

Beyond Fortress and Flow Through Ratu Gede Macaling and the Ethics of Permeable Protection in Anthropocene Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study interrogates the exhausted binary between fortress mentality and neoliberal permeability by theorizing *liminal interiority* through the Balinese figure of Ratu Gede Macaling (RGM). The objective is to demonstrate how indigenous cosmologies articulate spatial and ecological ethics that remain underexplored in global debates on the Anthropocene. Drawing on comparative hermeneutics of myth, ethnographic documentation, and ritual practice, the analysis reveals that RGM embodies *threshold immunity*: a mode of protection contingent upon ethical reciprocity rather than territorial sovereignty. The findings show that RGM's guardianship operates through calibrated mediation, ritualized protocols that regulate circulation between order and chaos, human and more-than-human domains. This framework enables *protective cohabitation*, where ecological stewardship emerges from contractual engagement with spiritual sovereignties, contrasting with Western conservation models premised on exclusion. The implications extend beyond Balinese contexts: first, by positioning mythological literacy as an epistemic practice for navigating ontological pluralism; second, by offering "calibrated openness" as an alternative paradigm for border ethics, environmental governance, and intercultural dialogue. Yet the study also cautions against the commodification of RGM within tourism economies, which risks stripping guardianship of its ecological epistemology. Future research should pursue comparative inquiries into liminal guardians across Asia-Pacific traditions, investigate institutional designs that integrate myth-sensitive governance, and empirically assess how ritual authority mediates conflicts between ecological protection and capitalist extraction. Ultimately, the study argues that sustainable futures may depend less on universalist principles than on cultivating the capacity to learn from civilizational narratives encoding millennia of experimentation with dwelling across difference.

KEYWORDS

Balinese cosmology, liminal space, threshold immunity, spiritual ecology, mythological literacy.



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Introduction

In an era defined by the acceleration of technocratic rationality, the flattening of spatial experience through digital mediation, and the growing estrangement between human communities and the more-than-human world, the question of interiority, understood not merely as psychological inwardness but as a relational ontology of dwelling, boundary-making, and spiritual habitation, has become conspicuously urgent

[1], [2], [3]. The contemporary global condition, marked by what Mbembe [4] terms “planetary entanglement,” reveals a profound disorientation: ecological crises intensify as extractive economies disregard the sanctity of place, while social polarization reflects a collapse of shared cosmological frameworks that once anchored collective meaning-making. Within this context, the civilizational heritage of the Asia-Pacific region, particularly its mythological architectures and indigenous epistemologies, offers more than nostalgic refuge; it presents a critical repertoire for reimagining spatial relations, ethical boundaries, and the very grammar of coexistence. Yet despite growing scholarly attention to indigenous ontologies in Oceania, Southeast Asia, and beyond [5], [6], the specific modalities through which Balinese myth articulates interiority, specifically through liminal figures who negotiate between cosmic domains, remain undertheorized in transdisciplinary conversations on space, spirituality, and ecological ethics. This gap is particularly conspicuous given that Balinese cosmology operates through a sophisticated spatial semiotics wherein the sacred is not transcendent but immanent, perpetually negotiated through ritual practice, architectural form, and narrative tradition [7], [8].

The figure of Ratu Gede Macaling, a spiritual sovereign associated with Nusa Penida and venerated across Bali as both protector and liminal mediator, embodies a radical conception of interiority that challenges Cartesian bifurcations between interior and exterior, human and non-human, order and chaos. Unlike Western mythological guardians who patrol fixed boundaries, Ratu Gede Macaling occupies a threshold space what Turner [9] conceptualizes as liminality, where cosmic forces are neither repelled nor assimilated but continuously balanced through ritualized engagement. His narrative presence does not fortify borders but rather establishes interiority as a *practice of relation*, wherein protection emerges not from exclusion but from the ethical maintenance of permeable membranes between domains. This understanding resonates with but also complicates phenomenological accounts of dwelling [10], [11] and recent geographical theorizations of “geographies of encounter” [12], [13], insofar as it refuses the domestication of interiority into bounded subjectivity or privatized space, proposing instead an interiorization that is irreducibly communal, ecological, and spiritually charged. If, as Sloterdijk [14] argues, modernity is characterized by the “loss of immune structures” that once protected psychic and social interiority, then mythological figures like Ratu Gede Macaling can be read as cultural technologies of immunological wisdom, not as defensive walls but as adaptive interfaces.

