

The Tension between Cultural Heritage and Individual Freedom: The JiLu Marriage Tradition among the Indigenous Javanese Community in Blembem, Ponorogo

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Abstract

This study investigates the persistence of JiLu, a Javanese customary prohibition against marriage between the first and third-born children of different families, as practised in Blembem Village, Ponorogo. Although JiLu lacks a formal legal or religious foundation, it continues to function as a binding social norm upheld through oral tradition, communal belief systems, and social sanctions. Employing a socio-legal approach, the research integrates qualitative data from in-depth interviews with traditional elders, affected couples, and local stakeholders, alongside a review of relevant literature. Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction—comprising the processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization—provides the theoretical framework to analyze how JiLu is maintained and reproduced. The findings reveal that JiLu operates as a symbolic system that regulates social behaviour, particularly in marital decisions, through emotional reinforcement and the fear of spiritual or social consequences. However, the norm's authority is increasingly questioned by younger generations exposed to formal education, religious reinterpretation, and modern legal rationality. This generational shift highlights a growing tension between the preservation of collective cultural identity and the assertion of personal autonomy. The study demonstrates how customary norms can either adapt or erode when confronted with changing societal values, contributing to broader discussions on the dynamics of tradition, law, and individual rights in contemporary rural Indonesia.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji keberlangsungan larangan pernikahan JiLu, yaitu norma adat Jawa yang melarang pernikahan antara anak pertama dan anak ketiga dari dua keluarga berbeda, sebagaimana dipraktikkan di Dusun Tembol, Desa Blembem, Kecamatan Jambon, Kabupaten Ponorogo. Meskipun JiLu tidak memiliki dasar hukum formal maupun legitimasi keagamaan, tradisi ini tetap dianggap mengikat secara sosial dan diwariskan melalui tradisi lisan, keyakinan kolektif, serta sanksi sosial. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan sosio-legal, penelitian ini didasarkan pada data kualitatif yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh adat, pasangan yang terdampak, serta pemangku kepentingan lokal, disertai kajian pustaka. Teori konstruksi sosial dari Berger dan Luckmann—meliputi proses eksternalisasi, objektivasi, dan internalisasi—digunakan sebagai kerangka analisis untuk memahami bagaimana JiLu dipertahankan dan direproduksi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa JiLu berfungsi sebagai sistem simbolik yang mengatur perilaku sosial, khususnya dalam keputusan pernikahan, melalui penguatan emosional dan rasa takut terhadap konsekuensi spiritual atau sosial. Namun, otoritas norma ini mulai dipertanyakan oleh generasi muda yang terpapar pada pendidikan formal,



reinterpretasi ajaran agama, serta rasionalitas hukum modern. Pergeseran ini menunjukkan adanya ketegangan antara pelestarian identitas budaya kolektif dan tuntutan akan otonomi individu. Studi ini memperlihatkan bagaimana norma adat dapat mengalami adaptasi atau bahkan peluruhan ketika dihadapkan pada perubahan nilai sosial, serta memberikan kontribusi terhadap diskusi yang lebih luas mengenai relasi antara tradisi, hukum, dan hak individu dalam masyarakat pedesaan Indonesia kontemporer.

Keywords Marriage of Jilu; Social Construction; Customary Law; Javanese Countryside

Introduction

Marriage prohibitions within Indigenous communities remain a prevalent social reality across various regions of the world. These restrictions often arise from kinship structures, clan divisions, and cultural mandates intended to preserve social balance and prevent intra-group conflicts. Among the Māori of New Zealand, specific kin groups (*whānau*) maintain marriage prohibitions to protect genealogical integrity.¹ Similarly, Indigenous communities in Canada enforce customary laws prohibiting marriage within the same clan to uphold social harmony and respect for ancestral ties.² In parts of Southeast Asia, including some Dayak and Orang Asli communities, traditional marriage rules still emphasize exogamy to broaden social networks and sustain tribal identities.³ Globally, a general social trend persists in which such marriage regulations serve crucial collective purposes—strengthening intergroup alliances, preserving cultural identity, and ensuring family cohesion. However, contemporary challenges such as urbanization, legal reforms, and the global rise of individual rights discourses increasingly press these communities to reconcile traditional values with personal autonomy.⁴ As a result, many indigenous groups now find themselves navigating a delicate balance between the preservation of cultural heritage and the growing legal and ethical recognition of individual freedoms in national and international frameworks.⁵

In Blembem Village, Ponorogo, the JiLu prohibition reflects a broader cultural pattern where traditional marriage practices remain central to community life. The rule—which discourages unions between individuals based on their sibling positions—is upheld out of concern that such pairings could invite bad luck or disrupt family harmony. As noted by Huda et al.⁶ these beliefs still carry social weight,

¹ Jacinta Ruru, *Listening to Culture: Indigenous Peoples, Cultural Rights and Law* (London: Routledge, 2017), 243.

² Val. Napoleon, *Living Together: Indigenous Legal Traditions* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 226.

³ Colin Nicholas and Amarjit Kaur Singh, *Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia: Changes and Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2019), 157.

⁴ M. Bianet Castellanos, *Indigenous Dispossession: Housing and Human Rights in the Americas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 118.

⁵ Sheryl Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics: A Subtle Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2021), 64.

