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CULTURAL SPACES IN ORANG ASLI ORAL TRADITIONS

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Abstract

This study develops a spatially grounded Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework for Orang Asli (OA) oral traditions. The study interprets oral heritage through cultural spaces linked to ancestry, *Adat*, sacred ecology, place memory, mobility, restriction and cosmological meaning. Existing documentation is dispersed across separate studies of myths, folktales, historical narratives, transmitted beliefs and proverbs, making it difficult to interpret Orang Asli oral traditions as an integrated ICH system. The study combined interviews with OA knowledge holders and community representatives with ethnographic records, publications and heritage reports. Content analysis identified manifestations by narrative form, function, symbolic meaning and community context. Inductive-deductive thematic analysis organized them into codes, facets and themes. Six experts assessed the framework using the Content Validity Index, informing four themes and sixteen facets. Spatial interpretation generated four conceptual layers and eight cultural spaces covering lineage, customary order, sacred landscapes, story landmarks, mobility routes, restricted areas, spirit guardians and cosmic time. The framework supports documentation, place-memory mapping, cultural-route planning, sacred-site protection and community-led safeguarding.

Keywords: Orang Asli, Oral Traditions and Expressions, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Place-Based Narratives, Cultural Landscape

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INTRODUCTION

This paper forms part of a continuing effort to document and classify Orang Asli [OA] Intangible Cultural Heritage [ICH] across five ICH domains, with this study focusing specifically on Domain 1, Oral Traditions and Expressions.

Across Peninsular Malaysia, OA oral traditions preserve ancestry, moral order, cosmological beliefs and place-based memory. Distinct from related OA ICH papers on performing arts, social practices and ecological knowledge, this paper focuses on spoken narratives, verbal transmission and story-linked places. This study develops an expert-informed framework linking oral manifestations to heritage-mapping categories for planning and community documentation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The oral traditions of the OA in Peninsular Malaysia are living systems of cultural transmission through which myths, legends, proverbs, chants and oral histories preserve relationships between people, nature, belief and place. As part of UNESCO's ICH Domain 1, these spoken forms carry collective memory, ethical values and cultural identity (UNESCO, 2003). They also function as knowledge systems that help communities remember origins, regulate conduct and sustain continuity across generations (Abu Bakar et al., 2025a, 2025b). Recent studies increasingly approach OA oral traditions as dynamic cultural knowledge rather than static folklore, especially in work on Jakun oral-story preservation, Semai folktale adaptation, and ethnohistorical naming practices (Sa'ad et al., 2023; Saad & Mansor, 2024; Gianno, 2023). However, existing studies often focus on individual Orang Asli communities or selected oral forms, with limited cross-comparison across myths, legends, historical narratives, beliefs and proverbs.

A place-based perspective is important because OA oral traditions frequently anchor memory in kinship lines, migration routes, rivers, forests, settlements, named landscapes and spirit-related sites. Semai origin myths, animal stories, ethnonyms and place names show how narrative retains moral meaning, ecological relations, descent, movement and ancestral continuity (Sa'ad et al., 2023; Gianno, 2023; Heikkilä & Williams-Hunt, 2024). These materials support heritage mapping by revealing cultural spaces that are absent from formal records, including sacred landscapes, remembered routes, forest-river settings and communal narrative spaces. Studies on Temiar shamanism, indigenous astronomy and celestial symbolism further show that OA oral traditions connect cosmology, ecology and moral order within lived landscapes (Salem et al., 2025; Majid, 2025; Hamacher et al., 2023). Yet the subtypes of the forms within oral tradition and expression remain underexplored (Pelet et al., 2025a, 2025b; Suhaimi et al., 2025; Khiantge et al., 2025). A Domain 1 framework is therefore needed to thematically classify oral genres while supporting heritage mapping, cultural-space recognition, and ongoing digital documentation efforts.

METHODOLOGY

This study forms part of an ongoing effort to document and OA ICH across five ICH domains. While the related OA ICH papers share a similar methodological structure, phases and validation stages to ensure consistency and comparability, this paper applies the process specifically to Domain 1: Oral Traditions and Expressions. The data extraction, coding and thematic categorization were therefore guided by forms of oral tradition and expression.

The study treated oral tradition as a system of spoken transmission rather than a collection of isolated stories. Data were drawn from interview transcripts with OA knowledge holders and community representatives, supported by ethnographic records, academic publications and heritage reports.

The first stage involved close reading of the corpus to identify manifestations of oral tradition and expression, including myths, origin and historical accounts, folktales, chants, proverbs, and ancestral narratives. Through content analysis, each manifestation was recorded according to its narrative form, symbolic meaning, cultural function and community context. The coded materials were then organized using inductive-deductive content and thematic analyses, moving from specific manifestations to manifestation codes, facets and broader themes. The resulting framework was assessed by OA cultural and heritage experts using the Content Validation Index (CVI). Their evaluation focused on whether the classification was clear, relevant, coherent and culturally appropriate for representing ICH Domain 1 Oral Tradition and Expression.

Table 1: Framework Development Stages

Phase	Description of Process	Output
Stage 1: Data Extraction and Coding	Interview transcripts and documents were analyzed using content analysis in ATLAS.ti to identify OA ICH Domain 1 manifestations. Symbolic meaning, oral form and normative function were recorded	Dataset of identified ICH manifestations, segmented corpus of data excerpts
Stage 2: Coding of ICH Manifestations under Domain 1	Identified manifestations were assigned manifestation codes to organize recurring oral expressions, narratives, transmitted beliefs and wisdom forms.	Coded dataset of OA Oral Tradition and Expression
Stage 3: Categorization of Themes and Facets	Coded manifestations were grouped into facets and organized into themes using thematic analysis to refine conceptual groupings within each theme and facet.	Structured set of themes and corresponding facets
Stage 4: Framework Drafting	Themes and facets were structured into a conceptual framework, mapping relationships into a coherent visual matrix guided by theoretical reasoning.	Initial framework showing classification hierarchy
Stage 5: Iterative Refinement	The framework was reviewed against coded data using thematic analysis to improve clarity, consistency and reduce overlap between codes, facets and themes.	Refined ICH Domain 1 framework ready for validation
Stage 6: Validation Preparation	The framework was converted into a validation tool with definitions of themes and facets and manifestation codes as well as guidance for expert evaluation.	Validation package with framework and scoring sheets
Stage 7: Validation Study Execution	Experts evaluated the framework, and I-CVI and S-CVI were calculated to assess content validity.	Expert feedback and CVI scores
Stage 8: Framework Refinement	Validation results were used to revise labels, structure, and grouping for improved coherence.	Revised Framework of OA ICH Domain 1

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were guided by a checklist covering settlement context, family structure, socio-demographic and socio-economic background, governance, environmental influence, cultural practices and heritage continuity. The checklist ensured core inquiries were secured while allowing follow-ups based on each participant's role, knowledge and community context. Participants included *Tok Batin*, elders, committee representatives and village members from various OA subgroups. To protect confidentiality, names are withheld and replaced with codes, while role, OA subgroup and village location are retained for context (Table 2). Table 3 shows the coding trail from transcript excerpt to theme, illustrating how selected evidence was condensed, coded and grouped into the relevant facets and themes of the Domain 1 framework.