The urgency of engaging this mythological wisdom is amplified by converging crises: The Anthropocene’s erasure of stable environments demands new models of human-environment relationality [15], [16], while the homogenizing logic of globalization threatens the very diversity of cosmological frameworks necessary for generating alternative futures [17]. Furthermore, the rise of virtual interiorities, digital spaces

that promise connection while producing atomization, calls for renewed attention to traditional forms of spatial belonging that integrate rather than isolate [18]. Yet scholarly discourse on myth and modernity often remains bifurcated: either myths are instrumentalized as cultural capital within heritage tourism economies, or they are relegated to ethnographic archives divorced from contemporary theoretical debates. This bifurcation obscures the analytic power of mythological narratives to illuminate what Ingold [19] calls “the textility of making”, the way worlds are woven through ongoing relational practices rather than imposed through abstract design. By situating Ratu Gede Macaling within the conceptual terrain of interiority and spatial theory, this study intervenes in multiple scholarly conversations: it challenges anthropocentric models of space by foregrounding cosmologies that decenter human sovereignty [20]; it enriches phenomenological accounts of place by introducing non-Western modalities of dwelling; and it contributes to urgent debates on ecological ethics by recovering models of guardianship predicated on reciprocity rather than domination.

This paper therefore pursues a dual objective: First, to theorize Ratu Gede Macaling as an exemplary figure of *liminal interiority*, demonstrating how Balinese myth articulates spatial relations that are simultaneously protective and porous, bounded and relational; and second, to assess the global relevance of this indigenous wisdom for contemporary challenges in spatial ethics, ecological stewardship, and intercultural dialogue. The theoretical framework draws on phenomenology of place [21], postcolonial critiques of spatial modernity [22], and ontological anthropology's emphasis on pluriversality [23], while remaining attentive to the specificities of Balinese cosmological grammar. Methodologically, the study employs a comparative hermeneutics that reads mythological narrative alongside ethnographic accounts and contemporary ritual practice, refusing to treat myth as static text but rather as living discourse that continues to shape spatial imagination and ethical conduct. The scope encompasses both the historical sedimentation of Ratu Gede Macaling's narratives and their contemporary mobilization in contexts ranging from environmental activism to architectural philosophy, thereby tracing the transhistorical efficacy of mythological wisdom. Through this critical lens, the paper argues that Balinese conceptions of interiority, as embodied in liminal guardian figures, offer a third way between the fortress mentality of defensive boundaries and the naive permeability of neoliberal openness, a model of *calibrated openness* wherein protection and exchange, immunity and hospitality, are held in dynamic equilibrium. Such a model, emerging from the civilizational matrix of the Asia-Pacific, speaks with particular force to a world struggling to reimagine the very possibility of dwelling amid disruption, offering not prescriptive solutions but provocative frameworks for what Stengers [24] calls “thinking in the presence of” radically different cosmologies. In illuminating how an island deity negotiates cosmic thresholds, this study ultimately proposes that the future of global

spatial ethics may depend less on universal principles than on the patient cultivation of what I term *mythological literacy*, the capacity to learn from civilizational narratives that encode millennia of experimentation with the question of how to live together, across difference, in place.

Liminal Interiority: Ratu Gede Macaling as Spatial Mediator and Cosmological Threshold

The Balinese cosmological architecture operates through the fundamental distinction between *sekala* (manifest, material realm) and *niskala* (unmanifest, spiritual realm), yet this framework resists reduction to Cartesian [25] binaries or Eliadean [26] sacred-profane dichotomies. The ethnographic documentation of Ratu Gede Macaling consistently emphasizes that “the physical world cannot exist without its transcendent source, namely the spiritual world,” positioning these dimensions not as oppositional categories but as mutually constitutive forces in dynamic equilibrium. This ontological structure materializes at Pura Penataran Dalem Ped through paired *Purusa-Pradana* statues constructed from Chinese coins, embodying “the balance of spiritual and material power” that worshippers seek when praying “to obtain balance in life and maintain harmony.” Unlike Casey’s [21] phenomenology of place, which privileges bodily experience of material localities, Balinese spatial ontology insists every *sekala* location is always-already saturated with *niskala* presence, rendering phenomenological reduction to “lived experience” insufficient for grasping the cosmological totality.