⁶ M. Huda et al., "Tradition, Wisdom and Negotiating Marriage and Inheritance Disputes on Javanese Muslim," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 9, no. 1 (2024): 25–44, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v9i1.9887>.

largely because they are deeply tied to long-held values of order and spiritual balance. Mujiyono et al.⁷ further points out that the custom functions as a way to preserve respectful relationships within the extended family, reinforcing stability through ancestral teachings. Yet, this adherence to custom is increasingly questioned by younger generations, who see these rules as outdated limitations. As Jun⁸ explains, many now prioritize autonomy and the right to choose their life partner over traditions that no longer reflect their values. The situation in Blembem illustrates how generational shifts can bring local cultural norms into conflict with broader human rights standards, particularly those that support individual choice and reject interference based on traditional structures like birth order.

Several previous studies have addressed the topic of marriage prohibitions in various cultural and religious communities. For instance, in Batak society, marriage within the same clan is strictly forbidden due to perceived blood relations, and violations result in customary sanctions.⁹ Similarly, the Minangkabau community prohibits marriages with close relatives, including cousins or former in-laws, as a mechanism to maintain social order and kinship purity.¹⁰ From a religious standpoint, in Nagari Lunto, individuals who belong to ethnic groups historically associated with adultery face marriage restrictions, reflecting an intersection between morality enforcement and social cohesion.¹¹ In the legal domain, interfaith marriages in Indonesia are technically prohibited, although many couples circumvent the regulations, revealing the gap between formal legal norms and social practices.¹² The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), for example, consistently issues fatwas and legal opinions to reinforce religious conformity in marital unions.¹³

Specific to JiLu, several studies have explored its cultural and religious underpinnings. Danur Putut Permadi and Hanif Fitri Yantari examined the axiological values of JiLu in Tempursari Hamlet, finding that community adherence to such myths helps preserve social harmony.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Chalimatus Sa'diyah and Abdullah Afif analyzed JiLu prohibition in Duren Village, Madiun, through

⁷ Mujiyono et al., "Local Cultural Approach in Navigating Family Conflict: Understanding Cultural Strategies for Human Well-Being," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 7 (2024): 2153–60, <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i7.4367>.

⁸ M. Jun, "How Social Change Occurs: Women's Agentic Negotiation and Defiance of Chhaupadi Practice," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 52, no. 4 (2024): 10–18, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajss.2024.08.002>.

⁹ Siti Dian Natasya Solin et al., "Batak Customary Marriage: A Study of the Prohibition of Same-Clan Marriage and Its Relevance in the Contemporary Era," *El-Ussrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 62, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ujhk.v7i1.23309>.

¹⁰ Defel Fakhyadi and Muhammad Adib Samsudin, "Islamic Law Meets Minangkabau Customs: Navigating Forbidden Marriages in Tanah Datar," *El-Mashlahah* 14, no. 1 (March 23, 2024): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v14i1.7364>.

¹¹ Nailur Rahmi and Rinta Okta Henny, "Sanksi Adat Tentang Larangan Perkawinan Terhadap Orang Sesuku Dengan Pelaku Zina," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 5, no. 2 (November 30, 2020): 329, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v5i2.1525>.

¹² Kholifatun Nur Mustofa et al., "Religious Authority and Family Law Reform in Indonesia: The Response and Influence of the Indonesian Ulema Council on Interfaith Marriage," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 23, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 383, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v23i2.11849>.

¹³ Ahmad Rajafi, Arif Sugitanata, and Vinna Lusiana, "The 'Double-Faced' Legal Expression: Dynamics and Legal Loopholes in Interfaith Marriages in Indonesia," *Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 1 (February 29, 2024): 19–43, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v5i1.2153>.

¹⁴ Danur Putut Permadi and Hanif Fitri Yantari, "Nilai Aksiologis Pernikahan Jilu Pada Masyarakat Jawa," *Dialog* 46, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 229–42, <https://doi.org/10.47655/dialog.v46i2.684>.

the Sadd al-Dzari'ah principle, highlighting how religious interpretation reinforces the custom's legitimacy.¹⁵ Despite these contributions, there remains a lack of research that critically interrogates the JiLu and Lusan traditions using socio-legal frameworks. This study fills that gap by applying a critical legal perspective to reveal how customary restrictions are maintained not solely for spiritual reasons but also through social pressure and communal sanctioning, as seen in Blembem Village, Ponorogo. Here, couples who violate JiLu norms often face ridicule, isolation, or symbolic exclusion from social rituals.¹⁶ By understanding law not as a neutral tool but as a construct influenced by social power relations, this study—drawing on Critical Legal Studies—argues that the persistence of JiLu reflects broader dynamics of control and conformity rooted in community ideology and identity.¹⁷

While various studies have previously discussed marriage prohibitions within indigenous communities, few have critically explored how such traditions persist through complex social mechanisms in contemporary rural Javanese society. This study offers a novel contribution by applying a socio-legal perspective to the JiLu marriage prohibition, analyzing not merely its cultural symbolism but also its function in maintaining communal authority and regulating individual autonomy. In Blembem Village, Ponorogo, JiLu (short for *siji* and *telu*) refers to the prohibition against marriages between first-born and third-born children from different families. Local belief holds that such unions invite misfortunes such as familial discord, illness, or even death. Although no formal legal sanctions are imposed, couples who violate this custom face significant social pressure, including ostracism from community rituals and exclusion from village activities. This persistence of JiLu norms, despite the influence of national law and modern values, demonstrates the enduring strength of customary traditions in shaping social relations within the community.