Table 2: Profile of Orang Asli Interview Participants

Code	Roles in Village	Groups	Village Name and Location
PO01	Director, Cultural Institution	Mah Meri	Kampung OA Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey
PO02	OA Youth Representative	Mah Meri	Kampung OA Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey
PO03	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Jakun	Kampung OA Sungai Bot, Karak, Bentong
PO04	Village Chairperson	Temuan	Kampung OA Cinta Manis, Karak, Bentong
PO05	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Temuan	Kampung OA, Ulu Pareh, Karak, Bentong
PO06	OA Representative	Temuan	Kampung OA, Ulu Pareh, Karak, Bentong
PO07	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Jah Hut	Kampung OA Pian, Kuala Krau, Temerloh
PO08	OA Representative	Jah Hut	Kampung OA Pian, Kuala Krau, Temerloh
PO09	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Che Wong	Kampung Kuala Enggang, Temerloh
PO10	Village Elder	Che Wong	Kampung Kuala Enggang, Temerloh
PO11	OA Representative	Che Wong	Kampung Kuala Enggang, Temerloh
PO12	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Semelai	Kampung OA Pelawan, Pos Iskandar, Bera
PO13	OA Representative 1	Semelai	Kampung OA Pelawan, Pos Iskandar, Bera
PO14	OA Representative 2	Semelai	Kampung OA Pelawan, Pos Iskandar, Bera
PO15	OA Representative 3	Semelai	Kampung OA Pelawan, Pos Iskandar, Bera
PO16	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Bateq	Kampung OA Kuala Atok, Jerantut
PO17	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Semoq Beri	Kampung OA Sungai Tiang, Jerantut
PO18	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Semai	Kampung OA Rening, Cameron Highlands
PO19	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Semai	Kampung OA Kuala Boh, Cameron Highlands
PO20	Leader / <i>Tok Batin</i>	Jakun	Kampung OA Gumum, Tasik Chini, Pekan

Table 3: Coding Trail from Content Analysis to Theme Development

Coding Stage	Coding Output
1 Verbatim Transcription	PO14: ...zaman dulu, lubuk besar bawah jambatan jadi tempat orang menuba ikan. Orang lama percaya bila muncul Ikan Sebarau semasa menuba tandanya hujan dan kilat akan datang. Cepat balik, berteduh dan selamatkan diri...
2 Transcript Excerpt	The participant explained that the river pool beneath the bridge was once used for poisoning fish, and that the appearance of <i>Ikan Sebarau</i> was believed to signal approaching rain and lightning, prompting people to leave for safety.
3 Condensed Meaning	The appearance of Hampala Barb during river fish-poisoning activity is interpreted as a warning sign of approaching rain and lightning.
4 Initial Codes	Animal Omen, Animal-based Environmental Warning, Animal Myths
5 Final Code	Ecological Agency Belief
6 Facet	Animistic Beliefs
7 Theme	Cosmological and Astral Transmitted Beliefs

Document Analysis

Document analysis complemented interviews by reviewing 403 academic, institutional, community and media sources relevant to Orang Asli oral traditions and expressions. Sources were screened for subgroup context, extractable cultural evidence and Domain 1 relevance, then condensed into meaning units and coded into manifestation codes, facets and themes to support interview-based classification (refer to Table 4).

Table 4: Document Sources and Screening Criteria

No	Types	Sources	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1	Peer Reviewed Articles	Mainly retrieved from MyCite, followed by Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, DOAJ SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online	Evidence on OA oral traditions, expressions, narratives, beliefs, language, transmission, subgroup context or place memory.	No ICH or oral tradition evidence; focused only on development, education, health or socio-economy.
2	Conference Papers	Academic conference proceedings, seminar papers and heritage-related conference publications.	Relevant findings on OA oral narratives, cultural expression, heritage documentation or oral knowledge continuity.	Too brief, duplicated published articles, or did not provide usable evidence for coding.
3	Book Chapters	Edited academic books on Orang Asli, indigenous studies, anthropology, heritage and culture.	Subgroup-specific evidence on folklore, legends, histories, beliefs or cultural meanings.	General discussion without insufficient detail for coding.
4	Books and Monographs	Ethnographic books, cultural monographs, Orang Asli studies and indigenous community publications.	Detailed descriptions of OA stories, customs, beliefs, language, oral knowledge or community history.	Outdated claims without cultural relevance, unclear source basis or no link to oral tradition.
5	Theses and Dissertations	University repositories, institutional libraries and postgraduate research databases.	Empirical or ethnographic findings on OA cultural practices, oral knowledge and heritage transmission.	Unavailable full text, unrelated focus or no extractable cultural evidence.
6	Government Reports	Mainly JAKOA, with related government and agency reports.	Official information on OA subgroups, village context, and cultural activities	Administrative data only, irrelevant to ICH documentation.
7	UNESCO documents	UNESCO ICH documents, safeguarding guidelines and conceptual references.	Definitions, safeguarding principles and conceptual guidance relevant to ICH domains and oral traditions.	Unrelated to ICH concepts or documentation.
8	Museum Archives	Museum records, exhibition notes, archive descriptions and heritage documentation.	Descriptions of OA cultural objects, stories, beliefs, performances, or intangible meanings of oral heritage.	Records with unclear provenance and no identification of subgroups.
9	Community Publications	NGO materials, local publications, blogs, community websites and informal documentation.	Community-based accounts of OA stories, beliefs, customs, oral histories, or cultural events.	Unverifiable claims, or unidentifiable community context.
10	Media Recordings	Audio and video documentaries, online news articles, and media features related to Orang Asli communities.	Recorded or reported oral narratives, expressions, cultural practices, beliefs, performances or heritage transmission.	Sensationalized reporting, unclear informant source or insufficient detail for coding.

