

## Strengthening National Identity Through the Value and Preservation of Tidung Tribe Culture in the Indonesia-Malaysia Border Area

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**Abstract:** This research project explores how the Tidung tribe's culture strengthens national identity in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region on Sebatik Island, an island off the coast of Borneo whose administration is split between Indonesia and Malaysia. Using a qualitative approach, the research analyses how the Tidung culture is preserved through customs, traditional games, and traditional cuisine. Primary data were collected from Tidung community leaders and academics, while secondary data were gathered from cultural documents. The research identified twelve cultural values embedded in the Tidung tribe's customs, traditional games, and traditional cuisine. These values are: religious, mutual cooperation, togetherness, independence, agility, integrity, courage, justice, permanence, firmness, simplicity, and fortitude. These values can strengthen national identity. Additionally, cultural preservation efforts were identified through the Iraw Festival and indigenous community programs. These values and efforts serve to strengthen national identity in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region and preserve the culture of the Tidung tribe.

**Keywords:** National identity, Tidung tribe, cultural preservation, border areas

### Introduction

National identity includes the collective identity of a nation formed by cultural, historical, and social elements (Snegur, 2024); expressed through text, music, and imagery, among other things (Snegur, 2023); and manifests as a political culture that upholds patriotism and national integrity (Filipchuk, 2024). The national identity reflected in the national culture shapes the human personality to foster national pride (Coroianu, 2024). As a unifying force, national identity can also be a source of division, especially if exploited for negative social phenomena (Bieber, 2020). Although national identity serves as a unifying force that strengthens social cohesion through a "supra-identity" framework (Ozer & Schwartz, 2025), it can also be a source of division when exploited for negative social phenomena, creating "affective polarization" that divides society along identity lines (Khrushcheva & Maltby, 2024).

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Social media reinforce the dual nature of national identity through unfiltered nationalist messages, which encourage emotionally charged polarization (Grbeša et al., 2023). This negative phenomenon also occurs in border areas due to the influence of foreign cultures and globalization, resulting in an interaction of transnationalism, cultural hybridization, identity conflicts, and socio-economic gaps. This negative phenomenon can cause conflicts due to the attraction and rejection of cultural traditions, causing tension and challenges in maintaining national identity (Yuriy, 2023). Such symptoms have appeared on Sebatik Island, an island off the coast of Borneo whose administration is split between Indonesia and Malaysia. The cross-border interactions between individuals, combined with the influence of foreign cultures and globalization, have led to a society that is less concerned with others. As a result, it has begun to lose its sense of identity. Therefore, strong cultural resilience is indispensable to guard against the fading of national identity (Kurniasih & Umar, 2022).

People living in the region prefer Malaysian products to Indonesian products (Nasution, 2023) and Malaysian television programs rather than Indonesian television (Briandana, 2019); and there are even teenagers who are thinking of changing citizenship because it is easier to get a job and education in Malaysia (Marlina, 2016). If this influence is left unchecked, the national identity of the Tidung tribe, as an indigenous tribe, will be eroded and eventually become extinct.

Culture is dynamic, by race, ethnicity, caste, background, gender, and kinship relationships. Such processes are characteristic of Indonesia, which is a multicultural country comprising more than 17,000 islands with over 300 ethnic groups and cultures, and dozens of languages (Immanuel et al., 2024; CIA Factbook, 2025). When faced with external influences related to national or international interests, identity will undergo the manifestation and interpretation of the supporting society (Maalouf, 2003). When that happens, space for conflict between communities with various cultures will emerge, and foreign influences will increasingly enter. Cultural resilience is not merely something "passive" but is characterised by the ability to preserve cultural elements. In this case, cultural preservation is also related to the concept of preservation through more specific efforts (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2014).

This study highlights how local Tidung culture in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region has become an arena for performative nationalism by the state, while also becoming a space for identity politics where local communities negotiate their existence as part of the Indonesian nation (Maksum, 2022; Ruhana & Karim, 2024). In this context, the Tidung culture is represented as a national treasure used to strengthen Indonesian identity in the border region. Through a critical approach to cultural representation and state symbolism, this study offers new insights into how nationalism is practiced in the periphery, rather than being monopolized by the center.

This study contributes scientifically to descriptive ethnography and ethnobotany and cultural ecology combining sustainability framework & ethnobiology to understand how cultural ecology reflects collective identity, cultural education (integration of values and character education based on local culture), transnational identity (maintaining identity through art and culture), and language and identity education (extending the ethnographic approach to applied linguistics and resilience tourism studies).

In the context of this study, the existence of the Tidung Tribe as a local indigenous community plays a strategic role in strengthening national identity. The culture and values of local wisdom possessed by the Tidung people represent the nation's cultural richness and function as a social bulwark against the infiltration of foreign cultures that have the potential to weaken the sense of nationalism. This study examines in depth how the cultural values in the traditional games and culinary arts of the Tidung Tribe are actualized to strengthen national identity, especially in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region, which is vulnerable to changes in cultural identity. In addition, this study also examines (1) how the cultural values in the

traditional games and culinary arts of the Tidung Tribe strengthen national identity and (2) how identity strengthening is carried out through cultural preservation. The analysis in this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits in efforts to preserve local culture as a basis for strengthening national identity in the border regions of Indonesia.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Regional culture will still be present in life if it has potential to be preserved and advanced. Cultural preservation, such as the Tumpeng Sewu Tradition in Kemiren Village, plays an important role in maintaining cultural resilience. This tradition sustains cultural identity and also contributes to socio-economic development, particularly through tourism (Danugroho, 2023). In this context, cultural awareness is related to the form of intense feelings about the heart, creativity, and response from cultivation and power; while cultural resilience is related to the dynamic conditions of a nation to face all kinds of threats, challenges, obstacles and disturbances that arise. To achieve this, cultural support communities must have cultural awareness and resilience. (Kurniasih & Umar, 2022)