This research adopts a socio-legal approach to examine the JiLu marriage prohibition as practised in Tembol Hamlet, Blembem Village, Jambon District, Ponorogo Regency. Fieldwork was carried out over three months, from September to November 2024. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with seven informants, including traditional elders, village officials, local community leaders, and couples who have had direct experience with the JiLu custom. To support and contextualize the primary findings, secondary data were gathered from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and local archival documents that provide both historical and sociological insights into the custom. The analysis is grounded in the social construction of reality theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, with a specific focus on the processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization.

¹⁵ Chalimatus Sa'diyah and Abdullah Afif, "Larangan Perkawinan Adat Jawa Jilu Perspektif Sadd Al-Dzari'Ah," *SHAKHSIYAH BURHANIYAH: Jurnal Penelitian Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (2023): 141–62, <https://doi.org/10.33752/sbjphi.v8i2.4345>.

¹⁶ Mitun, Interview with a Community Leader in Blembem Village, Ponorogo, November 1, 2024.

¹⁷ R.W. Gordon, "Critical Legal Studies," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition*, 2015, 251–54, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.86018-3>.

These theoretical concepts are used to explore how JiLu is continuously maintained as a shared norm within the community—constructed through storytelling, solidified into perceived truth, and internalized across generations. This framework allows for a deeper understanding of how cultural beliefs are formed, passed down, and embedded into the collective consciousness over time.

The JiLu Marriage Prohibition: A Socially Constructed Norm in the Javanese Context

The JiLu marriage prohibition, deeply embedded in the traditional Javanese community of Blembem Village, Ponorogo, reflects how cultural systems rooted in oral tradition and ancestral authority can shape not only communal identity but also intimate personal decisions like marriage. This belief, which forbids unions between a family's firstborn and thirdborn children, is held as a symbolic barrier against perceived disorder. Unlike state-enforced laws or religious doctrines, JiLu gains its legitimacy from repeated social practices—rituals, stories, and warnings that collectively reinforce its perceived sanctity. The prohibition serves a dual role: on one hand, it seeks to preserve spiritual balance within the household, and on the other, it maintains the sociocultural harmony of the village as a whole.¹⁸ Although lacking legal recognition, the tradition functions with real social force. Through consistent storytelling and intergenerational reminders, the practice has been normalized, especially among elders who often frame disobedience to JiLu as the root of various calamities—illness, financial struggle, or early death. The community's reliance on Islamic jurisprudence, particularly the maxim *dar'u al-mafâsîd muqaddam 'alâ jalb al-masâlih* (preventing harm takes precedence over seeking benefit), often serves to further cement its place in moral discourse, even among those beginning to question its relevance.¹⁹

What distinguishes JiLu from other traditional prohibitions is its specific focus on birth order rather than variables like social class, gender, or age. Within Javanese cultural reasoning, firstborn children are commonly perceived as assertive, disciplined, and accountable, while thirdborns are often seen as emotionally reactive, dependent, or indulged.²⁰ These contrasting personality traits are believed to generate conflict and instability in marriage, potentially disrupting the household's internal balance. JiLu derives its strength not from empirical reasoning but from repeated social reinforcement that embeds the rule into communal consciousness. In practice, couples who choose to ignore the JiLu norm may face exclusion from local events, become targets of community gossip, or be denied blessings during ceremonial rituals. These subtle social mechanisms—though lacking legal weight—can exert significant psychological pressure. While adherence is technically optional, many comply out of concern

¹⁸ Setsuko Shibuya, "Working Together for a Better Life: Individuals, Family, and Society in the Rural Mekong Delta, Vietnam," *Asian Anthropology*, March 14, 2025, 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2025.2464968>.

¹⁹ Mitun, Interview with a Community Leader in Blembem Village, Ponorogo.

²⁰ Ayu Laili Amelia, "Larangan Perkawinan Jilu dan Pembinaan Keluarga Sakinah di Kabupaten Blitar," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah* 10, no. 1 (June 30, 2018): 31–39, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v10i1.6571>.

for their social standing rather than personal conviction. In tightly bonded rural communities like Blembem, individual choices are rarely private. Social norms in such settings are not legally binding but are upheld through emotional learning, group expectations, and shared memory. As Wenzel and Woodyatt explain, informal social norms often serve as powerful behavioural regulators, promoting conformity and punishing deviation—even in the absence of formal authority.²¹

Despite JiLu's longstanding role in shaping marriage norms in Blembem, its authority is no longer immune to scrutiny—especially among younger generations with greater access to formal education, religious studies, and urban perspectives. These individuals have begun questioning not only the logic of JiLu but also the underlying assumption that firstborn and thirdborn children are inherently incompatible. One such voice is Latifah, a university student who, in an interview, reflected: “If mutual ethics, intention, and understanding are what truly determine a good marriage, why should we be restricted by a belief that says the firstborn and thirdborn cannot be together—just because of their birth order?”²² Her question directly challenges the core rationale of JiLu: the long-held belief that firstborns are too dominant and thirdborns too emotionally dependent and that this imbalance will inevitably cause instability. While elders see this classification as ancestral wisdom that must be followed to preserve harmony, Latifah represents a growing mindset that prioritizes character, compatibility, and faith over rigid social constructs. This generational divide marks a significant cultural turning point where tradition is no longer accepted without reflection but is weighed against evolving values and individual reasoning.