Multi-Phase Framework Development and Validation Workflow

Figures 1 and 2 summarize the two-stage framework process, showing initial source coding and thematic structuring, followed by expert validation, refinement, restructuring and final framework confirmation.

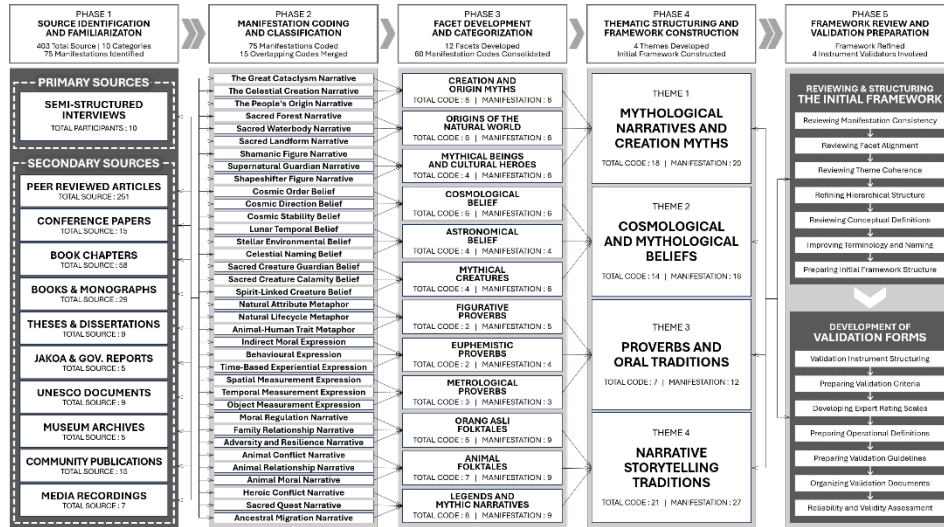


Figure 1: Initial Development and Construction of the ICH Domain 1 Framework

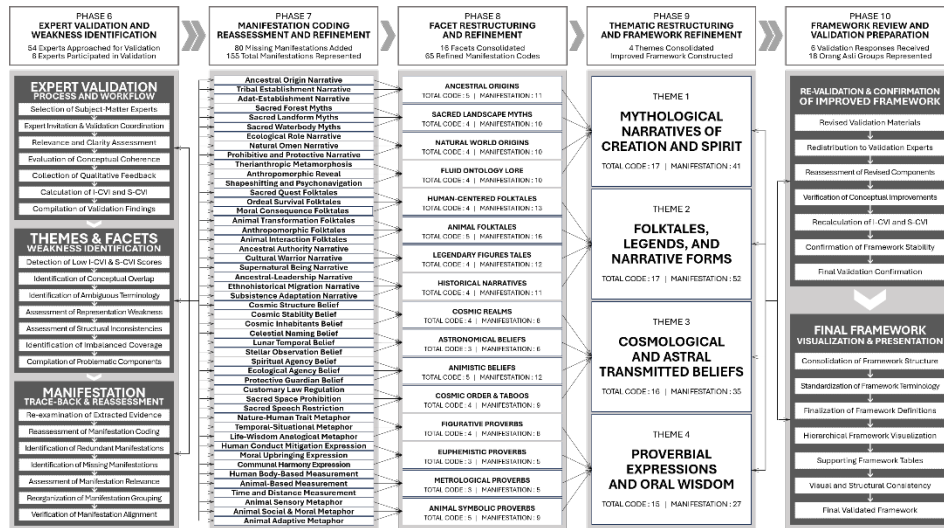


Figure 2: Expert Validation and Refinement of the ICH Domain 1 Framework

RESULTS

The expert validation process involved six experts. To ensure confidentiality, validators were anonymized using coded identifiers (Expert 1 to Expert 6). Table 5 presents each expert's background, field of expertise, and feedback.

Table 5: Validators' Feedback and Corresponding Revisions

Validator	Feedback	Corresponding Revision
Expert 1 Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) Expert in Indigenous welfare management and community support services	Recommended incorporating culturally significant locations, pathways, and landmarks into oral tradition narratives. Noted overlap between other domains and oral tradition categories.	Spatial and sacred environmental meanings were incorporated through <i>Sacred Landscape Myths</i> , <i>Sacred Space Prohibition</i> , and <i>Natural World Origins</i> . Manifestation codes were reassessed, merged, and redistributed into more distinct facets to reduce conceptual duplication.
Expert 2 Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) Expert in Indigenous welfare management and community support services	Recommended clarifying whether traditions are community-specific or shared across groups. Suggested differentiating kinship-based oral traditions due to variations in social structures	Manifestations were refined to better distinguish localized narratives, ancestral systems, and culturally specific oral traditions. Community-oriented narratives and ancestral structures were reorganized within facets such as <i>Ancestral Origins</i> and <i>Historical Narratives</i> .
Expert 3 GERIMIS Art Project (Cultural Organization) Expert in Indigenous Knowledge, Cosmologies, and Eco-Critical Cultural Studies	Recommended expanding framework elements to capture sacred functions and beliefs. Emphasized preserving indigenous terminology from Orang Asli languages.	The revised framework integrated sacred beliefs, cosmological systems, taboos, and oral transmission structures into dedicated facets. Indigenous concepts and culturally specific expressions were retained and refined within narrative, cosmological, and proverbial facets.
Expert 4 Institute of Environment and Development, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Expert in Sustainable Livelihoods of Indigenous Communities, Heritage Conservation	Suggested positioning cosmological and mythological narratives more prominently, and indicated conceptual overlap between oral traditions, beliefs, rituals, and narrative forms.	The structures were elevated into dedicated themes with additional and more specific facets, such as <i>Cosmic Realms</i> and <i>Fluid Ontology Lore</i> . Broad narrative categories were consolidated into more differentiated facets to improve thematic consistency.
Expert 5 Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin Expert in Indigenous people studies, Social Anthropology	Recommended including ritual narratives related to environmental practices and ecological customs.	Ecological and sacred landscape narratives were expanded through facets such as <i>Sacred Landscape Myths</i> , with dedicated facets: <i>Ecological Role Narratives</i> , and <i>Protective Guardian Beliefs</i> .
Expert 6 Kulliyyah of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages, International Islamic University Malaysia Expert in Humanities, Linguistic and Literature, Malay Language and Literature	Recommended clearer mapping between ritual narratives, healing expressions, and storytelling forms. Suggested clearer definitions for classification terminology and themes.	The revised framework separated cosmological beliefs, oral wisdom, folktales, and mythological narratives into independent thematic structures. Revised facets adopted more culturally grounded and functionally differentiated terminology across narrative and belief domains.