Ethnic identity is not characterised by its essential and static nature, but rather is shaped by politics, institutional structures, and local agents. Therefore, modernization, elite relations, and public discourse can ignite and trigger the reconfiguration of ethnic identity (Bria & Lam, 2022). Meanwhile, national identity is shaped through local and colonial historical narratives, producing a significant influence on the perceptions of nationality among border residents (Pirous, 2011). In the context of this study, Tidung identity is nurtured and activated by the role of the state, cultural festivals, education, and cross-border influences as part of the construction of "Indonesianness." Tidung cultural festivals or traditional performances are a way for the state to visualize "Indonesianness" and serve as a symbolic strategy to maintain national loyalty in border regions.

Research related to the Tidung tribe has not explicitly explored the use of Tidung culture to strengthen national identity. The existing results only provide an overview of the efforts to preserve the culture of the Tidung tribe in strengthening Indonesia's national identity, including cultural values in customs, traditional games, and traditional cuisine. This article focuses on revealing the values contained in the traditional culture, traditional games, and traditional cuisine of the Tidung tribe in Nunukan Regency that can strengthen national identity. In addition, this article also reveals preservation efforts made to strengthen national identity. By maintaining the values and preserving the culture of the Tidung tribe as a regional identity, the national identity is getting stronger, so that the sense of Indonesianness of the people in the region is also higher.

Thus, the novelty of this research is evident in how local culture, specifically the Tidung tribe's culture, is preserved as a tradition and serves as an instrument of national resilience. This approach links cultural preservation with strategic policies in maintaining national identity and integrity.

The urgency of this research lies in the on the border area as a strategic area for strengthening national identity. The Indonesia-Malaysia border area is a strategic area that is often considered vulnerable to the infiltration of foreign cultures. Studies that emphasize the importance of strengthening national identity in border areas are highly relevant, especially in facing the challenges of globalization and cross-border pressures. In addition, linking the preservation of local culture with cultural diplomacy in the context of borders can be a new approach that is rarely discussed in the study of nationalism and culture.

As a form of existence that distinguishes a nation from others, national identity is important in the setting of international relations. Identity will experience the form and interpretation of the supporting society in the face of external influences related to national and

even international interests. People often forget the essence of identity in the life of the nation during times of change. Edensor (2020) stated that national identity in a country can be formed by daily practices such as eating habits, travelling, watching movies, or listening to music, influenced by globalization that penetrates time and space. On the other hand, Obradović and Bowe (2020) illustrated that national identity begins when there is a relationship between groups that form the construction of national identity in a sustainable way, when history tells it positively, but not when history tells it negatively.

Research related to national identity, Manapova (2020) found that natural and geographical factors shape mentality, while constructivism and instrumentalism emphasize how the role of elites and politics in shaping identity through mythology and mass media. Therefore, national identity is a complex issue that is influenced by historical circumstances and cultural, social and religious differences (Legchilin, 2020). National identity is inextricably linked to the culture, and its realization in various spheres of public life can shape one's place in society and influence their interactions with the media. (Pavlyuk, 2020). Consumers who have the habit of consuming iconic domestic products are part of efforts to build a national identity that can be called product patriotism. (Spielmann et al., 2020). Building on this view, del Campo and Gil-Calvo (1994) argue that the cultural solidity of a country depends on the awareness of its inhabitants to show each other the same national identity and that society at a very nationalist level will resist the invasion of foreign cultures. In this context, Zhang et al. (2021) emphasized that culture and creative tourism contribute to the development of national identity towards tourists who come through long-term and short-term cultural memory.

Vechirko (2024) examined the concept of national identity through the analysis of exotic novels, and the French author Prosper Mérimée found that literature plays an important role in shaping national identity by reflecting national customs, folklore, and myths. Prosper Mérimée's work, explores national character and ethnocultural paradigms through narratives that explore the psychological depths of the people's mentality.

Research on the representation of national identity in EFL textbooks in Vietnam found that the textbooks consistently emphasized the idea of being part of a nation (民族) and living in a sacred national territory, which strengthened a strong sense of belonging and unity among the Vietnamese people. National identity in Vietnam is closely related to the concept of a common national territory and a sense of collective belonging to the nation (Phuong & Vanderstraeten, 2024). Strengthening the nation's identity through the preservation of the Tidung tribe culture in the Sebatik area (Indonesia-Malaysia border) includes cultural, educational, and historical strategies.

In the history of human development, culture is inseparable from the issue of identity, which is the bearer of culture. In the complex modern era, there has been a shift in the understanding of identity, which is now seen as more dynamic, that is, it can be formed, constructed, unstable, and modifiable. Identity can be formed by race, ethnicity, caste, background, gender, kinship, religion and even class, and everything can be summarized under a power or state, which can all depend on the state to activate it. A person's identity is a sign, both for individuals and for a large group, that influences the formation of behaviour. Identity cannot be said to be absolute; it is not given only once and for all (Maalouf, 2003).

