



REPRESENTATION OF NATURE AND LOCAL WISDOM IN MALAY PANTUN: A CULTURAL ECOLOGICAL DISCOURSE TOWARDS HUMAN SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The Malay *pantun* is a traditional poetic form rich in the thoughts, cultural values, and local wisdom of the Malay community. The presence of natural elements in these poems is not merely an aesthetic ornamentation (*pembayang*); rather, it serves as a dynamic medium to convey life philosophies, moral values, social relationships, and ecological awareness. This paper examines the representation of nature and local wisdom in Malay *pantun* through the lens of cultural ecology to promote human sustainability. Utilizing a qualitative approach based on textual analysis, this study examines selected Malay *pantun* sourced from *Kurik Kundi Merah Saga: Kumpulan Pantun Lisan Melayu* and *Pantun Melayu: Bingkisan Permata*. The analysis is guided by ecocriticism, cultural ecology, and the concept of local wisdom to scrutinize the relationships between humans, nature, culture, and human values. The discussion reveals five primary dimensions: nature as a reflection of the intellect and soul (*akal budi*), flora as a symbol of local wisdom, the maritime environment as cultural memory, nature as a moral and social teacher, and local wisdom as the foundation of human sustainability. The findings indicate that the traditional Malay community possessed a deep sensitivity toward their environment and positioned nature as a vital source of ecological wisdom, moral values, and social resilience. Therefore, the *pantun* should be re-read as a cultural ecological text crucial for values education, the preservation of cultural identity, and the formation of a civilized, sustainable society.

Keywords: Malay *pantun*, nature, local wisdom, cultural ecology, ecocriticism, human sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The Malay *pantun* is a traditional poetic heritage deeply intertwined with the daily life of the Malay community. Far from functioning merely as a tool for entertainment, humor, satire, or customary communication, it serves as a vessel for transmitting profound thoughts, values, counsel, and existential philosophies. Within the Malay tradition, the *pantun* is frequently associated with the refinement of character, linguistic eloquence, and the community's capacity to comprehend life through natural symbols. Harun Mat Piah (1989) explains that the *pantun* possesses its own unique structure, function, and aesthetic values, while Wilkinson and Winstedt (1914) view it as a direct reflection of the thoughts and sensibilities of the Malay people.

A defining feature of the *pantun* is the utilization of natural elements as the *pembayang* (the introductory or foreshadowing couplet). Images such as islands, mountains, seas, flowers, paddy, fruits, birds, rivers, soil, and wind are recurrently featured in the opening lines of the *pantun*. However, these ecological elements must not be regarded as mere linguistic ornaments. From the perspective of ecocriticism, literary works can be read as texts that reveal the relationship between humans and their physical environment, including the non-human world (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2023). Hence, nature in the *pantun* can be interpreted as a symbolic language born out of the community's lived experiences with their environment.

UNESCO's (2020) recognition of the *pantun* as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity underscores its status as a shared cultural treasure that preserves memory, values, and worldviews. Within the discourse of sustainability, the *pantun* can be re-evaluated as a text that bridges language, culture, nature, and human values. Zapf (2010, 2016) posits that literature functions as cultural ecology because it preserves cultural memory, critiques social imbalances, and renews how humans perceive their relationship with the biosphere.

This paper assumes that nature in the *pantun* is not a passive element. Instead, nature becomes a vehicle for conveying advice, customs, the nobility of character (*budi*), moderation, social wisdom, and a consciousness of ecological balance. Reading the *pantun* through ecocriticism, cultural ecology, and local wisdom allows it to be viewed not merely as an aesthetic heritage, but as an educational text highly relevant to fostering human sustainability.

Human sustainability in this paper is not narrowed down to physical survival or the conservation of natural resources alone. Rather, the term also refers to the continuity of values, decorum (*adab*), cultural memory, identity, and the community's capacity to navigate change without losing its humanistic foundations. Within this framework, the *pantun* becomes critical because it delivers moral education subtly, memorably, and close to daily experience. The poetic beauty of the *pantun's* structure allows ecological and social values to be inherited without being overtly didactic. Therefore, the connection between nature and *budi* (character/kindness) in the *pantun* must be read as part of the cultural mechanism that maintains social equilibrium.

Problem statement, research questions, and objectives.

