

CULTURAL ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF THE TORAJA ETHNIC GROUP IN SOCIAL INTERACTION AT LONG BELEH HALOQ VILLAGE, KEMBANG JANGGUT DISTRICT, KUTAI KARTANEGARA REGENCY

Adeliah Dwy Arianti^{1a*}, Jawatir Pardosi^{2b}, Aloysius Hardoko^{3c}, M. Jamil^{4d}

¹²³⁴Pancasila and Civic Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia

^a: adeliahda@gmail.com

^b: pardo_si@yahoo.com

^c: aloysiushardoko@gmail.com

^d: jamil@fkip.unmul.ac.id

(*) Corresponding Author

adeliahda@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the social structure, cultural adaptation strategies, and influencing factors of the Toraja ethnic community in Long Beleh Haloq Village, with data collected from eleven purposively selected informants through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation between February and May 2025. The findings reveal that the Toraja community maintains an egalitarian and functional social structure where status is based on contribution and social roles rather than lineage, while cultural adaptation is achieved through contextual language use, active participation in communal activities, and preservation of traditions such as the Rampanan Kapa' wedding ceremony. Strong internal cohesion and acceptance from local residents facilitate this adaptation process, although differences in customs, coordination challenges, and geographical distance present inhibiting factors; overall, the Toraja community successfully preserves its cultural identity while adapting harmoniously within a diverse rural social context.



INTRODUCTIONS

Culture is a fundamental element of human life that plays a crucial role in shaping social identity at both individual and collective levels. Through culture, individuals acquire systems of values, norms, customs, and behavioral patterns that guide social life. Culture functions not only as a heritage passed down from generation to generation but also as a frame of reference for building social relations, responding to differences, and adapting to

continuously changing social environments (Andayani et al., 2021). Therefore, culture holds a strategic role in creating social order, stability, and harmony within society.

Conceptually, culture encompasses the entire system of ideas, actions, and human creations that are learned and socially transmitted. Cultural elements include language, belief systems, customs, social norms, and values that regulate individual behavior in society. Values such as mutual cooperation, social solidarity, togetherness, and mutual respect serve as fundamental foundations for building harmonious social interactions (Putri et al., 2021). However, culture is dynamic and continues to evolve along with increasing population mobility and interregional migration processes (Alsandriata, 2015).

Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest levels of cultural diversity. The existence of hundreds of ethnic groups, local languages, and customary systems across various regions indicates that Indonesian society is multiethnic and multicultural. In this context, cultural differences are inseparable from everyday social life. Cultural diversity can become a social strength when managed effectively; however, it may also generate social distance and misunderstanding when intercultural adaptive capacities are limited (Pangestoeti et al., 2024).

In societies with diverse ethnic backgrounds, interaction among cultural groups is inevitable. Such interactions can develop harmoniously when each group is able to understand, respect, and adjust to existing differences. Conversely, failure to achieve cultural adaptation may lead to exclusivism, social prejudice, and obstacles in building healthy and sustainable social relationships (Hasmar et al., 2023). Therefore, cultural adaptation becomes a vital social process, particularly for migrant groups living alongside local communities with different cultural backgrounds (Rusli & Subair, 2021).

This phenomenon of cultural adaptation can be observed in Long Beleh Haloq Village, Kembang Janggut District, Kutai Kartanegara Regency, East Kalimantan Province. The village is inhabited by communities with diverse ethnic backgrounds, including the Toraja ethnic group. This condition creates continuous cultural encounters that require processes of social adjustment and negotiation in everyday life (Alsandriata, 2015).

The Toraja community is widely recognized for its strong social system and cultural values, such as close kinship ties, group solidarity, togetherness, and traditions of mutual cooperation. These values continue to be maintained and practiced even when the Toraja people migrate and settle in other regions (Allo & Santosa, 2018). However, the persistence of these values within a social environment dominated by local cultural norms requires effective adaptive and communicative strategies to prevent social distance and cultural misunderstanding (Athallah & Dharma, 2024).