Numerous scholars have examined the factors that impact national identity. For example, [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) emphasized that cultural objects play an important role in shaping the nation's identity, particularly in preserving cultural heritage. Bria and Lam (2022) examined how communities helped maintain national identity in the border areas of Indonesia and Timor Leste. In this case, maintaining the nation's identity included preserving local culture, actively participating in national ceremonies, and upholding the national language, all of which contribute to a sense of nationalism and unity. Hadj et al. (2022), showed that cultural activities and sports significantly strengthened national identity. In this context, attention to cultural

heritage fosters patriotism and unity, which further strengthens the integrity and identity of the nation.

Cultural products that contain life values and community characters function as a medium to strengthen the nation's identity. This strengthening is essential for the local community and contributes to the nation's pride and identity on a broader scale (Ramadhoni et al., 2024). In addition, studying historic figures can instill a sense of patriotism and nationalism, enabling the younger generation to gain insight into the nation's strength and potential and thus grow and cultivate a strong national identity. (Khaeruddin et al., 2024)

Fostering appreciation and respect for diversity, the preservation of cultures, such as art, music, and traditional languages, is essential because the impact of cultural influences across border regions is powerful. In areas with diverse societal impacts the integration of national history and cultural narratives into the educational curriculum can help students develop a deep sense of belonging and responsibility towards their nation. (Rizky et al., 2024). In border communities such as Sebatik Island, civic education is essential to strengthening national identity, which can be done by instilling national values and social cohesion with various methods, including lectures, socialization, and field action (Wahyudi et al., 2024). Strengthening of nationalism in border areas can be shown through the presence of the state in physical development, assistance, and the provision of education and community empowerment (Sudagung, 2021) and the use of cultural revitalization (Fitriasari, 2022).

Pancasila is the official, foundational philosophical theory of Indonesia. Five main principles drive this philosophy: religion, nationalism, integrity, independence and mutual cooperation. None of these values stands alone or develops independently; they interact with each other, develop dynamically and form a unit (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2014). These values have developed into eighteen character education values, namely religion, the spirit of hard work, love for the homeland, tolerance, respect for achievements, discipline, friendship or communication, hard work, love of peace, creativity, love of reading, independence, care for the environment, democracy, social care, curiosity, responsibility, and care for the environment.

It is essential to implement programs that aim to strengthen the nation's identity. The dynamics on the Indonesia-Malaysia border, which are influenced by political, economic, and security factors, require the strengthening of national cultural values (Maisondra et al., 2024). For this reason, cultural preservation through indigenous communities is essential. Stakeholders must adapt and innovate to preserve culture and strengthen identity in border areas.

## **Methodology**

### **Method**

The method used was qualitative descriptive with an ethnographic approach, which sought to explore the culture and, social phenomena in culture, and conduct data analysis and data interpretation about the meaning of human actions in cultural activities (Aktinson & Hammersley, 1994). The culture of the Tidung tribe was chosen because the people are indigenous residents of Nunukan Regency with diverse cultural practices.

### **Population and Sample**

Data sources included 15 indigenous Tidung residents (informants) residing in Sebatik and Nunukan. They were five Tidung traditional leaders, including the traditional leader and guardian of tradition; three community leaders and village elders with in-depth knowledge of Tidung history and cultural values; four Tidung youth active in cultural preservation through

local organizations and arts activities; and three local officials from the regional government and cultural institutions involved in managing cultural programs in the border area. This number was sufficient to ensure representation of perspectives across generations and social roles within the community.

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling approach, with the following criteria: (a) having direct knowledge and experience related to Tidung culture and the dynamics of local identity in the border area; (b) being actively involved in cultural preservation activities (such as festivals, traditional education, cultural rituals); (c) having social authority or influence in the community, or representing the younger generation; and (d) being willing to be interviewed openly and ethically. Snowball sampling was used to reach additional informants recommended by previous informants. In addition, document analysis was conducted to collect data from materials and records relevant to the phenomenon under study. We conducted document studies on archives and key records related to Tidung tribal culture, as well as on research reports, decrees, and local government regulations concerning customary villages.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through (1) in-depth interviews with an average duration of 90-120 minutes, (2) participant observation of cultural activities such as traditional ceremonies, traditional dance training, and community festivals, and (3) secondary documentation, including archives, local documentary videos, and government policy documents related to border culture. Direct observation was also carried out by observing customs, traditional games, and culinary practices, as well as the environment. The observations aimed to capture the dynamics between cultural actors and their environment, along with the range of activities undertaken within that context. The researchers served as interviewers and paid special attention to customs, traditional games, and cuisine, with a data collection time in the field of 18 days. The research data are in the form of the Tidung tribal culture: three customs (*tolak bala*, *nugal*, and *asrakal*), three traditional games (*manyipit*, *babitor*, and *kuntau*), and three traditional culinary practices (*talul biawan*, *dudul masikat*, and *lawar paria*).

### **Analysis**

Data were analyzed through thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedures, which included (1) data familiarization (rereading interview transcripts and field notes), (2) initial coding (identifying units of meaning based on topics such as "cultural performativity," "threats to Malaysian acculturation," or "the role of youth"), (3) theme determination (grouping codes into broader analytical themes), (4) theme review (assessing data consistency and relationships between themes), (5) theme naming and definition (structuring narratives and in-depth meanings of each finding), and (6) reporting results (presenting findings in the form of direct quotations, narrative summaries, and theoretical interpretations). We conducted cross-validation by triangulating data from informants and field observations to enhance data reliability.