Table 6 presents the content validation summary for the initial framework, while Table 7 outlines the revised themes and facets.

Table 6: Content Validation Summary of the Initial Framework

Themes	I-CVI	Facets	I-CVI	S-CVI
Mythological Narratives and Creation Myths	0.67	Creation and Origin Myths	0.67	0.67
		Origins of the Natural World	0.67	
		Mythical Beings and Cultural Heroes	0.67	
Cosmological and Mythological Beliefs	0.50	Cosmological Belief	0.67	0.56
		Astronomical Belief	0.50	
		Mythical Creatures	0.50	
Proverbs and Oral Traditions	0.67	Figurative Proverbs	0.67	0.67
		Euphemistic Proverbs	0.67	
		Metrological Proverbs	0.67	
Narrative Storytelling Traditions	0.50	Orang Asli Folktales	0.67	0.56
		Animal Folktales	0.50	
		Legends and Mythic Narratives	0.50	

Table 7: Revised Theme and Facets

Themes	Facets
Mythological Narratives of Creation and Spirit	Ancestral Origins
	Sacred Landscape Myths
	Natural World Origins
	Fluid Ontology Lore
Folktales, Legends, and Narrative Forms	Human-Centered Folktales
	Animal Folktales
	Legendary Figures Tales
	Historical Narratives
Cosmological and Astral Transmitted Beliefs	Cosmic Realms
	Astronomical Beliefs
	Animistic Beliefs
	Cosmic Order and Taboos
Proverbial Expressions and Oral Wisdom	Figurative Proverbs
	Euphemistic Proverbs
	Metrological Proverbs
	Animal Symbolic Proverbs

The validation results showed that several initial categories were too broad to capture the range of OA oral traditions. Origin stories, cosmological beliefs, folktales, taboos, and proverbial expressions often overlapped, making the earlier structure less precise. The revised framework therefore reorganizes the materials into clearer domains of mythological narratives, folktales and legends, cosmological and astral beliefs, and oral wisdom. This allows ancestral origins, sacred landscape myths, animal and human-centered folktales, animistic beliefs, and metaphorical expressions to be interpreted according to their specific oral functions. The revised structure is more useful for reading OA oral heritage as a system of memory, moral guidance, belief, and place-based transmission.

Table 8: Revised Themes and Facets Definitions

Themes & Definitions	Facets & Definitions
Mythological Narratives of Creation and Spirit <i>Oral narratives explaining origins of the world, people, and places, involving spiritual beings and reflecting community worldview, values, and relationships with nature and the unseen.</i>	Ancestral Origins <i>Narratives articulating community origins through ancestry, lineage, and establishment of cultural practices grounded in spiritual beliefs.</i>
	Sacred Landscape Myths <i>Myths interpreting origins and cultural significance of landscapes, linking geographical features with spiritual meaning, memory, and identity.</i>
	Natural World Origin <i>Narratives explaining formation of the natural world, including earth, sky, and living elements through symbolic and mythological representations.</i>
	Fluid Ontology Lore <i>Narratives of transformation between human, animal, and spirit forms, conveying moral, ancestral, and ecological meanings.</i>
Folktales, Legends, and Narrative Forms <i>Spoken stories including folktales, legends, and personal accounts that entertain, teach lessons, and preserve community history, identity, and collective memory across generations.</i>	Human-Centered Folktales <i>Folktales portraying ordinary human life, social relationships, cultural values, and behavioural lessons within Orang Asli communities.</i>
	Animal Folktales <i>Folktales featuring animals as central characters, reflecting human traits, conflicts, and survival strategies within environmental contexts.</i>
	Legendary Figures Tales <i>Narratives emphasizing mythic figures and beings whose actions shape cultural identity, values, and collective worldview.</i>
	Historical Narratives <i>Narratives recounting past events, community history, and collective memory, preserving knowledge of origins, experiences, and transformations.</i>
Cosmological and Astral Transmitted Beliefs <i>Beliefs explaining structure of the universe, celestial phenomena, and relationships among humans, nature, and spiritual realms, guiding understanding of time, order, and environmental interactions.</i>	Cosmic Realms <i>Beliefs explaining the structure of the universe, celestial phenomena, and relationships between humans, nature, and the spiritual realm.</i>
	Astronomical Beliefs <i>Orally transmitted beliefs about celestial bodies guiding time, seasonal cycles, navigation, and daily activities within Orang Asli communities.</i>
	Animistic Beliefs <i>Beliefs that natural elements possess spiritual essence, shaping how communities perceive, interact with, and respect the environment.</i>
	Cosmic Order and Taboos <i>Beliefs regulating human behaviour through taboos based on cosmological order to maintain balance between physical and spiritual worlds.</i>
Proverbial Expressions and Oral Wisdom <i>Short sayings, idioms, and expressions encapsulating cultural wisdom and moral values, used in communication and storytelling to transmit knowledge, norms, and ethical guidance across generations.</i>	Figurative Proverbs <i>Proverbs using metaphor and imagery to convey cultural wisdom, values, and shared understandings within Orang Asli communities.</i>
	Euphemistic Proverbs <i>Proverbs conveying meaning indirectly to soften expression, avoid offence, and encode sensitive cultural ideas within social communication.</i>
	Metrological Proverbs <i>Proverbs conveying measurement, estimation, and practical quantification knowledge used in daily activities and environmental interactions.</i>
	Animals Symbolic Proverbs <i>Proverbs using animals symbolically to describe human behaviour, convey values, and reflect relationships between humans and nature.</i>

Tables 9–12 present the thematic classification of ICH manifestations. The examples are partly representative, with each theme comprising four facets, each facet three to five codes, and each code covering multiple ICH manifestations.