Scholarship on the Malay *pantun* often prioritizes its structural forms, rhyme schemes, social functions, moral values, and linguistic aesthetics. Although natural elements are frequently mentioned, their deeper connection with culture and sustainability has not been comprehensively explicated. Nature is sometimes dismissed as a beautiful prelude (*pembayang*), whereas its selection reflects deep observation, empirical experience, and local wisdom of the Malay community.

Maulana Al-Fin Che Man and Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin (2022) demonstrate that natural phenomena such as storms, winds, waves, typhoons, stars, high tides, and currents in the *pantun* are directly tied to the empirical experiences of the maritime community. Similarly, Ab Jabar and Mohd Bukhari (2018) prove that the relationship between the *pembayang* and the *maksud* (the meaning/intent couplet) can be decoded through an ecological lens, as natural elements carry profound life philosophies and lessons. However, research that simultaneously integrates ecocriticism, cultural ecology, local wisdom, the formation of *akal budi* (intellect and soul), and human sustainability remains limited.



Based on this gap, this study addresses two research questions: (i) how is nature represented in the Malay *pantun* as a reflection of cultural ecology and local wisdom; and (ii) how does the *pantun* function as a vehicle for ecological education and human sustainability? Correspondingly, the research objectives are to analyze the representation of nature in the Malay *pantun* and to discuss its role as a medium for environmental education and human sustainability.

Emphasizing this research gap is crucial because studying nature in the *pantun* should not stop at cataloging flora, fauna, or weather patterns. Research must explain the process of meaning-making: how natural elements are selected, how the *pembayang* connects to the *maksud*, what values are transmitted through this relationship, and why those values remain relevant. By addressing these questions, this paper shifts the focus from nature as a descriptive backdrop to nature as a source of cultural epistemology and human education.

Literature review

The literature review can be gathered along four main pathways: ecocriticism, cultural ecology, local wisdom, and studies on nature within the *pantun*. Ecocriticism investigates the relationship between literary texts and the physical, non-human environment. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) define ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, while Buell (1995) asserts that literature shapes the environmental imagination by granting a meaningful presence to the non-human world. Garrard (2023) further expands the field through the cultural construction of place, pollution, animals, disasters, and climate change as cultural discourses.

In Malay literature, Mohd Saberi Muda and Mas Rynna Wati Ahmad (2019) demonstrate that poetry can record environmental degradation, developmental conflicts, and human responsibility toward the ecosystem. This study illustrates that nature is not just an image of beauty, but also a site of ecological critique. However, their focus is primarily on modern Malay poetry, leaving a gap in exploring how traditional poetic forms like the *pantun* implicitly store ecological knowledge.

The cultural ecology approach provides a broader framework for understanding the relationship between nature, texts, and culture. Zapf (2010, 2016) conceptualizes literature as a cultural system that preserves a society's memory, balances dominant discourses, and generates new possibilities for human-nature relations. This perspective is highly relevant because the *pembayang* of the *pantun* frequently records memories of agriculture, seafaring, migration, diet, traditional medicine, and social life. Hussain et al. (2020) also demonstrate that natural elements in Malay literature contain rich symbolism, beliefs, and worldviews that shape the cultural landscape and communal identity.

The concept of local wisdom asserts that a community's knowledge is formed through long-term relationships with their environment. Berkes (2012) describes traditional ecological knowledge as a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, belief, social institutions, and worldviews. In the *pantun*, local wisdom is detected through ancestral knowledge of plants, seasons, tides, wind patterns, navigation, and village layouts, which are then translated into advice on *budi*, decorum, and moderation. Bakar and Franco (2022) prove that oral traditions are primary vehicles for preserving and transferring ecological intelligence across generations.

Existing scholarship on the *pantun* itself provides a vital generic and corpus foundation. Harun Mat Piah (1989) examines its forms, social functions, and aesthetics, while collections like *Kurik Kundi Merah Saga* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015) and *Pantun Melayu: Bingkisan Permata* (Harun Mat Piah, 2007) demonstrate the vast cultural experiences of the Malays through natural imagery. Ab Jabar and Mohd Bukhari (2018) reject the assumption that the *pembayang* is detached from the *maksud*, proving an ecological link between the two.

Maulana Al-Fin Che Man and Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin (2022) explain the relationship between maritime phenomena and the seafaring experiences of the Malays. Mohamad Judi, Nik Khalili, and Amirham (2023) further illustrate that the *pantun* acts as an informal educational mechanism transmitting manners (*adab*), knowledge, and moral values. In the wider Nusantara region, Yenrizal, Sirozi, and Muhaimin (2024) explore environmental wisdom reflected in the *pantun* of the Uluan community, while Harum et al. (2025) demonstrate that the *pantun* in the Haruku customary community serves as a medium for environmental education and ecological-political activism.