### **Positionality and Reflexivity**

The researchers had partial ethnic ties to the Tidung community, allowing initial access. However, as academics living largely outside the border region, the researchers also brought an outsider perspective, similar to other researchers from outside the Tidung ethnic group. During interviews and observations, reflexivity was exercised through field observations and collaboration with local figures to check for interpretive bias. Researchers recognized that their

experiences and backgrounds shape interpretations of cultural rituals and narratives, so each conclusion was compared with informant validation to maintain the validity of the data. These researchers' backgrounds served as methodological strengths, boosting the scientific validity of the data and aligning the research with the community's ethical values and narrative justice.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Before publication, preliminary findings were communicated to the community. members then cross-examined interpretations and meanings to ensure accuracy and relevance, and necessary changes were made.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research received Ethical Clearance Approval on Social Studies and Humanities Research No: 141/ Ke.01/Sk/02/2024 from the National Research and Innovation Agency. Approval was obtained (before data collection) through meetings/consultations with Tidung traditional or cultural leaders to explain the objectives, methods, benefits, and data collection; followed by meetings with the community to obtain verbal and written consent. The researchers also provided informed consent to informants. They were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time if deemed necessary. The names and identities of informants were anonymized to maintain their confidentiality and comfort. Then, informants were interviewed voluntarily in Indonesian and local languages. The findings were validated with the community through discussions to ensure the research results also reflected local perspectives, respected local wisdom, and provided benefits to the community.

### **Findings**

#### ***Strengthening National Identity through Cultural Values and Preservation of Customs***

The data analysis, found that the culture of the Tidung tribe strengthens national identity through cultural values and cultural preservation efforts. Table 1 describes strengthening identity through cultural values and preservation in customs, traditional games and traditional cuisine, then continues by describing cultural preservation that develops in the community. The data in Table 1 show that customs internalize the fundamental values that underpin the construction of national identity. Values such as religiosity, cooperation, and togetherness are not just ceremonial elements, but act as social mechanisms that maintain community cohesion and strengthen national bonds in the living space of border communities. Customs, in this context, serve as a system of meaning that unites spiritual expression and social solidarity in a single cultural narrative. Its hereditary sustainability shows the success of preservation and the capacity of local culture to survive and adapt to the pressures of external values. In other words, customs protect local identities and strengthen the national foundations of the periphery, where geographical boundaries are often also the boundaries of identity.

**Table 1**  
***Cultural Values and Preservation of Customs***

Custom	Description	Strengthening National Identity	
		Cultural Values	Cultural Preservation
<b><i>Tulak Bala</i></b>	<i>Tulak bala</i> is a tradition of reciting prayers simultaneously in the month of Safar because the month is considered hot and has many disasters. The implementation involves gathering the people of one village in a house located at the bottom and close to the river, typically inviting the mosque's imam to serve as the prayer reader. In addition to prayers, a meal was also held together. <i>Ketupat</i> garbage is thrown into the sea to show that all disasters are also wasted.	religious, mutual cooperation, togetherness	Festival <i>Iraw</i>  Indigenous communities
<b><i>Nugal</i></b>	<i>Nugal</i> is a seed-sowing ceremony and part of the agricultural ritual of the Tidung Tribe. This ceremony is carried out before the rice planting season arrives. The word <i>nugal</i> means planting with the help of a stick, done by mothers. Men are in charge of cleaning the beheading place. In this ritual, prayers are recited, and the host also serves coffee or cakes. The decapitation prayer contains a request to Allah so that the seeds planted can give good results.	religious, mutual cooperation, togetherness	
<b><i>Asrakal</i></b>	<i>Asrakal</i> is a ceremonial procession to celebrate the birth of a child, symbolizing self-purification and gratitude to God. Led by two individuals who move in a circular route, the ritual involves shaving the infant's hair, with the number of rounds corresponding to the number of participants cutting their hair. Beyond its role as a Tidung cultural tradition, <i>Asrakal</i> serves to instill spiritual values from an early age, blending Islamic principles with local customs. It is also believed to ward off misfortune or negative energy, with the hope that the child will grow up healthy and protected from both physical and spiritual harm.	religious, mutual cooperation, togetherness	

### ***Strengthening National Identity through Cultural Values and Preservation in Traditional Games***

Table 2 shows that the traditional games of Tidung internalize the values of agility, courage, and togetherness. These values are the foundation for the formation of the character of border communities, as well as an instrument to strengthen social ties. This shows that although traditional games have become a vehicle for character inheritance, the values of moral courage and ethical consistency have not been fully internalized in the overall game. It is necessary to recontextualize the game to expand the spectrum of values conveyed, including the formation of characters that are more adaptive to the social dynamics in the border region. Thus, the preservation of traditional games is not just a form of cultural conservation, but is part of a social resilience strategy amid the pressure of cross-border cultural globalization.