Table 9: Theme 1 – Mythological Narratives of Creation and Spirit

Facets	Codes	Examples of Manifestation	Groups
Ancestral Origins	Ancestral Origin	Great Flood Myth: Ancestral survival of a primordial flood, symbolizing human origin and continuity after disruption.	Tem/Sem/Jak
	Narrative	Ancestral Genealogies: Encodes lineage through place-based narratives linking ancestors to natural elements.	Che/Tem/Jak/Seq
	Tribal Establishment	Semelai Sura: Community formation, customary laws, and social order via narratives rooted in forest-spirit relationships.	Sel
	Narrative	Kanaq: Etiological origin of taboos and rituals of the tribe, linking cultural rules to mythic events and geographic contexts.	Ork
Sacred Landscape Myths	Adat-Establishment	The Law of Talaiden: The story of a sudden tropical storm that targets a village because the hunters mocked a helpless creature.	Che
	Narrative	Adat: Etiological narratives of instruction and consequence, regulating behaviour and maintaining social order.	ALL
	Sacred Forest Myths	Tuhad: The forest is regarded as <i>Tuhad</i> , a sacred creator that gives life and should be treated with care and respect.	Ter
		Gool-War Watershed: Located in the Bukit Tapah Forest Reserve and serves as one of the ancestral forest domains.	Sem
Natural World Origin	Sacred Landform	Gunung Rajah: A sacred mountain as ancestral refuge from flood, symbolizing continuity between landscape and origin.	Tem
	Myths	Bukit Pasir Puteh/ Bukit Pelandok: A sacred hill where the Bamboo Prince was found in bamboo (<i>buluh bentong</i>)	Ken/Kiq/Jah/Lan
	Sacred Waterbody	Naga Seri Gumum: The origin and sacredness of Lake Chini where a mythical serpent with spiritual power resides.	Jak/Sel
	Myths	Jeram Buaya Sangkut: Etiological waterfall named after crocodile spirit encounters, linking place identity to spirits.	Jak
Fluid Ontology Lore	Ecological Role	Insect Myth: Insects' roles within forest systems, framing them as essential components of environmental balance.	Jak/Che/Sem/Ter
	Narrative	The Concept of Penani: The belief of food sharing as essential to maintain harmony and avoid upsetting the forest spirits.	Sem/Ter
	Natural Omen	Tiger Dream: Dreaming of a tiger showing its fangs warns of a future encounter with a tiger symbolizing caution.	Sem/Ter
	Narrative	Takat Kunyit: The tale warns against unsafe river behaviour by linking crocodiles with danger, reinforcing aquatic caution.	Jak
Fluid Ontology Lore	Prohibitive and Protective	Sentoyot Lidah Rusak: Prohibition of using <i>Nepenthes</i> for cooking, linking misuse with misfortune and imbalance.	Jak/Sem/Ter
	Narrative	Pangolin Scales: Etiological tale of burning or wearing pangolin scales to ward off evil spirits or repel elephants.	Bat/Sem/Ter
	Therian-thropic	Moyang Lembu: To cure a skin disease, a man abandons human food, eats wild grass, and transforms into a wild cow.	Mah/Jah
	Meta-morphosis	Moyang Buaya: Ignoring ancestral warnings, a villager hides in a river during a heatwave and transforms into a crocodile.	Jak/Jah/Mah
Fluid Ontology Lore	Anthro-pomorphic	Cermor Mawak Kerdor: A gibbon zips off her white fur coat to bathe, but a hunter steals it and forces her to remain a human.	Sem
	Reveal	Bongso and the Frog Woman: A frog transforms into a woman and marries Bongso, only to become a frog again after an insult.	Che/Tem/Jak
	Shape-shifting and	Shaman-Tiger: A shaman projects his soul into a tiger's body during a trance to protect his community from forest predators.	Bat/Sem/Tem
	Psycho-navigation	Ruwai Col Bird Journey: To recover a stolen soul, a shaman projects his spirit as a swift forest bird, while his body chants.	Sem/Jah/Che

Note. ALL = All or almost all ethnic groups practiced the manifestation; Abbreviations refer to Orang Asli subgroups: Kensiu (Ken), Kintaq (Kiq), Jahai (Jai), Mendriq (Men), Bateq (Bat), Temiar (Ter), Semai (Sem), Jah Hut (Jat), Che Wong (Che), Semoq Beri (Seq), Mah Meri (Mah), Temuan (Tem), Jakun (Jak), Semelai (Sel), Orang Kuala (Orl), Orang Seletar (Ors), and Orang Kanaq (Ork).

Table 10: Theme 2 – Folktales, Legends and Narrative Forms

Facets	Codes	Examples of Manifestation	Groups
Human-Centered Folktales	Sacred Quest Folktales	Bah Luit's Jungle Quest: <i>Bah Luit's</i> quest of following rituals and seeking blessings ensures treasure without misfortune.	Sem
		Bah Luj and Garuda: <i>Bah Luj's</i> quest, helping a sultan defeat a seven-headed Garuda, symbolizing heroism over chaos.	Sem
	Ordeal Survival Folktales	Bah Luj and Seven Batak: <i>Bah Luj</i> , a frail man, overcomes <i>Bataks</i> who devoured his family, symbolizing resilience.	Sem
		Bah Luj and Jak Cemenak: <i>Bah Luj's</i> steps as savior and outsmarts the evil spoirit who devoured unsuspecting villagers.	Sem
	Moral Consequence Folktales	Perang Kera: A story of a war between monkeys that cause a chaos and displacement of Orang Asli ancestors.	Sem
		Bah Bertai: The tale of a tiger (<i>serenglog</i>) as a supernatural enforcer, punishing broken promises to uphold moral order.	Sem
Animal Folktales	Origin and Etiological Folktales	Asal-Usul Badak Tampung: Animals bound a white sheet around tapir to sap its aggression, creating its white saddle.	Sem/Tem
		Kubung Sorok Ekor: The proud flying lemur, shamed by vanity, concealed its tail and became a nocturnal glider.	Sem/Tem
	Anthropomorphic Folktales	The Bat and The Seven Siblings: A tale narrating a bat who lives differently from its siblings and chooses a separate life.	Sem/Tem
		The Moonrat: A tale narrating the clever, trickster nature of the moonrat, highlighting social cunning.	Sem/Tem
	Animal Interaction Folktales	The Rooster and The Deer: A tale narrating a rooster challenging a deer through loud crowing and persistence.	Sem/Tem
		The Tale of Elephant: A tale of careless elephants hurting small animals, then taught by mice to be more respectful.	Sem/Tem
Legendary Figures Tales	Ancestral Authority Narrative	Halaq: Etiological narrative of the first shaman (<i>Halaq</i>), establishing foundations of spiritual ritual authority.	Mah/Jah
		The Moyangs: The ancestors, <i>Moyang Getah/Melur/Bojos</i> as figures who performed miraculous feats of survival.	Mah/Jah
	Cultural Warrior Narrative	Orang Laut Maritime Battles: A series of historic naval conflicts fought during the Triangular War (16 th - 17th centuries)	Ors/Orl Ors
		Prak Sangkiil (Perang Sangkil): A dark war where the tribe was hunted and captured by outsiders to be sold into slavery.	Sem/Tem
	Super-Natural Being Narrative	Sang Kelembai: A giant woman, weirdly shaped boulders, sacred caves, or prominent rock structures.	Sem/Tem /Jak
		Bawak Gerai: Blood-thirsting, a King-Kong-like forest creature symbolizing strength and fear of the unknown.	Bat/Sel/ Tem/Jak
Historical Narratives	Ancestral-Leadership Narrative	Leadership Succession: A system of leadership inheritance through lineage, maintaining governance continuity.	Bat/Sem/ Tem/Jak
		Ancestral Lineage: A belief linking identity to ancestral lineage, reinforcing obligations to heritage and memory.	Se/Tem/ Jak
	Ethno-historical Migration Narrative	Orang Laut: Narrative of nomadic boat-dwellers' maritime migration from Singapore, across the Tebrau Straits to Johor.	Ors
		Halbaw: Networks and pathways that guide the family camps through the rainforest following seasonal food and fruit cycles.	Bat
	Subsistence Adaptation Narrative	Nomadic Movement Patterns: The regular movement and relocation of the OA explaining adaptation in forest landscapes.	Bat/Jah/ Seq
		Community Name Etymology: <i>Semoq Beri</i> (forest people), <i>Temuan</i> (meeting point) signify history and identity.	Seq/Sem/ Tem