Based on this context, this study aims to describe the social structure of the Toraja community in Long Beleh Haloq Village, examine the cultural adaptation strategies they employ in social life, and analyze the factors that support and hinder the adaptation process. This research is expected to contribute academically to a deeper understanding of cultural adaptation dynamics in multiethnic societies, as well as to enrich socio-cultural studies on how migrant communities maintain cultural identity while achieving social integration (Departemen Hukum et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the cultural adaptation strategies of the Toraja ethnic group in social interactions within Long Beleh Haloq Village, Kembang Janggut District, Kutai Kartanegara Regency. A qualitative design was chosen to obtain an in-depth and holistic understanding of social meanings, interaction processes, and adaptive behaviors as experienced by the research subjects in their natural setting (Moleong, 2022) Conceptually, the study focuses on cultural adaptation strategies as efforts undertaken by individuals or groups to adjust to a different cultural environment without losing their cultural identity, the Toraja ethnic group as

a migrant community, and social interaction as the primary arena in which cultural adaptation occurs. The research concentrates on the social structure of the Toraja community, their cultural adaptation strategies in daily life, and the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing these strategies.

The research was conducted in Long Beleh Haloq Village from February to May 2025. Data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews with 11 informants selected using purposive sampling, based on social roles, length of residence (minimum five years), age (minimum 20 years), and involvement in social and cultural activities. Informants included Toraja community members, leaders of the Toraja Family Association (IKAT), local residents, and the village head. Secondary data were obtained from books, academic journals, and relevant documents to support the analysis (Sugiyono, 2020). Data collection techniques included observation to capture real social interactions, interviews to explore experiences and perspectives, and documentation to strengthen findings with written and visual evidence.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with continuous verification (Miles et al., 2018). This process was conducted iteratively to identify patterns and themes related to cultural adaptation. Data validity was ensured through triangulation, by cross-checking information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as comparing empirical findings with relevant theoretical perspectives. This approach was applied to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings (Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Structure of the Toraja Community in Long Beleh Haloq Village

The social structure of the Toraja community in Long Beleh Haloq Village reflects a significant adaptive transformation compared to the traditional social system in Tana Toraja. In their place of origin, social status is largely determined by genealogical factors, particularly noble lineage. However, in the migrant context of Long Beleh Haloq, social stratification has shifted toward a more functional and egalitarian system. Social status is no longer inherited but constructed through individual attitudes, social interactions, and contributions to communal life. All members have relatively equal opportunities to gain social recognition based on their participation and responsibilities within the community.

This transformation illustrates a fluid and open social structure shaped by everyday social interactions. Active involvement in community activities and local organizations, particularly the Toraja Family Association (Ikatan Keluarga Toraja—IKAT), plays a crucial role in shaping social status and roles within the Toraja migrant community. IKAT serves as an important social institution that facilitates coordination, solidarity, and collective action among Toraja migrants. Engagement in this organization often functions as an informal indicator of social standing within the community. This condition aligns with Soerjono Soekanto's theory of social interaction, which emphasizes that social structure is formed through dynamic interactions and social roles rather than hereditary factors (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2021a).

Strong kinship ties remain a defining feature of the Toraja community in Long Beleh Haloq Village. Although separated from their homeland, Toraja migrants maintain a strong sense of familial solidarity that extends beyond blood relations. Kinship relations are socially constructed through shared experiences, mutual support, and collective identity as migrants. This solidarity is expressed through cooperation in social, religious, and communal activities, as well as mutual assistance during times of hardship. Such cooperative practices function as social capital that supports cultural adaptation in a multiethnic environment. This finding is consistent with Gillin and Gillin's concept of

cooperation as a form of social interaction that strengthens social solidarity and group cohesion (Gillin & Gillin, 1954; Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2021a).