**Table 2**  
*Cultural Values and Preservation in Traditional Games*

Traditional Game	Description	Strengthening National Identity	
		Cultural Values	Cultural Preservation
<b>Manyipit or sapuk</b>	<i>Manyipit</i> (also known as <i>sapuk</i> ) is a traditional Tidung activity that originated as a silent, long-range hunting and combat weapon. Over time, it evolved into a traditional game and sport, played individually or in groups in a competitive format. Its purpose is to provide entertainment while training agility, concentration, mental discipline, and physical strength. Suitable for all ages, the game requires players to focus on a single target, demanding precision and sustained attention.	independence, agility, togetherness	Festival irau Indigenous communities
<b>Bebitor</b>	<i>Bebitor</i> is a traditional game of the Tidung people, particularly in Nunukan Regency, played by using the feet to lift and drop stones onto target stones placed on a flat line. A point is scored when a player successfully strikes the target stone, and the winner is the one with the highest score. The game progresses in stages, beginning with aiming by throwing stones at the targets. It requires at least two players, usually no more than five, and follows a competitive match system.	independence, integrity, agility, togetherness	
<b>Kuntau</b>	<i>Kuntau</i> is a traditional martial art of the Tidung people, practiced for centuries and passed down through generations. Once a mandatory skill, it combines combat techniques with dance-like movements. Performed by both men and women, it can be practiced individually, in groups, or sparring, with variations ranging from bare-hand techniques to the use of sharp weapons. Its diverse repertoire adapts to different contexts and is commonly showcased at cultural events, particularly weddings, as well as festivals across Tidung communities in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.	independence, courage, agility, togetherness	

### ***Strengthening National Identity through Cultural Values and Preservation in Traditional Culinary***

Table 3 below shows that Tidung traditional cuisine reflects daily consumption practices and becomes a symbolic medium that reflects the value system and collective perspective of border communities. Values such as togetherness, simplicity, fortitude, and justice are internalized through communal production processes and the selection of materials that represent resilience in limitations. In the socio-cultural context of Tidung, culinary practices play a role as an instrument of identity reproduction that connects generations, strengthens solidarity, and affirms a dignified but straightforward narrative of life. Thus, traditional food becomes an effective means of maintaining the continuity of inclusive and grounded national values.

Cultural preservation is interpreted both as an effort to maintain the outer form of tradition and as a strategy to revitalize values through participatory spaces. Cultural festivals like Iraw serve as a collective platform to revive traditional practices, traditional games, and

culinary expressions as a unified value system. This celebration creates an informal but impactful cultural learning ecosystem, especially for the younger generation who are directly connected to their cultural roots. Outside of ceremonial events, indigenous communities play a strategic role in maintaining cultural continuity through art development and education programs based on local wisdom. This approach shows that cultural preservation is not just the protection of memory, but the affirmation of a collective identity that is dynamic and relevant to the challenges of the times.

**Table 3**  
*Cultural values and preservation in traditional culinary*

Traditional Culinary	Description	Identity Strengthening	
		Cultural Values	Cultural Preservation
<i>Talu Biawan</i>	<i>Talu biawan</i> is a traditional Tidung ring-shaped cake made from rice flour, brown sugar, and banana, characterized by a crisp exterior and soft interior with a distinct banana aroma. In the Tidung language, <i>tal</i> <i>biawan</i> means "three noisy people" ( <i>tal</i> = three, <i>bi</i> <i>yang</i> = storm), a reference to a local tale about three individuals speaking loudly while preparing it. Earlier versions featured four holes, symbolizing fairness or equal division among four groups. The later single-hole design, resembling a ring, conveys a philosophy of unity and inseparability, reflecting the belief that harmony and collaboration among diverse elements produce outcomes greater than their parts	togetherness and cooperation, just	Festifal irau Indigenous communities
<i>Dudul Masikat</i>	<i>Dudul masikat</i> is a traditional sweet, chewy confection resembling the widely known Indonesian <i>dodol</i> , made from glutinous rice flour, coconut milk, and brown sugar. In the Tidung language, <i>masikat</i> means "to stick firmly," describing the cake's sticky texture, which symbolizes enduring bonds and unity. In some dialects, it also conveys firmness or permanence. The cake is regarded as a cultural metaphor for the resilience of family and fraternal ties, with its cohesive texture reflecting the hope that these relationships remain strong and inseparable.	togetherness, permanence, strength, hope	
<i>Lawar Paria</i>	<i>Lawar paria</i> is a traditional Tidung dish prepared from <i>paria</i> (bitter melon) mixed with young mango, grated coconut, shallots, chili, and spices, all combined raw without cooking—a method known locally as <i>lawar</i> . In Malay and related languages, <i>paria</i> is also called <i>peria</i> , though its linguistic origin remains uncertain. The dish reflects simplicity, using readily available ingredients to create a nutritious and flavorful meal, symbolizing togetherness and sufficiency. Its bitterness embodies patience, resilience, and the capacity to endure life's hardships while still offering benefits to others, reflecting Tidung cultural philosophy.	simplicity, togetherness, and fortitude	

## Discussion

### *Strengthening National Identity through Cultural Values*

Cultural values born from traditional customs, games, and traditional culinary practices in the Tidung community substantially contribute to the strengthening of national identity, as stated by Snegur (2023, 2024). It is a collective construction formed from cultural, historical, and social elements, and expressed through symbols and practices that live in everyday life. Furthermore, this identity plays a role in building a political culture that upholds integrity and national spirit (Filipchuk, 2024) as well as forming the personality of citizens who are rooted in pride in their homeland (Coroianu, 2024).