Note. ALL = All or almost all ethnic groups practiced the manifestation; Abbreviations refer to Orang Asli subgroups: Kensiu (Ken), Kintaq (Kiq), Jahai (Jai), Mendriq (Men), Bateq (Bat), Temiar (Ter), Semai (Sem), Jah Hut (Jat), Che Wong (Che), Semoq Beri (Seq), Mah Meri (Mah), Temuan (Tem), Jakun (Jak), Semelai (Sel), Orang Kuala (Orl), Orang Seletar (Ors), and Orang Kanaq (Ork).

Table 11: Theme 3 – Cosmological and Astral Transmitted Beliefs

Facets	Codes	Examples of Manifestation	Groups
Cosmic Realms	Cosmic Structure Beliefs	7 Layered Earth–Sky Structure: A stratified cosmos of named earth–sky layers with rationale and spatial significance.	Seq/Bat/Che
		Three-Tier Order: An understanding of the universe divided into sky, earth, and underworld, guiding human orientation.	Bat
	Cosmic Stability Beliefs	Tiang Seri and Tiang Tompong: The sacred pillars of Earth, maintaining stability within a structured cosmological system.	Seq
		Guardians of 4 Directions: A spatial model of the universe organized into four cardinal directions, each with a guardian.	Sem/ Jah
	Cosmic Inhabitants Beliefs	Inhabited Realm: Layered cosmic realms inhabited by distinct beings, reflecting ordered spiritual-physical relationships.	Seq/Bat/Che
		Kerei: Karei is a supernatural force believed to control natural elements such as thunder, lightning, and storms	Che/Bat/Jai/Ken
Astronomical Beliefs	Celestial Naming Belief	Bintang Lunga and Denai: Culturally assigned names for celestial bodies, the Pleiades and the Milky Way.	Bat/Tem/Sel
		Tohan: An origin account of the sun, moon, and stars through a creator figure (<i>Tohan</i>) providing light and life.	Bat/Seq/Tem
	Lunar Temporal Belief	Rahu’ (Eclipse): When the sun hunts the moon, cosmic time falters, stopping agricultural and communal practices.	Sem/Jah/Tem
		Lunar Phase Timekeeping: A cyclical temporal system where lunar phases govern daily life and ritual practices.	Sem/Sel/Bat
	Stellar Observation Belief	Ruwai: Rather than an aesthetic wonder, a shooting star signifies a spirit (<i>Ruwai</i>) moving between cosmic layers.	Sem/Jah/Che
		Stellar Knowledge: A star-based knowledge system shaping environmental interaction and practical decisions.	Sel/Tem
Animistic Beliefs	Spiritual Agency Belief	Pehunan/Kempunan: Unfulfilled cravings create spiritual vulnerability, exposing individuals to misfortune in the jungle.	Sem/Tem
		Bes-Ruwai Capture: Illness occurs when Bes (malevolent spirits) prevents Ruwai’s (the soul) safe return during sleep.	Jah
	Ecological Agency Belief	Penunggu: Guardian spirits dwell in natural locations and respond according to human treatment of these places.	ALL
		Semangat: Plants, animals, and landscapes are viewed as sentient beings capable of rewarding or punishing humans.	ALL
	Protective Guardian Belief	7 Semenggot: An account of protective supernatural guardians mediating relationships between humans and unseen entities.	Sem/Tem/Jak/Jah
		Moyang Carvings: Ancestral spirit carvings serve as protective guardians that absorb disease and repel malevolent forces.	Jah/Mah
Cosmic Order and Taboos	Customary Law Regulation	Lawad, Ye’Yo and Tum Yap: A system of forest laws governing behavior, violations, and ritual forgiveness.	Bat
		Penehad: A customary law prohibiting the mixing of personal odors and possessions to personal sovereignty.	Ken/Bat
	Sacred Space Prohibition	Serenglog Taboo: A prohibition observed in forest settings, to avoid angering spiritual entities or causing disturbances.	Sem
		Tualang Shadow Perimeter: The immediate ground underneath Tualang trees are treated as spirit-inhabited spaces.	Sem/Jah/Tem
	Sacred Speech Restriction	Predator Avoidance Naming: Respectful substitute names are used for predators to prevent attracting their presence.	ALL
		Bahasa Kapur: Sacred camphor harvesting requires the use of a secret language to avoid disturbing protective spirits.	Jak/Tem

Note. ALL = All or almost all ethnic groups practiced the manifestation; Abbreviations refer to Orang Asli subgroups: Kensiu (Ken), Kintaq (Kiq), Jahai (Jai), Mendriq (Men), Bateq (Bat), Temiar (Ter), Semai (Sem), Jah Hut (Jat), Che Wong (Che), Semoq Beri (Seq), Mah Meri (Mah), Temuan (Tem), Jakun (Jak), Semelai (Sel), Orang Kuala (Orl), Orang Seletar (Ors), and Orang Kanaq (Ork).