From a theoretical perspective, the existence of JiLu can be understood through the lens of social constructionism, as developed by Berger and Luckmann and further elaborated by Best and Snyder. According to this framework, social norms emerge and persist through a three-stage process: externalization, objectification, and internalization. In Blembem's case, externalization happens when elders convey cautionary stories about the dangers of marriages between firstborn and thirdborn children. These narratives—often framed as ancestral wisdom—are told and retold until they move into the stage of objectification, where they are no longer viewed as personal or cultural opinions, but as unquestionable truths.²³ Over time, these beliefs are internalized by the younger generation, who absorb them as part of their moral compass. Susilo, a senior community member from Tembol Hamlet, captured this phenomenon clearly: “JiLu is not written anywhere, but we all know its power”.²⁴ His statement highlights how oral tradition transforms collective belief into perceived fact. JiLu, then, is

²¹ M. Wenzel and L. Woodyatt, “The Power and Pitfalls of Social Norms,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 76, no. 1 (2025): 583–606, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-020124-120310>.

²² Latifah, Interview with a resident of Blembem Village, Ponorogo, November 5, 2024.

²³ J. Best and J. Snyder, “Social Constructionism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Criminological Theory and Concepts*, 2017, 210–13, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315744902-47>.

²⁴ Susilo, Interview with a resident of Blembem Village, Ponorogo., October 27, 2024.

more than custom—it becomes a deeply ingrained mental structure that governs how people interpret misfortune, morality, and proper behaviour in everyday life.

Even though traditions like JiLu have long been part of cultural life in Blembem, they are not immune to change. These kinds of social constructs are dynamic—they shift when they come into contact with new ways of thinking. This is particularly evident today, as younger generations begin to weigh JiLu against religious knowledge and rational analysis gained through formal education. Dardak, a young villager, voiced a common sentiment among youth when he said that he found no scriptural basis for JiLu and believed that trust and emotional compatibility should guide marriage, not rigid traditions based on birth order.²⁵ His perspective highlights a broader trend: the growing willingness to reinterpret customs through personal and contemporary moral reasoning. This questioning weakens the symbolic authority that once made JiLu seem absolute. When people start noticing that even couples who followed the rule still face divorce or hardship, the rule's moral weight begins to falter. As a result, JiLu is no longer sustained by belief alone, it is being reexamined through logic, fairness, and lived experience.

JiLu's continued influence in Blembem is also maintained through a process known as habitualization—where traditions become normalized simply because they are repeated over time. As Şahin²⁶ explains, when an idea is enacted often enough, it begins to feel natural, regardless of its origin. This mechanism is especially visible in Javanese rural culture, including Ponorogo, where repeating ancestral practices is a primary way to keep traditions alive. But as modern influences—such as formal education, digital media, and religious reinterpretation—become more accessible, younger generations start to develop a more critical outlook. What once felt unquestionable now becomes open to doubt. The older generation, once the sole narrators of cultural truth, now face challenges not just to the emotional wisdom they carry, but also to the intellectual authority they hold. Although warnings about spiritual consequences still influence some villagers, that fear is weakening. Research by Viscogliosi et al.²⁷ shows that norms like JiLu often operate through emotional pressure—fear of supernatural punishment, shame, or community rejection. Yet, once people begin to differentiate between coincidence and causation, the grip of such beliefs begins to loosen.

Even so, JiLu in Blembem functions as more than just a rule about marriage—it acts as a cultural anchor that connects individuals to their community's shared values and historical identity. Its role is not solely to ward off misfortune, but to reaffirm loyalty to ancestral customs and collective belonging.

²⁵ Abi Dardak, Interview with a religious leader in Blembem Village, Ponorogo, November 4, 2024.

²⁶ F. Şahin, "Implications of Social Constructionism for Social Work," *Asian Pacific Journal of Social Work* 16, no. 1 (2006): 57–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21650993.2006.9755992>.

²⁷ C. Viscogliosi et al., "Importance of Indigenous Elders' Contributions to Individual and Community Wellness: Results from a Scoping Review on Social Participation and Intergenerational Solidarity," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 5 (2020): 667–81, <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-019-00292-3>.

JiLu operates as a form of symbolic communication: it marks who aligns with tradition and who steps outside the communal boundary. Those who challenge it are often seen as disturbing the moral balance of the village. This belief helps explain why many people continue to comply with JiLu, even when they privately question it. For some, following the rule maintains harmony; for others, it's simply habitual. But this quiet conformity is showing cracks. With voices like Laily and Latifah beginning to question JiLu openly, they create space for broader reflection. Their stance encourages others—especially younger villagers—to reconsider whether obedience to tradition should outweigh personal conviction, especially in decisions as intimate as marriage.