The recurring customs of the Tidung people embody profound values of religiosity and social solidarity. Similarly, traditional agrarian practices preceding the planting season reflect cooperative values and gratitude for the interdependence between humans and nature. Meanwhile, in the life-cycle rites that welcome the birth of new family members, an essential message about self-purification and respect for life reflects the view that cultural resilience results from a combination of cultural awareness and community resilience in the face of external challenges. (Kurniasih & Umar, 2022).

The whole practice maintains ethnic identity while simultaneously, becoming a mechanism for the transmission of national values that strengthen social cohesion and deepen the collective experience as part of the Indonesian nation. This perspective reflects the theoretical approach to national identity as a dynamic construct, continually shaped through cultural practices that are alive in people's daily lives (Edensor, 2020). In essence, national identity is a manifestation of cultural values that grow and develop in various aspects of life and become a distinguishing marker of a nation from other nations.

In Tidung culture, values such as independence, courage, and the spirit of togetherness contained in traditional games as a form of collective physical activity inherited from generation to generation still seem to be reflected in people's daily behaviour. The findings support Hadj et al. (2022), who stated that cultural activities such as sports and folk games significantly strengthen national identity among the younger generation. These values not only form a strong national character, but also function as strategic social capital, especially for border communities that are always in a vulnerable position to external influences.

In the face of cross-border interactions involving national and global interests, cultural identity tends to undergo negotiation of meaning and interpretation adjustment by its supporting communities. (Maalouf, 2003). The geographical position of the Tidung people, who live in the country's border area, is a real representation of the leading layers of citizens. Therefore, the preservation of traditional cultural forms such as folk games is crucial, considering the existence of modern digital games that often lead to individualism and neglect of collective values. If left unchecked, modern digital games can weaken the national mentality of the younger generation, especially in strategic areas such as borders. Therefore, the revitalization of traditional games is an agenda for cultural preservation and should also be considered a cultural strategy that can strengthen ideological resilience and national character. This reminds us of the work of Briandana (2019), who noted that transnational media have the potential to form a dual identity that weakens national identity awareness, especially in border areas, and digital penetration can erode the collective values of border communities.

On the other hand, Vechirko (2024) emphasized that cultural objects, such as culinary practices and literature, also play a role in shaping the collective imagination and national identity through local narratives and symbolism. The traditional cuisine of the Tidung people fulfills the function of consumption and also becomes a symbolic medium to transmit cultural values that strengthen collective identity. Various typical foods such as rice-based snacks and

processed local vegetables reflect the values of togetherness, constancy, and simplicity embedded in people's lives. From a symbolic cultural perspective, the name and culinary form contain a philosophical meaning that reflects the relationship between humans, nature, and social values.

The value of simplicity reflected in the characteristics of the taste, ingredients, and presentation of the food shows an attachment to the local cultural heritage. It forms an open and inclusive attitude towards social diversity. This inclusive attitude is evident in the Tidung people's acceptance of the existence of immigrant tribes in their area, without viewing them as a threat. This aligns with Ramadhoni et al. (2024), who argued that cultural products that reflect local character can strengthen national identity as well as collective pride.

This attitude reflects cultural resilience that can adapt without losing identity, while strengthening social capital in border communities. In this framework, cuisine becomes part of a national narrative that lives in daily practice, where local values are integrated with the dynamics of national pluralism. Against the backdrop of rapid social transformation, often leading to value fragmentation due to digitalization and global trends, traditional cuisine plays a strategic role as a marker of cultural stability. It maintains the traces of local culture and strengthens the resilience of national identity from the grassroots, especially in areas that are vulnerable to value negotiation due to cross-cultural encounters (Yuriy, 2023).

Thus, the cultural context of Tidung contains symbolic values and plays a functional role in shaping and maintaining national identity. This research shows that the local culture of the Tidung people, through customs, traditional games, and cuisine, internalizes fundamental values such as religiosity, togetherness, cooperation, integrity, resilience, and simplicity, which are cultural values that form national identity (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2014).

Pavlyuk (2020) stated that the actualization of cultural values in daily life is an effective mechanism in shaping social position and national loyalty. These values are not just heritage, but present in daily practices that shape and strengthen national identity. Customs function as a system of meaning that combines spirituality with social solidarity; traditional games reflect the character of a tough and independent citizen. Meanwhile, traditional cuisine is a narrative symbol that unites people, nature, and social values in everyday life. These three are both cultural elements and a resilient and inclusive value ecosystem. Bria and Lam (2022) emphasized that ethnic identities such as Tidung can be reconfigured by political dynamics, elite relations, and active public discourse in the context of border communities that are vulnerable to shifting values due to cross-border interactions.

In a broader perspective, national identity is not formed solely from historical narratives and political constructions, but rather from cultural practices that are repeated and live in the collective consciousness. In this context, cultural resilience is the key for the nation to face global threats, which can only be built through high cultural awareness and participation. (Danugroho, 2023).

Therefore, cultural communities such as the Tidung people play a strategic role in maintaining the continuity of national identity. Phuong and Vanderstraeten (2024) showed that education that emphasizes attachment to national and regional identities has succeeded in fostering a strong sense of nationalism in Vietnam through local resilience that is open to diversity.