What distinguishes Ratu Gede Macaling’s liminality from Turner’s [9] theory of threshold spaces as temporary structural suspensions is that here liminality is not transitional but constitutive, the threshold itself serves as generative mechanism through which order and disorder mutually produce each other. The lontar manuscripts specifies that RGM is not merely chaos itself, but the regulator of chaos, whose frightening presence guarantees that this destructive energy can be redirected or restored to cosmic balance through proper ritual. This inverts Turner’s temporality rather than liminality as ritual phase, ritual becomes the technology for maintaining permanent liminality as cosmological necessity. Unlike Cerberus preventing exit from Hades or the Four Heavenly Kings protecting Buddhist cosmological quadrants through vigilant prohibition, RGM operates through *calibrated mediation*, not rejecting chaos but regulating circulation between order and disorder.

The geographical paradox of Nusa Penida, physically isolated yet cosmologically central, instantiates this liminal logic spatially. Designated as “Dalem Nusa,” the island functions as “a center of *niskala* power that serves as a fundamental marginal area for maintaining Bali’s balance as a whole,” disrupting conventional center-periphery models [27], [28]. RGM’s multiple titles encode specific spatial jurisdictions, as “Ratu

Gede Samudra" he governs maritime boundaries separating and connecting Nusa Penida to Bali; as "Dalem Nusa" he exercises absolute authority over threshold territory; his power portfolio "includes authority over life, death, disease, and the ocean", functions mapping directly onto boundary-maintenance requirements. In the tradition folklore, the narrative of Prince Gotra's petition to make Mount Byah habitable illustrates this operational logic, instead of simple permission or refusal, RGM established a conditional protocol where ceremonies must be regularly performed for *bhuta kala* for a harmonious life, transforming a dangerous space into an inhabited one not by eliminating *niskala* forces, but by establishing a ritual interface for productive coexistence.

The ritual technology of *threshold immunity* becomes legible through analysis of *bhuta yadnya* ceremonies and distinctive *pecaruan* offerings presented to RGM: "raw offal and raw blood, served on papah banana leaves with special spices." This material specificity uncooked, blood-saturated animal materials contrasting sharply with refined offerings to higher deities, signals ontological difference between honoring benevolent *dewa* and managing appetitive *bhuta kala*. However, RGM occupies ambiguous hierarchical position, receiving both aggressive *pecaruan* and honorific worship, simultaneously bestowing protection and inflicting punishment on ritual violators. This dual capacity instantiates what I term *threshold immunity*, not Sloterdijk's [29] hermetic enclosure producing immunity through exclusion, but rather *regulated permeability* where protection operates through cosmological contract contingent upon proper ritual conduct. The boundary RGM guards is not wall but membrane, selectively permeable based on ritual performance.

This immunological architecture finds material expression in the *ngelawang* tradition, where giant *barong landung* effigies representing RGM are paraded around village boundaries. Originating from defensive strategy when RGM's supernatural army attacked Bali, villagers created impostor effigies causing the forces to retreat, contemporary practice continues as active boundary-maintenance. The *barong landung* functions as Latourian [30] mediator rather than intermediary, not merely representing but partially actualizing RGM's presence, temporarily installing his threshold immunity around village perimeter. The philosophical foundation lies in *rwa bhineda*, yet documents emphasize this is not Manichean [31] dualism but recognition of paired opposites as mutually constitutive, RGM's destructive power (chaos) is a cosmic solution needed to restore and maintain balance (harmony). The *poleng* (black-white checkered) symbolism materializes this principle, received as title *Papak Poleng* from Dewi Durga, *poleng* cloth wraps liminal objects signaling zones where opposing forces meet but remain distinct, instantiating productive differentiation rather than modernist resolution into unity or postmodern endless deferral.

