Biak society:

Aspect	Description
Nama Marga	Makuker
Main Ancestor	The ancestor Makuker is believed to be a sacred figure who founded the lineage of this clan. Several versions of oral tradition mention that this ancestor came from a certain sacred mountain or island, or from Sup Makuker in Biak.
Origin Place / Location	The sacred mountains on Biak Island or the surrounding islands (according to the oral myth version). This location has become a symbol of protection and the starting point for the spread of the Makuker descendants.
Meaning of the Name	The name "Makuker" is symbolic, representing the power of ancestors, connection with nature, and a clear social identity within the Biak community structure.
Cosmological Symbol	The Makuker clan is associated with certain natural elements, such as mountains, the sea, or guiding stars, which are believed to provide protection.

Social Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being a member of a kinship is important in Biak society.</li> <li>- Maintaining relationships between clans and social order.</li> <li>- Providing support in resolving customary conflicts.</li> </ul>
The Role of Ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating in and leading ceremonies for birth, death, naming, and environmental rituals.</li> <li>- Preserving ancestral traditions through symbols, myths, and sacred rituals.</li> </ul>
Cultural Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kinship solidarity</li> <li>- Preservation of the environment and nature.</li> <li>- Maintenance of historical heritage and clan myths.</li> </ul>

Snonkaku Byak (Biak people) construct their identity from myth, before being familiar with modern civilization such as reading and writing. The myths that develop not only explain the origins of clans but also reinforce the spiritual relationship between humans and nature. Rituals performed on sacred mountains, such as offering sacrifices called Kakes in the Biak language and traditional prayers (ritual speech), serve to maintain the balance between the human world and the ancestral spirit world.

Thus, sacred mountains become an important symbol in maintaining the ecological ethics of the Biak community. The relationship between the mountains and clans shows that nature is considered part of a living and moral social system.

## 5. Conclusion

The sacred mountains in Biak serve as symbols of cosmology that reinforce the social and cultural identity of the community. The connection between mountains and clans illustrates the Biak people's perspective on nature as part of a system of knowledge and customary morality. Mountain toponyms act as a means of preserving values, history, and ecological balance passed down through generations. By understanding the significance of sacred mountains, the community can strengthen local wisdom and maintain a harmonious relationship between humans, ancestors, and the universe.

## Compliance with ethical standards

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### Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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