The JiLu marriage prohibition reveals the power of socially constructed norms to shape behaviour, regulate relationships, and reinforce collective identity—even without legal backing. Rooted in oral tradition and maintained through ritual, the custom has long functioned as a moral compass in Blembem Village. Yet, under the pressures of education, modern religious interpretation, and individual rights discourse, JiLu now stands at a crossroads. While it remains influential among elders and traditionalists, its authority is increasingly questioned by youth who see no empirical or spiritual justification for its existence. Berger and Luckmann's theory helps us see JiLu not as a relic, but as an ongoing social narrative—one that is still being written, challenged, and redefined. Whether it persists, adapts, or fades will depend on how the community continues to negotiate the balance between collective heritage and individual freedom.

Negotiating Personal Autonomy and Cultural Tradition in JiLu Marriages

The JiLu marriage restriction constitutes a deeply entrenched cultural convention within the communal life of Blembem Village, located in Jambon District, Ponorogo. This norm prohibits matrimonial unions between individuals who are the firstborn and thirdborn children from separate families, stemming from the belief that such combinations are inherently incompatible and may result in familial instability, conflict, or even premature death. Although JiLu lacks textual authority in both religious doctrine and scientific research, it continues to hold significant moral weight among older generations who regard it as sacred ancestral wisdom. This tradition is transmitted orally and reinforced through intergenerational communication, particularly during family gatherings and village ceremonies. JiLu is not merely a social rule but a symbolic framework that reflects local perceptions of cosmic balance, relational order, and communal well-being. However, this long-standing belief is increasingly challenged by younger generations, who—under the influence of education, religious reinterpretation, and modern values—begin to question the rationality of such prescriptions. They tend to favour marriage decisions based on emotional compatibility, mutual respect, and individual agency, rather

than adhering to birth-order taboos. This shift indicates a gradual transformation in how cultural authority is negotiated within the village.

The shifting dynamic is illustrated in the personal account of LN Anidha, a resident of Blembem. In an interview, she recounted how she and her partner acknowledged the JiLu restriction but ultimately prioritized their personal decision and spiritual beliefs. Initially reminded of the prohibition by her parents, Laily explained that the final choice was left to her and her partner. With a strong reliance on religious faith, she expressed confidence that all matters, including marriage and its consequences, are determined by God. Her response highlighted a significant transition from communal decision-making to individual autonomy: “Yes, I knew about it... at first, my parents reminded me about it, but the decision was returned to us because we are the ones who will live it. And bismillah, with the belief that everything—our livelihood, death, and destiny—has already been determined by Allah, we just go through what we think is good”.²⁸ This perspective signals a movement toward viewing marriage as a deeply personal journey guided more by faith and personal judgment than by inherited cultural boundaries.

From this explanation, it can be concluded that an individual’s decision to shape their life path, including choosing a partner, should not be constrained by collective traditions that may no longer align with personal values. This underscores the importance of respecting individual rights to make decisions based on their own beliefs and perspectives. In the context of *JiLu* marriages, Roberto Unger’s philosophy affirms that every individual has a fundamental human right to determine their life choices without being subjected to coercive norms or social pressures. The right to marry is recognized as a fundamental human right, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees the freedom to marry without unreasonable restrictions.²⁹

The choice made by Laily and her partner to enter into a JiLu marriage, despite longstanding prohibitions, illustrates a form of personal agency that resists conformity to traditional expectations. Rather than adhering to communal fears rooted in myth and custom, their decision was influenced by the belief that matters of destiny, livelihood, and life’s course lie in divine hands—not in societal taboos. This perspective suggests that social norms should not become rigid boundaries that restrict individuals from making decisions aligned with their values and convictions. Their case illustrates how personal autonomy can still flourish within communities where collective traditions hold sway. Moreover, it reflects how value pluralism within a society may foster both change and mutual respect. As some community members uphold tradition while others pursue change, it becomes possible to negotiate a

²⁸ Laily Nur Anidha, Interview with a JiLu couple in Blembem Village, Ponorogo, November 13, 2024.

²⁹ Widyawati, “Interreligious Marriage in the Kompilasi Hukum Islam: A Human Right Perspective,” *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 6 (2012): 858–65.

shared space that honours both. According to McDonald, tensions between personal rights and traditional norms can be addressed through constructive dialogue, which enables communities to maintain cultural heritage without suppressing individual freedom.³⁰

When viewed through the lens of subjective values, the case of JiLu marriage highlights the idea that each person holds the right to determine their values and interpret life's meaning based on individual beliefs and lived experience. This approach centers on the notion that people themselves are best positioned to decide what holds significance in their lives, without being tethered to inherited customs or traditional frameworks. As Eabrasu³¹ suggests, subjective values encourage personal agency in ethical and cultural decision-making. Applied to JiLu, this perspective explains why some individuals choose to disregard longstanding taboos or superstitions—they place greater trust in their judgment than in unverified cultural rules. Their willingness to pursue marriage despite such prohibitions reflects a deeper commitment to authenticity and freedom. Willoughby et al.³² points out that this marks a broader cultural shift, where personal meaning and individual convictions increasingly outweigh collective expectations. In such contexts, the act of marrying outside the JiLu restrictions becomes not just a choice of love, but an affirmation of the right to self-determination in the face of social conformity.