Cultural preservation cannot be interpreted simply as the conservation of traditions, but as a transformative effort to strengthen the nation's ideological and social resilience amid the currents of globalization that continue to move across space and time. (Filipchuk, 2024)

The traditional culinary practices of the Tidung people, preserved in daily consumption and the momentum of conventional celebrations in areas such as Nunukan Regency, demonstrate that cultural heritage extends beyond ceremonial spaces into daily life. This preservation carries a deeper meaning, as traditional food is an integral part of a symbol of

national identity that reflects collective values, simplicity and pride. In this context, people's preference for local culinary consumption is both culturally meaningful and a form of emotional and symbolic engagement with the state. As Spielmann et al. (2020) stated, the tendency to choose iconic domestic products can be interpreted as an expression of patriotic products, which is a form of citizens' commitment to strengthening national identity through consumption practices based on local values. Therefore, Tidung traditional cuisine is a cultural product and, a strategic instrument in maintaining the continuity of national identity amid globalization dynamics.

The existence of the cultural identity of the Tidung tribe in Indonesia and Malaysia shows that ethnic attachment is not always a source of disintegration (Khrushcheva & Maltby, 2024). However, Zhang et al. (2021) showed that cultural tourism can strengthen cross-border national identity through the activation of a shared cultural memory that can be a bridge of harmony between countries. The cultural similarities between the Tidung communities in the two countries open up a space for cross-border dialogue that strengthens the recognition of diversity as part of the construction of their respective national identities. In this context, the people of Tidung on the border of North Kalimantan, which is administratively part of Indonesia, show pride in their cultural identity as a reflection of a strong national personality. Coroianu (2024) noted that the national identity reflected in local culture has a vital role in shaping the character of citizens and fostering a sense of pride in the nation.

In the challenges of globalization and the potential for the blurring of national identity boundaries in border areas, Tidung's cultural fortitude has become a strategic social capital. Maisondra et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of identity-strengthening programs in strategic areas such as borders to maintain national stability and cohesion. Through the preservation of customs, traditional games, and distinctive culinary traditions, the Tidung people preserve their existence as an ethnic community and strengthen their position as the guardians of the symbolic line of national identity in the outermost region. Thus, cultural identity is not positioned as a barrier, but rather as a foundation of national unity and pride amid diversity and cross-border pressures.

Cultural contestations in the international arena, such as the unilateral claim of traditional Indonesian food by other countries (Malaysia), including rendang cuisine, are a reminder that cuisine is an artefact of consumption and, a symbol of national identity that has strategic value and must be maintained. Jayme (2022) emphasized that cultural objects such as traditional food have a central role in the construction of national identity, especially in the context of the preservation of cultural heritage. In the case of the Tidung tribe, both communities in Indonesia and Malaysia maintain the same culinary heritage. However, this requires the Tidung people in Indonesia, especially in North Kalimantan, to be more active in affirming their traditional cuisine as part of a legitimate and historically and geographically recognised national identity, rather than relying on external influences (Nasution, 2023). Within this framework, national identity is not static or singular. It is formed through historical dynamics, cultural diversity, social construction, and the role of religious values (Legchilin, 2020). It reminds us that national identity is formed from a complex combination of history, religion, culture, and social structures.

The preservation of the culture of the Tidung tribe is closely related to the religious life of its people, the majority of whom adhere to Islam. The values of togetherness and cooperation that are upheld in spiritual practices are also reflected in their various cultural expressions. The strength of these religious values increases internal social cohesion. It expands ethnic solidarity, as seen in the emergence of collective identity awareness through Pan Dayak organisations that accommodate brotherhood between Dayak and Tidung peoples within the forum of the Kalimantan Indigenous Tribal Alliance. (Sani, 2018)

Therefore, all cultural elements studied in this study refer to the cultural values of the Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (2014) as a resilient cultural ecosystem. Within this framework, the sustainability of the customs, traditional games, and culinary specialties of the Tidung tribe is not solely a form of cultural conservation but an integrative strategy to strengthen national identity. Cultural values practiced in daily life serve as both ideological and social capital for addressing identity challenges amid national plurality and societal change.

### ***Strengthening Identity through Cultural Preservation***

Cultural preservation efforts to strengthen the national identity of the Tidung people in the border region are embodied in the annual Iraw Festival. This festival serves as a collective space to display and inherit the cultural richness of the Tidung tribe in its entirety, ranging from traditional practices, traditional games, to typical culinary dishes. Traditional rituals held before festivals, such as tolak bala, reflect spiritual and social efforts to create community peace. This activity represents a form of performative nationalism, as expressed by Danugroho (2023), which states that cultural and arts festivals are important arenas in building community cohesion and national identity.

Meanwhile, folk games and local cuisine are not just entertainment or ceremonial consumption, but also contain symbols of values such as solidarity, resilience, and local wisdom. Thus, the Iraw Festival is both an annual cultural agenda and, a strategic instrument in strengthening the sense of belonging to the nation's identity, especially in the midst of the challenges of globalization and the potential fading of local culture in border areas. As Bieber (2020) affirmed, cultural products that embody the values and character of the community function as a medium to strengthen the nation's identity and contribute to national pride through the active role of the local community.

The customs of the people in the border areas are not only a local cultural heritage, but also serve as a strategic pillar in strengthening Indonesia's national identity. Amid globalization and the penetration of foreign cultures, customs function as a protective mechanism that maintains the authenticity of cultural values and prevents the assimilation process that can erode the nation's identity. Through the preservation and revitalization of local traditions, border communities maintain their cultural character and affirm the state's symbolic and social presence in a region vulnerable to external influences. Pirous (2011) emphasized that strengthening national identity in border areas is increasingly important, considering that the region is vulnerable to political, economic, and cultural influences across borders. Thus, strengthening customs in border areas is part of a broader cultural strategy to maintain the integrity of national identity while emphasizing state sovereignty in the strategic area.