Table 12: Theme 4 – Proverbial Expression and Oral Wisdom

Facets	Codes	Examples of Manifestation	Groups
Figurative Proverbs	Nature-Human Trait Metaphor	Fruit Maturation: Fruit ripening represents human growth, maturity, and natural progression across life stages.	Sem/Tem / Bat
		Floral Femininity: Comparison between women's beauty and flowers, fruits, or landscapes representing cultural ideals.	Sem/Mah
	Temporal-Situational Metaphor	Time and Distance: Interpretations of time through daily activities, linking temporal understanding to lived experience.	Bat/Tem/ Sem
		Hot and Cool Times: Temporal states are judged by spiritual balance rather than fixed clock-based measurements.	Sem/Che
	Life-Wisdom Analogical Metaphor	Oath and Custom Morality: Emphasis on honouring oaths and customs, reinforcing proper conduct for social order.	Che/Sem/ Tem
Euphemistic Proverbs		Leadership: Customary framework emphasizing leadership responsibilities, decision-making, and community wellbeing.	Sem/Jak/ Tem
	Human Conduct Mitigation Expression	Begei Entag Semeu: An expression comparing stubbornness to a bear's ear, softening direct behavioural criticism.	Sem
		Begei Caknak Pug: A symbolic expression someone who eats messily, spilling crumbs and scattering their food everywhere.	Sem
		Berayot: A mischievous behavior of a child in softened terms, literally means 'walking without purpose'.	Sem
	Moral Upbringing Expression	Cip Punan: Symbolic food-touching customs reinforce gratitude and respect within communal interactions.	Sem
		Pet Poi: A communal expression about finishing tasks fully and avoiding unnecessary leftovers.	Sem
	Communal Harmony Expression	Mai ni-nyea: Gentle communal expressions are used to defuse conflict and restore social harmony.	Sem
Metro-logical Proverbs	Body-Based Measurement	Measurement of Size: Proverbial expressions of using the human body as a standard to explain object size.	Sem/Bat
		Measurement of Length: Proverbial expressions of body spans functioning as natural rulers for measuring length.	Sem/Tem
	Animal-Based Measurement	Measurement of Area: Proverbial expressions of animals and nature as cultural reference to measure land and space.	Sem/Tem
		Measurement of Height: Proverbial expressions of building safety through comparison of house height with animals.	Sem/Jak
	Time and Distance Measurement	Measurement of Time: Expression of time, measured through daily tasks, enabling tracking of duration.	Sem/Bat
Animal Symbolic Proverbs		Measurement of Distance: Expression of distance through movement or simple acts to describe short or long distances.	Sem/Tem
	Animal Sensory Metaphor	Animals as Colour Indicator: Referring to the level of ripeness (maturity) of fruits or agricultural produce.	Sem/Bat/ Tem
		Animals as Sensory References: Animal characteristics as sensory experiences such as touch, sound, and condition.	Sem/Tem /Jah
	Animal Social and Moral Metaphor	Animals as Social Boundary Markers: Animals function as symbolic markers of proper and improper social conduct	Che/Tem /Sem
		Animals as Social Models: Human relationships, conflicts, and social patterns interpreted through animal interactions.	Bat/Tem/ Jak
	Animal Adaptive Metaphor	Weaving Architecture: Nest structures used as metaphorical models for weaving and shelter-building techniques.	Mah/Tem /Sem
		Hunting Weaponry: Hunting poisons are developed through metaphorical imitation of animal defensive adaptations.	Tem/Sem /Bat

Note. ALL = All or almost all ethnic groups practiced the manifestation; Abbreviations refer to Orang Asli subgroups: Kensiu (Ken), Kintaq (Kiq), Jahai (Jai), Mendriq (Men), Bateq (Bat), Temiar (Ter), Semai (Sem), Jah Hut (Jat), Che Wong (Che), Semoq Beri (Seq), Mah Meri (Mah), Temuan (Tem), Jakun (Jak), Semelai (Sel), Orang Kuala (Orl), Orang Seletar (Ors), and Orang Kanaq (Ork).

The classification in Tables 9–12 shows that OA oral traditions repeatedly attach meaning to particular forms of space. The manifestation codes were therefore re-read for their spatial implications, not only for their narrative or symbolic functions. Ancestral origin narratives, genealogies, leadership accounts and community-name etymologies point to spaces of lineage and identity. *Adat*-establishment narratives, customary law regulation, moral folktales and oral wisdom point to spaces where conduct, responsibility and social order are remembered or reinforced. Sacred forest, landform and waterbody myths, together with ecological role narratives and animal symbolic proverbs, indicate natural settings that carry ecological and sacred meanings. Historical migration narratives, subsistence adaptation narratives, metrological expressions and time-distance measurements point to routes, camps, pathways and livelihood spaces.

From this reading, the cultural spaces in Table 13 were developed by grouping recurring spatial meanings into four planning-oriented layers. Community identity and social order were represented through Origin Lineage Space and Adat Order Space. Sacred Landscape and Place-Memory were drawn from codes linked to sacred ecology and named story landmarks. Movement and Livelihood were derived from codes involving migration, subsistence, routes, taboos, restrictions and controlled access. Spiritual and Cosmological Sensitivity was developed from codes involving spirit guardians, unseen beings, transformations, celestial signs, lunar time and cosmic order. Table 14 then applies these spaces back to each manifestation code, showing how oral traditions can be translated into cultural spaces categories. This strengthens the planning relevance of the paper by treating oral traditions as spatial knowledge that can inform cultural routes, place-memory mapping, sacred-site protection, ecological sensitivity and culturally appropriate development control.