This dynamic shows how subjective values empower individuals to shape their understanding of life's purpose, even when that understanding stands in opposition to prevailing social norms. Choosing to engage in a JiLu marriage—despite community disapproval—demonstrates a bold assertion of personal freedom. Such decisions reflect a commitment to authenticity over conformity. From the standpoint of liberal thought, this act aligns with the belief that individuals have the right to make life choices based on their convictions, rather than being compelled to follow inherited rules or collective expectations. As Parekh³³ argues, liberalism places the individual at the centre of moral and social life, recognizing their right to determine their path, including deeply personal matters like marriage. This approach highlights the importance of autonomy and equal rights in shaping personal decisions. Similarly, DiZerega³⁴ emphasizes that individuals must be free to define their values without being coerced by dominant cultural norms. Within this liberal framework, JiLu marriage becomes a site

³⁰ L. McDonald, "Can Collective And Individual Rights Coexist?," in *Group Rights*, 2022, 349–75, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315253770-22>.

³¹ M. Eabrasu, "A Praxeological Assessment of Subjective Value," *Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics* 14, no. 2 (2011): 216–41.

³² B.J. Willoughby, S.S. Hall, and H.P. Luczak, "Marital Paradigms: A Conceptual Framework for Marital Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs," *Journal of Family Issues* 36, no. 2 (2015): 188–211, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13487677>.

³³ B. Parekh, "Liberalism and Morality," in *The Morality of Politics*, 2018, 81–98, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351138284-5>.

³⁴ G. DiZerega, "Spontaneous Order and Liberalism's Complex Relation to Democracy," *Independent Review* 16, no. 2 (2011): 173–97.

where self-determination confronts tradition, revealing the growing space for personal voice in rural cultural contexts.

In an interview, Laily explained that her family does not adhere to the prohibition on *JiLu* marriages. She believes that everything in life, including marriage, is part of God's divine plan. According to her, "There's nothing, because, in our family, we are not among those who believe in such things. So, whatever happens, we believe it's already Allah's decree." She further added, "In my opinion, beliefs like that are starting to fade among the community, maybe because, in reality, household problems are now so diverse. Like I said, every person and every marriage will undoubtedly face challenges. The issues that arise are not exclusively limited to *JiLu* couples but occur in families globally. So, *JiLu* couples can't be blamed as the cause of family problems. For those who still hold onto such beliefs, in my opinion, they have an outdated mindset—a mindset that refuses to be challenged".³⁵

During the interview, Laily shared that the belief in the *JiLu* marriage prohibition is slowly losing its grip within the Blembem community. She pointed out that problems in marriage—whether related to finances, health, or emotional stability—are not unique to couples who violate *JiLu* norms. In her view, every marriage carries its own set of struggles, regardless of whether the couple followed traditional restrictions or not. Because of this, she finds it illogical to blame family misfortunes solely on a *JiLu* pairing. Laily also observed that those who still strictly follow the prohibition often hold rigid mindsets and are less receptive to change. Her opinion signals a broader shift in societal values, where more people now prioritize real-life experiences and factual reasoning over inherited customs. This reflects a growing reliance on personal observation and critical thinking rather than unquestioned tradition. As noted by Pennycook et al.³⁶ such shifts often align with political liberalism, which promotes rational inquiry and scientific evidence over rigid adherence to conventional moral codes. This trend suggests that communities like Blembem are gradually moving toward a more evidence-based, reflective way of interpreting tradition and social rules.

This perspective highlights the way individuals actively use their freedom to question and reevaluate traditional values. Rather than accepting inherited customs without thought, they rely on personal autonomy to assess whether such traditions still hold relevance in the face of changing cultural, social, and modern-day realities. As Akyil et al.³⁷ suggest, this kind of evaluation involves balancing the need to honour cultural heritage with the flexibility to embrace newer values that better reflect present-day societal norms. Each person, shaped by unique life experiences and personal reflections, holds the

³⁵ Anidha, Interview with a *JiLu* couple in Blembem Village, Ponorogo.

³⁶ G. Pennycook et al., "On the Belief That Beliefs Should Change According to Evidence: Implications for Conspiratorial, Moral, Paranormal, Political, Religious, and Science Beliefs," *Judgment and Decision Making* 15, no. 4 (2020): 476–98.

³⁷ Y. Akyil et al., "Experiences of Families Transmitting Values in a Rapidly Changing Society: Implications for Family Therapists," *Family Process* 55, no. 2 (2016): 368–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12163>.

right to define what is meaningful to them. These self-defined values then become the foundation for how they make decisions and navigate daily life.³⁸ Laily's views demonstrate this courage—she chooses to let go of customs that no longer resonate with her understanding of life and replaces them with beliefs more aligned with contemporary values. Her stance is consistent with the idea of personal freedom, which affirms that individuals have the right to shape their own lives without being constrained by outdated social expectations or inherited cultural obligations.