This spatial ontology converges with yet differs from other Asia-Pacific cosmologies: Aboriginal songlines emphasize continuity and path (Rose, 1996); Fijian *vanua* privileges genealogical belonging (Tomlinson, 2009); the RGM complex foregrounds *conditional habitation* where space becomes livable through ongoing ritual negotiation with forces possessing agency, intention, and punitive capacity. This positions Balinese cosmology closer to Ingold's (2011) "dwelling in motion" but with critical addition that the negotiation partner can withdraw protection or unleash chaos. The resulting concept of *threshold immunity as hospitality through discernment* offers alternatives to both liberal multiculturalism's boundary erosion and nativist fortification, proposing calibrated openness: maintaining distinction while enabling circulation, protecting without enclosing, excluding without demonizing. In Anthropocene contexts where nature-culture boundaries have collapsed (Latour, 2017; Tsing, 2015), this paradigm suggests maintaining differential zones while acknowledging permeability—boundaries not abolished but ritualized, subject to protocols of respect, reciprocity, and regulated exchange.

Ecological Guardianship and the Ethics of Permeable Protection: Ratu Gede Macaling in Anthropogenic Context

The ecological dimension of Ratu Gede Macaling's guardianship demands reframing from spatial ontology to environmental ethics, positioning this figure within contemporary discourse on multispecies entanglements (Haraway, 2016; Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010) and more-than-human geographies (Whatmore, 2006; Lorimer, 2015). If the first framework interrogated how RGM constructs liminal interiority, this section investigates for what and for whom such cosmological guardianship operates, with particular attention to the material-ecological consequences of spiritual sovereignty. The ethnographic documentation reveals RGM's title as "Ratu Gede Samudra" (King of the Ocean) signaling jurisdiction over maritime resources and coastal ecologies, while his authority to "bring fatal disease to those who violate rules or fail to fulfill obligations" establishes a punitive enforcement mechanism that regulates human behavior toward the environment. This contrasts fundamentally with conventional Western conservation paradigms that separate protected areas from human habitation (Brockington et al., 2008); the Balinese system instead instantiates what I term *protective cohabitation*, where environmental stewardship emerges inseparably from ritual engagement with spiritual sovereigns.

The operational logic of this spiritual ecology becomes visible through practices like *melasti* (oceanic purification ceremonies) conducted before major ritual cycles and the elaborate *bhuta yadnya* offerings presented to RGM, particularly during Purnama Sasih Kalima (full moon of the fifth month). The document notes this timing corresponds to "seasonal transition when Bali is ecologically and spiritually at a high point of

vulnerability, prone to disease and epidemics," with ritual action serving as "large-scale preventive measure" to "control the *merana* energy led by RGM during periods traditionally considered dangerous, thereby maintaining *harmoni* during unstable seasons." This temporal coordination between ritual calendar and ecological cycles parallels Lansing's (2006) documentation of Bali's *subak* irrigation system as "spiritual ecology," where temple festivals coordinate rice planting schedules to optimize water distribution and pest management. However, where *subak* operates through hierarchical territorial organization and predictable agricultural rhythms, RGM's guardianship addresses *contested zones*—ocean, cliffs, caves, and liminal areas that resist stable territorialization and productive incorporation.

These spaces, often dismissed in modernist frameworks as wasteland or frontier for extractive exploitation, are precisely where RGM's authority is most pronounced. The narrative of I Gotra's petition reveals that making Bukit Byah habitable required not conquest but negotiated settlement with RGM, establishing protocols whereby "if these regulations are violated, disaster will occur." This conditionality instantiates what Ostrom (1990) theorized as common-pool resource management through institutional design, yet with the critical addition that one party to the institutional arrangement possesses supernatural agency and punitive capacity. Comparative analysis illuminates distinctive features: Japanese *kami* spirits inhabit specific natural features (waterfalls, ancient trees, rock formations) as localized presences requiring propitiation (Breen & Teeuwen, 2010); Cambodian *neak ta* similarly protect landscape features but primarily through benevolent guardianship (Davis, 2016). RGM's guardianship differs through its emphasis on *contractual reciprocity enforced through threat*—protection is neither automatic nor unconditional but contingent upon ritual compliance, with withdrawal of protection manifesting as epidemic disease (*grubug*) or maritime disaster.