The traditional games of the people in the border areas do not solely function as entertainment, but are a strategic means of transmitting local cultural values and strengthening national identity. Values such as courage, agility, solidarity, and sportsmanship contained in traditional games form a formidable national character. In the context of borders that are vulnerable to foreign cultural penetration, folk games are an instrument of cultural defense that maintains local uniqueness while strengthening loyalty to the nation. Thus, the preservation of traditional games is part of an artistic strategy that supports national integration in strategic areas. Consistent with this perspective, Rizky et al. (2024) emphasized that preserving traditional arts, music, and languages is crucial in the border region due to the strong influence of foreign cultures.

The traditional cuisine of border communities represents a cultural identity that lives on in daily practice and serves as a powerful symbol of nationality. More than just food, local cuisine contains historical narratives, cooperative values, and collective identities that strengthen people's emotional ties to the homeland (Marlina, 2016). In globalization and the

potential for cross-border cultural assimilation, traditional cuisine has become a tool of cultural diplomacy that introduces the uniqueness of the nation, as well as a vehicle for local economic empowerment and education of national values. Therefore, cuisine is a cultural expression that is also a strategic asset in building identity resilience in border areas. As Sudagung (2021) stated, education based on local wisdom through reading gardens and traditional houses in border areas can instill national values and strengthen social ties between communities. Khaeruddin et al. (2024) emphasized that cultural products embody the values and character of the community serve to strengthen the nation's identity, as well as contribute to national pride through the active role of local communities. In the context of borders, the preservation of cultures such as art, music, and traditional languages has become increasingly crucial given the rapid influence of foreign cultures from neighboring countries.

Building on this approach, several Tidung indigenous communities in Nunukan Regency—such as the Tidung Tribe Customary Institution, the Tidung Citizen Communication Forum, the Tidung Women's Communication Forum, and Gardamaruti (Tidung Cluster Youth and Student Movement)—are collectively involved in cultural preservation through the Tidung art and culture development team, accompanied by Garuda Maruti. One of their strategic initiatives is "*Kampung Cerita Sungai Bilal*," a cultural school based on a local curriculum that includes Tidung language lessons, scientific and literary works, and talent development in dance, traditional games, culinary arts, and distinctive Tidung crafts such as batik, sesingal, and traditional clothing. Through this approach, cultural preservation is an agenda for the protection of local heritage that a sense of identity and strengthens cultural resilience in border areas. Indeed, Fitriasari (2022) stated that culture-based education in border areas increases identity awareness and reduces the alienation that arises due to the central-periphery dynamics of the country.

Cultural preservation efforts by border communities underscore the crucial role of cultural heritage in shaping national identity, particularly through sustainable preservation mechanisms. In this context, community participation in border areas is key to maintaining the spirit of nationalism and strengthening social cohesion (Maksum, 2022). In border areas such as Sebatik Island, education based on local wisdom through reading gardens and traditional houses plays a vital role in instilling national values and strengthening social ties. This approach can be done through lecture methods, socialization, and field actions (Wahyudi et al., 2021). In this case, the involvement of the Tidung indigenous community through local schools and curriculum is an effective cultural strategy to transform national values in the lives of the younger generation. The role of the Tidung traditional chief is also central in this process, considering the high level of community obedience to customary authorities. Traditional heads not only function as cultural guardians but also as social mediators and symbols of community integrity in facing internal and external challenges.

## Conclusion

People in the Sebatik and Nunukan Island areas face a blurred national identity due to the high level of social interaction between Indonesian and Malaysian citizens. These interactions transcend national boundaries and may blur or reshape each other's national identity. Culture serves to reconcile these identity ambiguities by reinforcing shared values. Customary culture, traditional games, and cuisine of the Tidung tribe contribute to the development of strong national values such as cooperation, togetherness, integrity, and courage. This is the strength of Indonesian citizens on the Indonesia–Malaysia border in maintaining their national identity.

Efforts to preserve Tidung culture through the Iraw Festival and initiatives undertaken by indigenous communities through structured cultural programs have a positive impact on both

cultural continuity and the strengthening of national identity. These initiatives help sustain cultural values while simultaneously reinforcing the national identity of people in border areas. This research shows that Tidung's local culture is a strategic element in strengthening national identity in the border area.

The findings underline the critical role of cultural practices in fostering a resilient national identity, especially in border areas vulnerable to external cultural penetration. This research has important implications for the development of theoretical studies, policy formulation, and socio-cultural practices in border regions. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on the construction of national identity based on local culture, particularly within indigenous communities like the Tidung tribe. From a policy perspective, these findings offer a conceptual foundation for central and regional governments to formulate strategies that preserve local culture while reinforcing national identity in strategic regions. Practically, the Tidung culture represents ethnic identity and functions as a non-military instrument of national resilience and a medium of soft diplomacy amid transnational influences.

Therefore, the preservation of Tidung culture—primarily through traditional customs, games, and traditional culinary practices—needs to be understood as a cultural conservation effort and as a strategic pillar of national development and identity resilience in border areas.

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