Stigma and Social Sanctions: Mechanisms of Enforcement in JiLu Practice

As previously discussed, JiLu marriages—referring to unions between firstborn and thirdborn children—are considered culturally prohibited in many Javanese communities, including in Tembol, and Blembem Village. This belief remains particularly strong among the older generation, who act as the tradition's principal guardians. In Blembem, the persistence of the JiLu custom can be examined through the theoretical framework of social construction, which includes the stages of externalization, objectification, and internalization. The first stage involves elders articulating and conveying their beliefs, thereby transmitting the prohibition across generations. As Mulyana³⁹ explains, over time these articulations are ritualized and normalized, gradually transforming into collective truths. Through repeated practices and communal rituals, JiLu becomes embedded within the social fabric of the village—transitioning from a belief into a socially accepted reality. Similarly, Wahyuningtyas et al.⁴⁰ describe the final stage of internalization, where individuals—especially the younger generation—begin to absorb and internalize these norms as part of their worldview. This process, reinforced through familial upbringing and participation in community life, sustains JiLu not only as a cultural convention but also as an expression of both personal identity and communal belonging.

The externalization of the JiLu tradition began when community ancestors introduced the marriage prohibition as a form of social regulation, intended to preserve order and harmony within kinship structures. Over generations, this prohibition was orally passed down and eventually accepted as an established norm, especially by those directly taught by their elders. During the objectification phase, JiLu took on the status of a taken-for-granted truth—reinforced through communal practices and informal sanctions such as social exclusion or public criticism aimed at those who defied the norm. These consequences strengthened the perception that JiLu was not merely a belief but a necessary rule to maintain community stability. However, the process of social construction does not stop at

³⁸ G.P. Yankov, "Between 'Is' and 'Ought': A Philosophical Investigation of Personal Values and Their Application in Managerial Practice," *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 37, no. 3 (2017): 164–82, <https://doi.org/10.1037/teo0000063>.

³⁹ Mulyana, "Manifestation of Linguistic Aesthetics and Characters in Javanese Wedding Ceremonial Discourse," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 13, no. 2 (2023): 333–42, <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v13i2.63074>.

⁴⁰ B.P. Wahyuningtyas, D. Asteria, and Sunarto, "The Accommodation of Communication in the Family as an Adjustment of Cultural Values between Generations," *Social Sciences* 12, no. 12 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12120653>.

widespread acceptance. The final stage, internalization, depends on how individuals interpret and assign value to the tradition within their own moral and social frameworks. At this point, tradition becomes embedded in personal belief systems and guides behaviour almost automatically—unless questioned. Increasingly, individuals are beginning to assess whether traditions like JiLu still resonate with present-day values, and in doing so, they open space for reinterpretation or rejection based on evolving personal and societal norms.

The importance of individual freedom is particularly evident in how the JiLu tradition is perceived and contested in Blembem Village. As people assert their autonomy, varying interpretations of JiLu emerge, and these differences frequently lead to social tension within the community. Individuals who choose to disregard the JiLu prohibition often face discriminatory treatment, including social exclusion, gossip, and negative labelling by those who firmly uphold the custom. Such enforcement of tradition frequently results in the marginalization of those considered to be deviating from the collective norm. This pattern is not unique to Blembem; Calvo⁴¹ observed a similar phenomenon in Bolivia, where conflicts arose between community factions seeking to preserve traditional values and those advocating for change. In both contexts, traditional norms become tools of social control, used to define who belongs and who does not—often at the expense of those who seek to act according to their personal beliefs.

Discriminatory behaviour often has its roots in prejudice, which separates people into “insiders” and “outsiders” based on perceived differences and a lack of genuine understanding. Schaefer⁴² notes that these biases can lead to actions that restrict certain groups from accessing equal rights or opportunities. In the context of Tembol, such prejudice is visible in how older residents respond to those who go against the JiLu marriage prohibition. Families that break this traditional rule often find themselves quietly ostracized—they become subjects of community gossip, face judgmental remarks, or are subtly excluded from social gatherings. This kind of social distancing is particularly noticeable in the early stages of their marriage when community attention is heightened. Moreover, if any misfortune strikes these families—like illness, loss, or financial trouble—it is frequently interpreted not as a coincidence, but as a direct punishment for violating JiLu. These assumptions, though unverified, reinforce fear and keep the tradition alive through emotional pressure rather than reason.

In Tembol, the JiLu marriage taboo continues to hold a strong influence, particularly among the older generation. Many elders view this tradition as a vital moral boundary that should not be crossed.

⁴¹ V. Calvo, “The Construction of the ‘Self’ in Conflicts around Land in Contemporary Tarabuco (Bolivia),” *Development and Change* 47, no. 6 (2016): 1361–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12279>.

⁴² R.T. Schaefer, “Prejudice in Society: Sociological Perspectives,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition*, 2015, 839–45, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.32190-0>.

Wiji,⁴³ a long-time resident of the village, shared her concern about couples who ignore this prohibition. According to her, those who go against the JiLu warning—even after being advised not to—often face dire consequences. She recounted a case in which, not long after a JiLu marriage took place, the bride's father passed away. For her, this incident wasn't coincidental but a result of the couple's disobedience. Similarly, Rosyidah⁴⁴ told a nearly identical story. After her child married in violation of the JiLu custom, the bride's father became seriously ill and eventually died. She interpreted this as a direct consequence of defying the tradition, insisting that they had been warned but refused to comply. These personal testimonies reflect how deeply spiritual and emotional interpretations continue to shape the community's understanding of cause and consequence.