Table 13: Planning-Oriented Cultural Space Framework

Layers	Code	Cultural Spaces	Definition
Community Identity and Social Order	A	Origin Lineage Space	Spaces linked to ancestry, genealogy, origin narratives, and community identity transmission.
	B	Adat Order Space	Spaces linked to customary law, leadership, conduct, responsibility, and communal regulation.
Sacred Landscape and Place-Memory	C	Sacred Ecology Space	Natural settings carrying sacred, ecological, symbolic, or oral heritage meanings.
	D	Story Landmark Space	Named places preserved through myths, folktales, legends, histories, or place-based narratives.
Movement and Livelihood	E	Mobility Livelihood Space	Routes, pathways, camps, and resource areas linked to movement and subsistence memory.
	F	Taboo Restriction Space	Places governed by avoidance, prohibition, speech control, access limits, or buffer needs.
Spiritual and Cosmological Sensitivity	G	Spirit Guardian Space	Spaces associated with spirits, guardians, ancestors, transformations or unseen presence.
	H	Cosmic Time Space	Spaces interpreted through cosmology, stars, moon, directions, seasons, or time reckoning.

Table 14: Spatial Interpretation of ICH Manifestation Codes

Themes	Facets	Manifestation Codes	Cultural Spaces (Coded)							
			A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Mytho-logical Narratives of Creation and Spirit	Ancestral Origins	Ancestral Origin Narrative	/		/	/				
		Tribal Establishment Narrative	/	/	/			/	/	
		Adat-Establishment Narrative		/				/		
	Sacred Landscape Myths	Sacred Forest Myths	/		/	/			/	
		Sacred Landform Myths	/		/	/			/	
		Sacred Waterbody Myths			/	/			/	
	Natural World Origin	Ecological Role Narrative			/		/		/	
		Natural Omen Narrative			/	/		/		
		Prohibitive & Protective Narrative			/		/	/	/	
	Fluid Ontology Lore	Therianthropic Metamorphosis			/				/	
		Anthropomorphic Reveal			/				/	
		Shapeshifting & Psycho-Navigation			/				/	/
Folktales Legends, and Narrative Forms	Human-Centered Folktales	Sacred Quest Folktales			/		/		/	
		Ordeal Survival Folktales		/	/				/	
		Moral Consequence Folktales		/	/			/	/	
	Animal Folktales	Origin & Etiological Folktales			/					
		Anthropomorphic Folktales		/	/					
		Animal Interaction Folktales		/	/					
	Legendary Figures Tales	Ancestral Authority Narrative	/	/					/	
		Cultural Warrior Narrative	/	/		/	/			
		Super-Natural Being Narrative			/	/			/	
	Historical Narratives	Ancestral-Leadership Narrative	/	/						
		Ethnohistorical Migration Narrative	/		/	/	/			
		Subsistence Adaptation Narrative	/		/	/	/			
Cosmo-logical and Astral Trans-mitted Beliefs	Cosmic Realms	Cosmic Structure Beliefs							/	/
		Cosmic Stability Beliefs							/	/
		Cosmic Inhabitants Beliefs							/	/
	Astronomical Beliefs	Celestial Naming Belief								/
		Lunar Temporal Belief					/	/	/	/
		Stellar Observation Belief					/		/	/
	Animistic Beliefs	Spiritual Agency Belief			/			/	/	
		Ecological Agency Belief			/		/	/	/	
		Protective Guardian Belief			/	/			/	
	Cosmic Order and Taboos	Customary Law Regulation		/			/	/	/	
		Sacred Space Prohibition			/	/		/	/	
		Sacred Speech Restriction			/		/	/	/	
Pro-verbial Expressions and Oral Wisdom	Figurative Proverbs	Nature-Human Trait Metaphor		/	/					
		Temporal-Situational Metaphor					/		/	/
		Life-Wisdom Analogical Metaphor		/						
	Euphemistic Proverbs	Human Conduct Mitigation		/						
		Moral Upbringing Expression		/						
		Communal Harmony Expression		/						
	Metrollogical Proverbs	Body-Based Measurement					/			
		Animal-Based Measurement			/		/			
		Time and Distance Measurement					/		/	
	Animals Symbolic Proverbs	Animal Sensory Metaphor			/		/			
		Animal Social & Moral Metaphor		/	/					
		Animal Adaptive Metaphor			/		/			

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate an improved organization of OA oral traditions and expression by distinguishing four knowledge functions: (i) mythological narratives, (ii) folktales and legends, (iii) cosmological and astral beliefs, and (iv) proverbial wisdom. The initial I-CVI and S-CVI scores of 0.50–0.67 revealed conceptual overlap and insufficient differentiation among themes and facets. Expert feedback therefore guided the restructuring into clearer categories representing ancestry, moral and social regulation, ecological knowledge, cosmological beliefs, collective memory, and proverbial wisdom.

The major discovery is that OA oral traditions are also place-based cultural systems. Origin narratives, sacred landscape myths, migration accounts, taboos, astronomical beliefs and proverbial expressions repeatedly refer to forests, rivers, mountains, routes, settlements, resource areas and celestial-temporal conditions. Tables 13 and 14 translate these relationships into four heritage-mapping layers and eight spaces covering lineage, *Adat*, sacred ecology, story landmarks, mobility, restrictions, spiritual guardianship and cosmic time.

This approach extends heritage planning beyond fixed monuments by recognizing sites, territories, routes, seasonal-use areas, restricted zones and interconnected cultural landscapes to ICH manifestations. The framework support cultural landscape assessment, heritage inventories, development screening and community-based documentation. Its mapping categories also provide a basis for participatory heritage documentation guided by community consent and appropriate protection of sensitive or sacred oral knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study forms part of ongoing efforts to document and classify OA ICH, with a specific focus on Domain 1, Oral Traditions and Expressions. The findings show that oral tradition encapsulates what is spoken, narrated, remembered, believed, and verbally transmitted. OA oral tradition captures myths, folktales, legends, cosmological beliefs, proverbs, idioms, omens, and oral wisdom. The study proposed an expert-informed framework that organizes OA oral heritage into four themes, sixteen facets, and related manifestation codes. This structure clarifies mythic origins, folk narratives, cosmic beliefs, and oral wisdom. The main value for planning is that the structure brings the spatial dimensions of oral tradition and expression into view. Lineage spaces, *Adat* jurisdictions, sacred ecological spaces, story landmarks, livelihood-mobility spaces, taboo-restriction spaces, and spirit-guardian spaces constitute the spatial framework through which oral traditions are anchored and safeguarded as ICH manifestations. The framework serves as a conceptual foundation for heritage mapping rather than a completed spatial inventory. Future site-specific mapping should be refined through sustained OA community participation and validation.

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