Social institutions, particularly the family and IKAT, play a central role in sustaining social order and cultural continuity within the Toraja community. The family acts as the primary agent of socialization, transmitting core cultural values such as respect for elders, mutual assistance, and social harmony. Meanwhile, IKAT functions as a collective institution that reinforces kinship bonds, preserves cultural values, and facilitates social adaptation in the migrant context. These roles reflect the functions of social institutions as described by (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2021a), namely providing behavioral guidelines, maintaining social solidarity, and exercising social control. Furthermore, Putra & Lestari (2021) emphasize that IKAT serves as both a cultural preservation mechanism and a social communication platform that enables Toraja migrants to maintain their cultural identity while adapting to diverse social environments.

Social values and norms continue to serve as the moral foundation of Toraja social life in Long Beleh Haloq Village. Core values such as mutual cooperation, solidarity, respect, and togetherness are consistently practiced in everyday interactions. These values are reinforced by the Toraja philosophical principle *misa kada dipotuo pantan kada dipomate* (united in life, separated only in death), which strengthens collective responsibility and social cohesion. Norms governing politeness, respect for elders, and mutual assistance contribute to harmonious relationships both within the Toraja community and with the wider local society. This condition supports Koentjaraningrat's view that culture functions as a system of values and norms that guide human behavior, regulate social interactions, and maintain societal balance (Koentjaraningrat, 2015a)

Cultural Adaptation Strategies of the Toraja Ethnic Group in Social Life in Long Beleh Haloq Village
 Everyday Communication and Social Interaction

Everyday communication constitutes a fundamental aspect of the cultural adaptation strategy of the Toraja ethnic group in Long Beleh Haloq Village. Through open, polite, and respectful communication, the Toraja community is able to establish harmonious social relationships with local residents from diverse cultural backgrounds. In a multicultural social context, communication functions as a primary medium for mutual understanding and social integration (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2021a).

In daily life, the Toraja community employs bilingual communication by using both the Toraja language and Indonesian. The Toraja language is predominantly used in intra-ethnic interactions, particularly within family settings and internal community activities, as a means of preserving cultural identity and strengthening group solidarity. Meanwhile, Indonesian is used in interactions with local residents and individuals from other ethnic groups, reflecting an adaptive response to the broader social environment. This bilingual communication pattern demonstrates the adaptive capacity of the Toraja community to integrate into a new social setting without losing its cultural identity (Kim in Fres, 2022). These social interactions are illustrated in Figure 4.5



Figure 4.5 Social interaction activities between the Toraja ethnic group and local communities during community events in Long Beleh Haloq Village.

Active participation in community events indicates intensive communication and reciprocal social relations between the Toraja community and local residents. Through everyday communication, the Toraja people not only exchange information but also learn local norms and customs as part of a continuous process of cultural adaptation (Kim in Fres, 2022).

Work as a Cultural Adaptation Strategy

Work serves as one of the main means through which the Toraja community in Long Beleh Haloq Village adapts to its new environment. Through occupational activities, the Toraja people not only meet their economic needs but also establish social relationships and strengthen cooperation with local communities. From the perspective of cultural ecology, cultural adaptation strategies are closely influenced by physical and social environmental conditions (Berry, 2020).

Most members of the Toraja community are engaged in agriculture and plantation sectors, particularly oil palm plantations, as well as other forms of work aligned with local economic opportunities. This occupational choice reflects the ability of the Toraja people to adapt to the natural environment and economic structure of Long Beleh Haloq Village. In performing their work, the Toraja community is widely recognized for its strong work ethic, including diligence, honesty, and responsibility, which represent enduring cultural values carried from their homeland. This work-related interaction is depicted in Figure 4.6



Figure 4.6 Daily work activities of the Toraja ethnic group in oil palm plantations together with local communities.