Sustainability education studies also reinforce the value of local knowledge. Lestari, Paidi, and Suyanto (2024) show that local wisdom supports sustainability education because it bridges concepts of nature with social practices and responsibilities. Permatasari et al. (2024) also illustrate that cultural heritage and local knowledge contribute significantly to ecological and social sustainability. However, these prior studies typically examine the dimensions of nature, morals, education, or community in isolation. The critical research gap is the lack of an integrated framework that synthesizes natural representation, the *pembayang-maksud* dynamic, ecocriticism, cultural ecology, local wisdom, *akal budi*, and human sustainability.

A synthesis of prior research reveals three primary tendencies. First, genre studies emphasize the form and function of the *pantun* but do not always address its ecological dimensions. Second, environmental studies identify phenomena and symbols but do not necessarily connect them to the construction of *akal budi*. Third, research on education and local wisdom asserts the value of oral traditions but rarely builds a specific link between the structural mechanics of the *pantun* and human sustainability. This paper integrates these three tendencies by examining nature as a representation, cultural memory, source of values, and foundation of education.

Furthermore, this review demonstrates that the concept of sustainability is often discussed through policy, technology, and resource management, while the dimension of cultural imagination is largely ignored. Behavioral attitudes toward nature are formed not only by scientific data, but also by narratives, symbols, language, and values that define how humans perceive the world. The *pantun* holds a distinct advantage in this context because its structure is concise, rhythmic, and memorable. It transfers knowledge not through direct instruction, but through the relational dynamic of the *pembayang* and *maksud* that stimulates interpretation. Therefore, the *pantun* can contribute to shaping ecological consciousness at emotional, ethical, and cultural levels.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing library research and textual analysis. The research data consist of selected Malay *pantun* extracted from *Kurik Kundi*



Merah Saga: Kumpulan Pantun Lisan Melayu (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015) and *Pantun Melayu: Bingkisan Permata* (Harun Mat Piah, 2007). The stanzas were selected via purposive sampling based on three criteria: the explicit presence of natural elements, a meaningful connection between these elements and cultural values or life guidance, and the representation of local wisdom regarding human-nature relationships, *budi*, moral education, and social balance.

The textual analysis was executed through a four-stage process. First, natural elements were identified as ecological representations based on ecocriticism. Second, the relationship between *pembayang* and *maksud* was interpreted as an interconnected network of nature, culture, and humanity through cultural ecology. Third, the latent local wisdom within the natural elements was uncovered. Fourth, these values were connected to human sustainability, namely *budi*, decorum (*adab*), social responsibility, resilience, and ecological balance.

The combination of these frameworks allows nature to be read on four levels of meaning: as a physical entity, a cultural symbol, a source of traditional knowledge, and a vehicle for human character building. Ecocriticism identifies the representation and relationship between humans and nature; cultural ecology explains how nature becomes memory, customs, and worldview; local wisdom explains inherited knowledge and values; and human sustainability evaluates its contribution to building civilized and responsible individuals.

The unit of analysis is the *pantun* stanza as a whole, rather than isolated natural terms. Each *pembayang* is read in conjunction with the *maksud* to avoid interpretations based on isolated symbols. The interpretation also takes into account the cultural context of elements such as paddy, wells, ships, and local fruits. This step enables the analysis to distinguish between descriptive, symbolic, moral, and social functions. The validity of the interpretation is strengthened through continuous comparison between the *pantun* text, theoretical concepts, and relevant prior findings.

The data grouping produced five themes: nature as a reflection of the intellect and soul (*akal budi*), flora as a symbol of local wisdom, the maritime environment as cultural memory, nature as a moral and social teacher, and local wisdom as the foundation of human sustainability. This categorization is interpretive but based on repeating patterns in the corpus. A single *pantun* may contain more than one dimension; however, it is placed under the most dominant theme to ensure an organized discussion. This approach does not aim to make statistical generalizations, but rather to build a deep understanding of the cultural mechanisms that connect nature with values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nature as a *Pembayang* and a Reflection of *Akal Budi*

The Malay *pantun* connects the natural *pembayang* with the *maksud* that delivers the core thought or moral lesson. This relationship highlights that the community's imagination was forged through a profound connection with their physical surroundings (Buell, 1995; Garrard, 2023). The *pembayang* constructs a space of experience, while the *maksud* directs that experience toward ethical values. This connection is not necessarily based on direct logic; rather, it operates through analogy, sound, emotion, and culture. The refinement of the

pantun lies in its ability to connect the physical world with the moral world without separating the two.