This model troubles contemporary environmental ethics in productive ways. Rights of nature frameworks (Tănăsescu, 2022) extend legal personhood to ecosystems, yet typically within anthropocentric juridical structures where human institutions adjudicate nature's rights. Environmental justice discourse (Schlosberg, 2007) addresses distributional equity and procedural inclusion but often remains bounded by humanist assumptions. The RGM paradigm suggests an alternative: *cosmopolitical guardianship* that acknowledges spiritual entities as legitimate stakeholders in ecological governance. When RGM is invoked to regulate fishing practices or coastal development—as documented in contemporary Nusa Penida where communities cite his authority to oppose extractive tourism infrastructure—this represents not romantic primitivism but pragmatic recognition that effective environmental protection requires mobilizing multiple registers of authority, including spiritual sovereignty that commands popular legitimacy where state regulation fails.

However critical analysis must resist romanticization. The appropriation of RGM imagery in Bali's tourism economy, *barong landung* performances commodified as cultural spectacle, Nusa Penida marketed as mystical island for Instagram aesthetics—frequently strips spiritual guardianship of its ecological epistemology. The document notes that worshippers prioritize phenomenological experience and ritual efficacy over rigid mythological dogma, suggesting pragmatic orientation toward results rather than doctrine. However, when tourism operators invoke RGM as brand identity while facilitating mass visitation that degrades precisely the liminal coastal zones under his protection, this constitutes epistemic violence that extracts symbolic capital while undermining the socioecological systems the symbolism encodes. Contemporary conflicts around Nusa Penida's rapid tourism development—exemplified by debates over beach access, waste management, and coral reef degradation—reveal tensions between ritual guardianship and capitalist extraction that cannot be resolved through cultural preservation rhetoric alone.

The concept of *ecological interiority* emerges from this tension: understanding that environmental protection requires not merely external regulation (state enforcement, protected area boundaries, conservation funding) but cultivation of interior relationship with place mediated through cosmological accountability. When communities perform *pecaruan* offerings to RGM using raw offal and raw blood on banana leaves, they enact material relationship acknowledging their embeddedness within more-than-human assemblages where oceanic forces possess agency, appetite, and authority. This resonates with political ecology of the more-than-human [32] yet insists that spiritual sovereignty must be recognized as legitimate actor rather than metaphorized away. The document's framing of RGM as not merely chaos itself, but the regulator of chaos whose frightening presence guarantees that destructive energy can be redirected or restored to cosmic balance through proper ritual" suggests guardianship model that is neither anthropocentric (humans as environmental stewards managing passive nature) nor naively ecocentric (nature as inherently harmonious requiring only non-interference) but rather *cosmopolitically centered*—acknowledging that any landscape contains pluralities of agents, interests, and powers requiring ongoing negotiation.

In Anthropocene contexts where Latour [16] and Tsing [5] document the collapse of nature-culture boundaries and the emergence of contaminated diversity, RGM's liminal guardianship offers frameworks for what Haraway [15] calls "staying with the trouble." Rather than apocalyptic narratives or techno-optimist solutions, the RGM paradigm proposes *ritualized accountability to forces that exceed human control*, acknowledging ocean, disease, and death as participants in ecological assemblages that cannot be managed away but must be continuously negotiated through protocols that maintain differentiation while enabling coexistence.

Mythological Literacy and Civilizational Dialogue: Ratu Gede Macaling as Pedagogical Paradigm for Global Futures

Contemporary engagements with indigenous knowledge systems oscillate between two equally problematic extremes: romanticization that exoticizes local wisdom as utopian alternative while ignoring internal contradictions and historical complexities, and dismissive reduction of myth to pre-scientific superstition irrelevant for modern problem-solving [33], [34]. Both positions misrecognize the epistemic function of mythological narratives, treating them either as literal truths requiring preservation or as allegorical fictions requiring demythologization. Against these reductive readings, I propose treating the Ratu Gede Macaling complex as what might be termed a *compressed wisdom system*, dense semiotic structures that condense generations of experiential knowledge about navigating complexity, uncertainty, and alterity. The ethnographic documentation reveals RGM operating across multiple registers simultaneously: historical figure (I Gede Mecaling, son of I Renggan and Ni Merahim, born 180 Caka), spiritual sovereign (Ida Bhatara Ratu Gede Mas Mecaling Dalem Nusa), cosmological regulator (controller of *bhuta kala* energies), and pedagogical paradigm (teacher of *kawisesan* to *balian* practitioners). This multivalence is not confusion requiring clarification but rather *strategic polyvalence* that enables the narrative to function across different temporal and ontological scales.