The figure illustrates that work functions as a space for social interaction that fosters mutual trust and positive interdependence among community members. Thus, work not only represents an economic activity but also acts as a medium for cultural adaptation and social integration (Berry, 2020)

Social Relations and Participation in Community Activities

Social relations are a crucial element in the lives of the Toraja community in Long Beleh Haloq Village. As migrants, the Toraja people recognize that the ability to establish positive social relationships is key to gaining acceptance in a new social environment. Social interaction grounded in openness, tolerance, and cooperation serves as the foundation for harmonious community life (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2021b).

The Toraja community actively participates in various village activities, such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), community service, and national celebrations. Such participation strengthens social bonds with local residents and reinforces social solidarity within the village. This involvement is clearly reflected in Figure 4.7



Figure 4.7 Activities of Independence Day celebrations and mutual cooperation during community service in the village environment,

In addition to maintaining relationships with local residents, the Toraja community also preserves strong intra-ethnic social ties based on cultural values such as *siri'* (self-respect) and *kasiturusan* (togetherness). These values guide social behavior and interactions, ensuring that social relationships are not merely functional but also rooted in deeply embedded cultural norms (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2021b).

Cultural Preservation through Toraja Wedding Ceremony (*Rampanan Kapa'*)

The Toraja traditional wedding ceremony (*Rampanan Kapa'*) represents a significant form of cultural preservation maintained by the Toraja community in Long Beleh Haloq Village. For the Toraja people, marriage is not merely a personal union but also a social event involving extended families and the wider community. From an anthropological perspective, traditional ceremonies function as value systems that guide social behavior and cultural continuity (Koentjaraningrat, 2015).

The implementation of *Rampanan Kapa'* in Long Beleh Haloq Village is conducted in an adaptive manner by adjusting to the social and economic conditions of each family. Although not all traditional stages are performed in full, core values such as mutual cooperation, responsibility, and respect for ancestors are consistently upheld. This ceremony also serves as a means of strengthening social solidarity and maintaining cultural identity in a migrant context (Wiranata, 2018). This cultural practice is illustrated in Figure 4.8



Figure 4.8 The implementation of the Toraja traditional wedding ceremony (*Rampanan Kapa'*) in Long Beleh Haloq Village

The participation of local community members reflects harmonious interethnic relations and mutual respect across cultural boundaries. Therefore, *Rampanan Kapa'* functions not only as a form of cultural preservation but also as an effective cultural adaptation strategy that reinforces social integration within a multicultural society (Koentjaraningrat, 2015b; Wiranata, 2018)

Factors Supporting and Inhibiting the Cultural Adaptation Strategies of the Toraja Ethnic Group in Long Beleh Haloq Village

Supporting Factors (Internal and External)

Supporting factors play a crucial role in determining the success of the Toraja community in adapting to the social and cultural environment of Long Beleh Haloq Village. Cultural adaptation is influenced not only by individuals' personal ability to adjust but also by the strength of internal values within the community and external support from the surrounding social environment. Internally, the Toraja community draws strength from cultural values such as solidarity, togetherness, and cohesion, which have long been embedded in their social practices. Externally, support comes from the local community's acceptance, openness, and collaboration, as well as institutional backing from village authorities (Berry, 2020).

Internal support is visible through the strong sense of mutual assistance and solidarity among Toraja members. Organizations such as the Ikatan Keluarga Toraja (IKAT) help maintain this sense of togetherness by organizing and facilitating social and cultural activities. These internal values provide a resilient foundation that helps the community navigate economic and social challenges in the migrant setting. In addition, external support significantly contributes to successful adaptation. Acceptance from local residents and encouragement from the village government create an inclusive social environment in which the Toraja community can participate actively in village activities, such as communal work (*gotong royong*), cultural celebrations, and religious events, without facing ethnic or religious discrimination. The village authorities also provide space for traditional Toraja ceremonies, allowing the community to practice their culture while integrating with local society.