Pulau Pandan jauh ke tengah,
Gunung Daik bercabang tiga;
Hancur badan dikandung tanah,
Budi yang baik dikenang juga.
(Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015)

(Translation)

*Pandan Island is far out in the midst of the sea,
Mount Daik has three peaks;
Though the body disintegrates, embraced by the earth,
A good deed is remembered forever.*

Islands, mountains, and the earth/soil construct a physical environment that is vast, enduring, and distant. The soil reminds humanity of their origin and the end of life. From the perspective of cultural ecology, the expression "embraced by the earth" (*dikandung tanah*) indicates that while human physical form eventually merges back with nature, the abstract value of *budi* remains alive in social memory. This *pantun* teaches that a person's worth is not measured by their physical body or temporary status, but by their *budi*. A sustainable society, in this context, is one that preserves gratitude for kindness and respectful social relations.

Ambilkan saya buah delima,
Masak sebiji di balik daun;
Budi tuan saya terima,
Jadi kenangan bertahun-tahun.
(Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015)

(Translation)

*Pluck for me a pomegranate,
Ripened alone behind the leaves;
Your kindness I graciously accept,
To be cherished for years to come.*

A pomegranate ripening behind the leaves symbolizes something valuable yet unassuming. Nature acts as a symbolic language to express gratitude, loyalty, and memory. Both stanzas prove that the *pembayang* is not an aesthetic ornament, but a system of signs that translates natural observations into a philosophy of *budi*. This finding also shows that the concept of *budi* in the *pantun* is relational. Kindness only has meaning when it is recognized, reciprocated with appreciation, and preserved in collective memory. Therefore, nature helps sustain social ethics by giving a concrete form to abstract values.

Flora as a Symbol of Local Wisdom

Flora is a dominant category in the *pantun*. Fruits, flowers, paddy, leaves, and trees demonstrate the community's observation of nature and their ability to convert this



knowledge into life guides (Berkes, 2012). The selection of flora is typically linked to familiar characteristics such as taste, color, season, utility, or growth patterns. These attributes then become the basis of comparison with human traits, social dynamics, and life journeys. Thus, daily botanical knowledge is transformed into a moral and cultural vocabulary.

Asal padi daripada jerami,
Mulia padi kerana beras;
Kalau kita tidak memahami,
Alam yang lembut menjadi keras.
(Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015)

(Translation)
Rice originates from the straw,
Noble is rice because of the grain;
If we fail to understand [the natural order],
The gentle nature turns harsh.

Paddy, straw, and rice represent the agrarian landscape and cycles understood through generations of farming. Paddy is not merely a crop, but the ultimate source of sustenance and life. The line "The gentle nature turns harsh" (*Alam yang lembut menjadi keras*) is a profound ecological warning—a reminder that the ecosystem that provides sustenance can become a destructive threat if humans fail to respect or understand its limits. Thus, this *pantun* serves as a vehicle for environmental education, teaching ecological balance, limits, and human stewardship.

Pisang emas dibawa belayar,
Masak sebiji di atas peti;
Hutang emas boleh dibayar,
Hutang budi dibawa mati.
(Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015)

(Translation)
Golden bananas are brought on a voyage,
One ripens on top of the chest;
Debts of gold can be repaid,
But a debt of kindness is carried to the grave.

The imagery of golden bananas paired with a voyage combines agrarian and maritime experiences. "Gold" represents replaceable material value, whereas "kindness" (*budi*) is an irreplaceable moral value. Thus, flora in the *pantun* serves as a symbol of local wisdom that places social relationships and moral accountability infinitely higher than material wealth. Paddy and bananas also demonstrate that ecological knowledge is inseparable from economic and social life. Crops provide livelihoods, but the experience of cultivation nurtures values of patience, cooperation, and awareness of natural limits. The *pantun* condenses these experiences into easily transmissible life guides.

Alam Maritim as Cultural Memory

Seas, ships, boats, estuaries, winds, and currents record the experiences of the Malays as coastal populations and seafarers. Marine elements are not merely backdrops, but memories of mobility, trade, migration, and regional connections (Maulana Al-Fin Che Man & Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, 2022).