The stigma attached to JiLu marriages in Tembol appears to stem primarily from the older generation, who strongly adhere to ancestral teachings and view the JiLu prohibition as a sacred, non-negotiable norm. For them, going against this tradition is more than just a personal decision—it's seen as a cultural transgression that could trigger misfortunes within the family. This belief reflects the generational divide, where older community members attribute incidents such as illness or death. According to Hadnes and Schumacher,⁴⁵ such perceptions are common in communities where traditional norms are deeply linked to moral outcomes, and deviations are believed to bring about social or spiritual consequences. In contrast, younger individuals—particularly those who have access to modern education and technological exposure—tend to view these traditional beliefs as outdated. Their growing scepticism reflects what Pelizzo et al.⁴⁶ describe as a broader shift in societal values, where increased exposure to socio-economic development leads to the questioning and, in many cases, rejection of customs that no longer resonate with personal or contemporary values.

In Blembem Village, JiLu remains a widely respected custom that discourages marriage between two individuals. Elders believe those born first tend to be assertive and controlling, while those born third are often seen as spoiled or emotionally volatile. Mbah Mitun⁴⁷ stated that uniting individuals with such contrasting tendencies invites conflict in the household. This belief, although unwritten, shapes how families approach matchmaking. However, the younger generation increasingly views such reasoning as outdated. They argue that relationship success depends on emotional maturity and compatibility, not ordinal birth traits. Hirschmann⁴⁸ explains that many social norms are historically

⁴³Wiji, personal communication, November 24, 2024.

⁴⁴ Rosyidah, Interview with a resident of Blembem Village, Ponorogo, November 27, 2024.

⁴⁵ M. Hadnes and H. Schumacher, "The Gods Are Watching: An Experimental Study of Religion and Traditional Belief in Burkina Faso," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 4 (2012): 689–704, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2012.01676.x>.

⁴⁶ R. Pelizzo, D. Turganov, and N. Kuzenbayev, "Modernization, Superstition, And Cultural Change," *World Affairs* 186, no. 4 (2023): 869–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00438200231203012>.

⁴⁷ Mitun, Interview with a Community Leader in Blembem Village, Ponorogo.

⁴⁸ N.J. Hirschmann, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom," in *Liberty Reader*, 2017, 200–222, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315091822-11>.

constructed and maintained through repeated behaviours rather than critical evaluation. In this light, JiLu is seen not as a spiritual safeguard but as a cultural remnant lacking relevance today. Saralae et al.⁴⁹ emphasize that myths often uphold these rules, embedding them with moral authority that pressures individuals to conform—even when the original logic no longer resonates. This generational shift marks a move toward personal choice and away from inherited constraints.

Mbah Mitun⁵⁰ emphasized that those who break the JiLu custom are often subjected to indirect punishment from their community, such as being gossiped about or excluded from social gatherings. He stressed that this tradition should not be taken lightly or dismissed as baseless folklore. His remarks illustrate how entrenched beliefs operate as informal systems of control, where social pressure enforces adherence to unwritten norms. The insistence on respecting JiLu reflects more than just cultural loyalty—it points to an underlying hierarchy, where questioning tradition is viewed as a form of disobedience. In this setting, the power to judge and penalize rests largely with the collective, not formal institutions. As Dixon⁵¹ suggests, practices like gossip and exclusion are mechanisms through which communities maintain internal order, using social visibility and public opinion to ensure conformity and discourage deviation from established customs.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the endurance and evolving nature of the JiLu marriage prohibition in Blembem Village, Ponorogo, as a culturally constructed norm that regulates marital decisions based on sibling birth order. Although JiLu lacks codification in formal legal or religious systems, it continues to exert significant influence through oral transmission, symbolic enforcement, and social pressure. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, the findings demonstrate how JiLu is maintained through the cyclical processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization—firmly embedding the tradition into the collective consciousness of the local community. The research also identifies a growing generational shift, particularly among younger individuals exposed to modern education, religious reinterpretation, and urban influences. These actors increasingly question the legitimacy of JiLu, favouring individual autonomy, emotional compatibility, and rational evaluation over inherited taboos. Their critical stance reflects a broader cultural transition in rural Indonesia, where personal freedom and self-determination are gradually challenging communal conformity. Ultimately, the JiLu prohibition exemplifies the dynamic interplay between tradition and transformation. It reveals

⁴⁹ N.K. Saralae, A.M. Alymbaev, and R.B. Salmorbekova, "The Mythology of Ethnogenesis: The Experience of Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz-Oghuz Myths as a Factor in the Ethnic Consolidation of the Kyrgyz Society," *Voprosy Filosofii* 2023, no. 10 (2023): 181–87, <https://doi.org/10.21146/0042-8744-2023-10-181-187>.

⁵⁰ Mitun, Interview with a Community Leader in Blembem Village, Ponorogo.

⁵¹ R. Dixon, "Ostracism: One of the Many Causes of Bullying in Groups?," *Journal of School Violence* 6, no. 3 (2007): 3–26, https://doi.org/10.1300/J202v06n03_02.

that customary norms survive not only because of spiritual conviction but also due to deeply embedded social mechanisms. Yet, as values evolve, such norms must confront the possibility of reinterpretation or decline. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the function of customary law within local contexts and emphasizes the ongoing negotiation between cultural preservation and the assertion of individual rights in contemporary Indonesian society.

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