This balanced interaction between internal cultural values and external social support reflects Berry's (2020) integration strategy, in which the Toraja community preserves their cultural identity while actively participating in the host society. Factors such as mutual cooperation, social acceptance, and solidarity reinforce this integrative approach, allowing cultural adaptation to proceed smoothly while maintaining social harmony. The Toraja people's presence in Long Beleh Haloq exemplifies how cultural integration can foster peaceful coexistence in a multicultural environment.

Inhibiting Factors (Internal and External)

Despite these supporting factors, the Toraja community also encounters challenges originating from both internal and external sources. Internal obstacles are primarily related to coordination within the community and the implementation of cultural practices. Some Toraja households are geographically dispersed, making it difficult to organize communal activities efficiently. Additionally, initial migration often requires adaptation to new social norms, balancing the preservation of cultural identity with the need to conform to local social systems (Kim, 2022).

Internal challenges also include limitations in organizing traditional ceremonies and maintaining the relevance of cultural practices in a migrant context. For instance, certain rituals, including religious and cultural events, may need to be simplified to fit local conditions while adhering to the principle of "*di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung*", meaning the community preserves ancestral traditions as long as they do not conflict with local norms. Such adaptations demonstrate the Toraja community's capacity to maintain cultural continuity while respecting local regulations, ensuring that traditional practices remain meaningful and socially accepted.

Externally, minor misunderstandings or differences in social norms may occur between the Toraja community and local residents. However, these differences rarely lead to conflict due to the local community's openness and willingness to respect cultural diversity. Challenges are often resolved through dialogue and family-oriented approaches, reinforcing harmonious relations. Local participation in social events, such as communal gatherings or Toraja weddings, reflects positive social integration and mutual acceptance.

This situation aligns with Kim (2022) theory of cultural adaptation, which emphasizes that adaptation is a dynamic process often accompanied by cultural stress (*culture shock*). Success in adaptation depends on open, flexible, and effective communication strategies to navigate cultural differences. For the Toraja in Long Beleh Haloq, maintaining respectful dialogue, observing local norms, and resolving issues collaboratively are key to overcoming both internal and external obstacles. Consequently, despite challenges such as dispersed households, coordination difficulties, and minor cultural discrepancies, the Toraja community effectively preserves social harmony and cultural identity in a multicultural environment.

Furthermore, Koentjaraningrat (2015a) supports this perspective by emphasizing that every society possesses universal cultural elements, including value systems, norms, and social interactions, which regulate communal life. Values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and respect are central to achieving social harmony. In Long Beleh Haloq, these cultural values enable the Toraja community to maintain a balanced relationship with local residents while sustaining their own cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

The Toraja community in Long Beleh Haloq Village demonstrates an open and egalitarian social structure, where status is determined by responsibility, contribution, and exemplary behavior rather than ancestry. Social relations are based on *gotong royong*, solidarity, and mutual respect, supported by family institutions and the Ikatan Keluarga Toraja (IKAT), which preserve cultural values and strengthen kinship. Cultural adaptation is evident in communication, work, social interactions, and traditional ceremonies such as Rampanan Kapa', showing a balance between maintaining Toraja identity and integrating into the local multiethnic environment. Internal factors, such as solidarity and active participation in IKAT, and external factors, such as local acceptance and government support, facilitate adaptation, while challenges include dispersed settlements, cultural differences, and administrative limitations. These are managed through open communication, mutual respect, and deliberation, ensuring harmonious social integration.

Based on these findings, the Toraja community is encouraged to continue preserving values like solidarity, togetherness, and communal cooperation to maintain harmonious social relations. Local residents should remain open and respectful toward cultural diversity, while regional authorities should support cultural and social activities, including IKAT, to strengthen interethnic harmony. Future researchers are advised to examine cultural adaptation among other migrant groups or conduct comparative studies to enrich understanding of Indonesia's socio-cultural dynamics. Overall, the successful balance between cultural preservation and social integration illustrates that openness, mutual respect, and cooperation are key to sustainable and inclusive social life in the diaspora.

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