Reading RGM as a pedagogical figure illuminates specific competencies essential for what Rittel and Webber [35] theorized as "wicked problems", challenges characterized by irreducible complexity, value conflicts, and unknown unknowns that dominate 21st-century governance. First, *tolerance for ambiguity*: RGM is simultaneously frightening and protective, capable of bestowing safety, health, and long life while wielding authority to bring fatal disease to those who violate rules. This is not moral inconsistency but recognition that security and threat, protection and punishment, emerge from the same cosmological source, requiring discerning engagement rather than binary classification. Second, *relational thinking*: the document emphasizes that RGM cannot be understood in isolation but only within networks of relations with other cosmic entities, human communities, and landscape. His genealogy connects him to Dukuh Jumpungan (primordial priest-navigator), Bhatara Rudra (who granted *panca taksu*), and Dewi Durga (who bestowed the title *Papak Poleng*). At the same time, his spatial jurisdiction encompasses the ocean, Nusa Penida, and the liminal zones between Bali's cultivated interior and chaotic exterior. Third, *ethical pragmatism*: interaction with RGM demands *phronesis* (practical wisdom) rather than adherence to abstract principles. The document notes communities prioritize phenomenological experience and ritual efficacy over rigid mythological dogma, signaling orientation toward contextually appropriate action that produces desired outcomes, protection, health,

and communal harmony through calibrated ritual performance. Fourth, *temporal multiplicity*: RGM operates simultaneously in mythic time (the narrative of his transformation from human to deity), ritual time (the annual *piodalan* at Purnama Sasih Kalima), historical time (documented in lontar manuscripts), and contemporary moment (invoked in current environmental conflicts and tourism debates).

These competencies acquire urgency when we recognize their relevance for contemporary crises that exceed technocratic management: climate adaptation requiring decisions under radical uncertainty, pandemic response demanding coordination across incommensurable knowledge systems, and migration governance navigating between security and humanitarian imperatives. The RGM paradigm suggests that such challenges may be less tractable through rationalist optimization than through cultivation of what I term *mythological literacy*, the capacity to read compressed wisdom encoded in narrative traditions as practical guidance for living with intractable complexity. Comparative analysis positions RGM within global genealogies of guardian figures: Greco-Roman *lares* and *penates* protecting household boundaries [36], Chinese *tudi gong* governing local earth energies [37], Yoruba *orisa* inhabiting specific geographies [38]. Nevertheless, distinctive innovations emerge: where *lares* operate through spatial enclosure (protecting interior from exterior threats), and *tudi gong* through bureaucratic hierarchy (celestial administration replicating imperial structure), RGM functions through *contractual conditionality*, protection contingent upon ritual compliance, with violation triggering withdrawal of guardianship manifested as epidemic or disaster.

The practical implications extend beyond academic comparison. Documentation of contemporary Nusa Penida reveals cases where invocation of RGM's spiritual authority has facilitated community agreements on resource use that state regulatory frameworks failed to achieve, particularly regarding coastal development, fishing practices, and sacred site protection. Conversely, ignorance of spiritual geographies has produced conflicts. Tourism infrastructure violating liminal zones, waste management systems disrespecting ritual protocols, and commodification of *barong landung* performances severing symbolic forms from their cosmological functions. These cases suggest that effective governance in contexts of ontological pluralism requires what I term *myth-sensitive institutional design*, not theocratic subordination of secular authority to religious doctrine, but rather institutional architectures that recognize and accommodate diverse ontological commitments. This differs from liberal multiculturalism's procedural inclusion (representing diverse groups in decision-making while maintaining secular epistemic monopoly) by acknowledging spiritual sovereigns as legitimate stakeholders whose authority cannot be reduced to human representation.