Kapal berlabuh di Kuala Sepetang,
Membawa dagang ke luar negeri;
Kerana hari telah petang,
Mohon izin mengundur diri.
(Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015)

(Translation)

*The ship drops anchor at Kuala Sepetang,
Carrying trade to foreign lands;
Since the day has turned into evening,
I beg permission to take my leave.*

An anchored ship marks the completion of a journey, which is paired with the request to take leave. Maritime experiences are translated into social etiquette: one does not abruptly leave a gathering without permission. Nature, therefore, becomes a source of analogy that refines communication and maintains social order.

Perahu lancang dari Petani,
Nak ke darat beli kain;
Buah bacang serupa kuini,
Rupanya sama rasanya lain.
(Harun Mat Piah, 2007, p. 226)

(Translation)

*The lancang boat from Patani,
Heading to the shore to purchase cloth;
The bacang fruit looks just like the kuini,
Similar in appearance, but distinct in taste.*

This *pantun* combines a boat with botanical knowledge of local fruits: *bacang* and *kuini*. These fruits are nearly identical in appearance but vastly different in taste. This ecological knowledge is transformed into a cultural metaphor warning humans not to judge others based solely on outward appearances. Maritime and floral elements function as cultural memory that shapes discernment, caution, and social wisdom. These findings show that maritime memories record not only physical movements, but also social ethics. Sailing, anchoring, and moving between water and land serve as metaphorical structures to comprehend human encounters, departures, and character assessment.

Nature as a Moral and Social Educator

The *pantun* uses nature to deliver moral education subtly. Nature functions as a "teacher" that educates humans about self-awareness, character, courtesy, and accountability.
Asamnya kandis asam gelugur,



Ketiga dengan asam remenia;
Nyawa menangis di pintu kubur,
Hendak kembali ke dalam dunia.
(Harun Mat Piah, 2007, p. 137)

(Translation)

*Sour is the kandis, sour is the gelugur,
The third is the sour remenia;
The soul weeps at the gates of the grave,
Longing to return to the mortal world.*

Sour fruits *asam kandis*, *asam gelugur*, and *asam remenia* construct a bitter, sour sensory experience paired with existential sorrow and spiritual regret. Nature becomes a cultural symbol of bitterness and self-reckoning. This stanza warns against spiritual negligence, reminding individuals to live responsibly before their time runs out.

Pucuk manis pucuk lenggundi,
Daun purut digetus rasa;
Yang manis bernama budi,
Yang indah itu bahasa.
(Harun Mat Piah, 2007, p. 137)

(Translation)

*Sweet-shoots and the lenggundi shoots,
The kaffir lime leaf is plucked, releasing its aroma;
That which is sweet is named kindness (budi),
That which is beautiful is language (bahasa).*

Plants central to cuisine and traditional medicine are transformed into a vocabulary of values. "Sweetness" is mapped to moral goodness (*budi*), while natural beauty is mapped to linguistic decorum (*bahasa*). The *pantun* asserts that a civilized person is evaluated by their character and speech. Here, nature becomes an instrument for moral education that strengthens social cohesion. The effectiveness of this instruction lies in its appeal to sensory experiences—taste, smell, and appearance. Abstract values are explained through tactile realities, making moral counsel more intimate, effective, and memorable.

Local Wisdom and Human Sustainability

Human sustainability is not limited to physical ecological conservation, but encompasses the preservation of moral values, decorum, identity, cultural memory, and social responsibility. Local wisdom bridges environmental knowledge with human character building.

Pucuk kaduk tepi perigi,
Buah rambai atas peti;
Biar buruk rupa diri,
Asal pandai mengambil hati.
(Harun Mat Piah, 2007, p. 137)

(Translation)

*Wild betel leaves beside the well,
Rambai fruits on top of the chest;
Though one's physical appearance may be plain,
What matters is the art of winning hearts.*

Wild betel leaves, rambai fruits, and a well depict the natural and social layout of rural spaces. The well is not merely a water source, but a communal space for village interaction. The *maksud* reinforces that a person is valued for their empathy and character, rather than outward beauty. Empathy and social sensitivity (*pandai mengambil hati*) are presented as essential to communal peace.

Awan berarak bergulung-gulung,
Menderu angin dari seberang;
Sudah nasib dilambung untung,
Badan tercampak di rantau orang.
(Harun Mat Piah, 2007)

(Translation)

*Clouds drift and roll across the sky,
Winds howl from the opposite shore;
Such is the fate of being tossed by fortune,
To be cast away in a foreign land.*

The movement of clouds and winds represents the changes and instability of life. Nature mirrors the experience of migration and teaches resilience, adaptability, and fortitude without losing one's cultural identity. Overall, the findings show that local wisdom in the *pantun* cultivates individuals who are courteous, empathetic, moderate, resilient, and socially responsible. Human sustainability, therefore, is born of the synthesis of adaptability and loyalty to cultural values. Humans may travel, migrate, and adapt to changes, but *budi*, language, and social responsibility remain their anchor.

FINDINGS MODEL AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the analysis, the relationship between nature and human sustainability progresses through a systematic, multi-tiered framework:

Representation of Nature → Local Wisdom → Malay Cultural Ecolog

The representation of nature forms the baseline for traditional knowledge through the community's lived experiences with their ecosystem. This knowledge shapes a distinct cultural ecology where customs, language, and collective memory are tightly woven. This



process nurtures the *akal budi*, emphasizing courtesy, moderation, gratitude, and social harmony.

This study has three primary implications. First, the *pantun* must be read as a cultural ecological text rather than a mere aesthetic heritage. This perspective expands *pantun* scholarship from structural analysis to human-nature relationships and sustainability. Second, the *pantun* can be actively integrated into language, literature, and cultural curricula to build environmental awareness. Through the *pantun*, students can learn that nature is an active component of our moral and cultural identity. Third, the local wisdom preserved in the *pantun* remains highly relevant to contemporary society, providing a cultural foundation for building a civilized, resilient community.

In the field of education, the *pantun* holds immense potential as a vehicle for ecopedagogy. Instruction should not focus solely on the structural patterns of the *pembayang* and *maksud* but should invite students to interpret traditional knowledge of plants, agriculture, marine life, weather, and communal spaces. This approach bridges linguistic heritage with environmental consciousness, moral character, and social responsibility. The *pantun* thus acts as a bridge between traditional knowledge and modern sustainability agendas.

From a research perspective, this findings model can be tested against a larger corpus of *pantun*, regional variations, and cognate oral traditions in the region. Further research can compare nature's function in the *pantun* with *syair*, proverbs, or folklore. An interdisciplinary approach involving literature, education, anthropology, and environmental studies has the potential to demonstrate how cultural heritage contributes to sustainable behavioral changes. From a practical standpoint, educational and cultural institutions can develop *pantun* modules based on local ecological themes. Students do not merely read *pantun* but also identify the plants, spaces, history, and practices referred to in the stanzas. This method can revive the connection between text and place while encouraging appreciation for biodiversity and community heritage.

CONCLUSION

The Malay *pantun* is a profound literary heritage rich in natural representation, cultural values, and local wisdom. Natural elements do not appear in the *pembayang* as mere decoration; they were selected based on generations of close observation, agricultural practice, and philosophical reflection on the environment. Nature in the *pantun* functions as a structural prelude, a cultural symbol, a moral teacher, a mirror of the intellect and soul (*akal budi*), and a medium to convey moral and social values.

Through ecocriticism, the *pantun* highlights the symbiotic relationship between humans and the earth, sea, crops, vegetation, and wind. Through cultural ecology, the *pantun* is read as a text that preserves the cultural memory, worldviews, and collective experiences of the Malays. Concurrently, the framework of local wisdom reveals the inherited practical and social codes embedded within these verses.

This study underscores that the *pantun* is not merely an antique artifact of the past, but a vital source of cultural epistemology relevant to the future. It offers a balanced worldview that teaches humans to live with *budi*, speak with courtesy, respect nature, preserve social relationships, and maintain cultural roots. Therefore, the *pantun* must

continue to be studied, taught, and championed as a vital text that contributes to building a civilized, ecologically conscious, resilient, and sustainable humanity. Preserving the *pantun* is synonymous with preserving nature, culture, and the intellect and soul of the community.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its integration of *pantun* studies with the discourse of sustainability through a clear, conceptual progression: the representation of nature in the *pembayang* forms local wisdom; this wisdom is preserved in cultural ecology; cultural ecology builds *akal budi*; and *akal budi* sustains humanity. This flow shows that preserving heritage cannot be separated from preserving moral values and ecological relationships. When the *pantun* loses its function in communal life, what is lost is not just a poetic form, but a vital cognitive structure through which the community understands nature and regulates human relationships.

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