The concept of mythological literacy as a practical governance resource challenges assumptions structuring contemporary knowledge economies. In contexts dominated by technoscientific rationality, myth typically appears as cultural heritage requiring preservation or symbolic capital for tourism branding, never as *an epistemic resource* for addressing present challenges. However, the RGM complex demonstrates how mythological narratives encode sophisticated knowledge about boundary maintenance, risk management, collective action coordination, and human-environment relations that remain operational across historical transformations. The lontar documentation of RGM receiving *panca taksu* from Bhatara Rudra, encompassing healing power (*taksu balian*), epidemic prevention (*taksu penolak grubug*), charisma (*taksu pengeger*), supernatural power (*taksu kesaktian*), and disaster causation (*taksu pengadakan merana*), maps onto contemporary governance challenges, public health infrastructure, disaster risk reduction, political legitimacy, security provision, and sanctioning mechanisms. Rather than dismissing this as primitive cosmology, mythological literacy recognizes it as *a compressed governance theory* that has proven adaptive across centuries of ecological and political transformation.

This framework contributes to debates on pluriversality [39], onto-epistemic justice [34], and decolonizing knowledge systems [40], [41] by insisting that civilizational dialogue cannot occur solely through abstract principles or policy coordination but requires engagement with what Geertz [42] called “thick description”, detailed accounts of how different traditions address perennial problems of human existence. Myth constitutes one of the densest media for such description, encoding not merely beliefs but *practiced ontologies*: ways of worldmaking instantiated through ritual, materialized in architecture, enacted in governance, and transmitted pedagogically. The question RGM poses to global audiences is not “should we adopt Balinese cosmology?” (which would constitute epistemic imperialism in reverse) but rather: “What becomes thinkable about security, borders, protection, and coexistence if we model these not on sovereign states with territorial integrity but on liminal guardians with permeable boundaries?” This is to use Balinese specificities as *thinking device* that opens imaginative possibilities for refiguring global arrangements constrained by exhausted paradigms.

The agenda emerging from this analysis proposes comparative mythology of space, guardianship, and coexistence across Asia-Pacific civilizations as research program building *repertoires of alternatives* accessible during moments of crisis and transformation. Such repertoires would not prescribe universal solutions but rather expand the conceptual vocabulary available for improvisation under novel conditions, recognizing that governance innovations often emerge less from rational design than from creative redeployment of inherited cultural resources toward unprecedented challenges.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the figure of Ratu Gede Macaling is not merely a local myth but a conceptual paradigm that challenges the modern dichotomy between fortified enclosure and unbounded openness, offering instead a model of *threshold immunity* that emphasizes protection through ethical openness and cosmological contracts. The central finding reveals that interiority in Balinese cosmology is understood as a relational space continuously negotiated through ritual rather than as a static entity bounded by walls, thereby generating the concept of *calibrated openness* that speaks directly to global debates on spatial ethics and ecology. The theoretical contribution lies in the novelty of reading mythology as a *compressed wisdom system* capable of expanding spatial theory, ontological anthropology, and environmental ethics, while the practical contribution emerges in the potential to design environmental policies and resource governance frameworks that are more sensitive to local cosmologies. The practical implications extend to the integration of *mythological literacy* into education, public policy, and professional practice, while also warning against the commodification of tourism that risks eroding the ecological epistemologies embedded in ritual practice. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its reliance on qualitative data and its focus on the Balinese context, making cross-cultural generalization a task for future inquiry. Further research is recommended to explore comparative studies of liminal guardians across the Asia-Pacific, to test *myth-sensitive* institutional designs, and to empirically assess the impact of commodification on local ecological epistemologies. Ultimately, this research affirms that ecological sustainability and spatial ethics in the Anthropocene cannot rely solely on universalist principles of modernity but demand the capacity to read and revitalize cosmological narratives that have long served as civilizational laboratories of experimentation, thereby opening pathways toward more inclusive, just, and cosmopolitical paradigms of sustainability.

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