

## Mapping Evidence on *Engklek* and Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood: A Systematic Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

Social-emotional development is a core dimension of early childhood education because it shapes children's ability to build relationships, manage emotions, and adapt to social environments. A growing body of research indicates that traditional games can foster these competencies through activities that require cooperation, interpersonal communication, and self-regulation. This article presents a systematic literature review to map and synthesize empirical evidence on the contribution of the traditional game *engklek* to young children's social-emotional development. The literature search was conducted across Google Scholar, Garuda, DOAJ, ERIC, and institutional repositories, covering publications from 2015 to 2025. Study selection followed the stages of identification, screening, and eligibility assessment, resulting in 14 articles that met the inclusion criteria and were thematically analyzed. The synthesis indicates that *engklek* contributes to three main domains: (1) social skills (e.g., cooperation, rule-following, and communication), (2) emotion regulation (e.g., frustration control and persistence), and (3) prosocial behavior and peer interaction quality (e.g., empathy, sharing, and conflict resolution). These findings suggest that *engklek* functions not only as a cultural practice but also as a pedagogical medium that aligns with play-based learning grounded in local contexts. The review supports integrating traditional games into early childhood curricula and developing contextual, inclusive, and child-friendly instructional strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional development is one of the main foundations for children's success in education and long-term social life. Children who have strong social-emotional skills tend to be able to build positive relationships, manage emotions effectively, resolve conflicts in healthy ways, and show empathy toward others (Papalia et al., 2008). In the context of early childhood education, this aspect becomes increasingly important given that early childhood is a critical period in the formation of interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities (Amaliah et al., 2024).

However, children's social-emotional development today faces challenges due to changes in play patterns and the increasing use of digital devices. Children's interactions that are increasingly limited and more focused on individual activities can hinder the growth of

cooperation skills and emotional control (Radesky et al., 2015). Several early childhood education institutions have also reported the emergence of individualistic behavior, limited ability to share, and low communication skills among peers. This condition indicates the need for learning strategies that can restore natural experiences of social play.

Traditional games are one relevant alternative to address these challenges. As part of local culture, traditional games do not function only as entertainment, but also contain social, moral, and educational values integrated into play activities (Elya et al., 2019). *Engklek*, as one traditional game that is still practiced in various regions in Indonesia, offers a game structure that encourages direct interaction, cooperation, the ability to follow rules, and the practice of emotion regulation. Beyond the motor benefits that have been widely discussed, this game also has the potential to strengthen children's social-emotional aspects through healthy competitive and collaborative activities (Aulia & Sudaryanti, 2023).

Although research on traditional games continues to develop, studies that specifically review the contribution of *Engklek* to early childhood social-emotional development remain limited and scattered across various types of publications. In addition, there has not yet been a comprehensive synthesis that systematically gathers, compares, and integrates findings from scientific research. Therefore, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is needed to provide an overall picture of the effectiveness of *Engklek* in supporting children's social-emotional development.

Based on this need, this study aims to systematically analyze research findings that discuss the role of *Engklek* in early childhood social-emotional development. Through an SLR approach, this review is expected to make theoretical and practical contributions to the development of culture-based learning models, and to serve as a basis for early childhood teachers to use traditional games as contextual and meaningful educational tools.

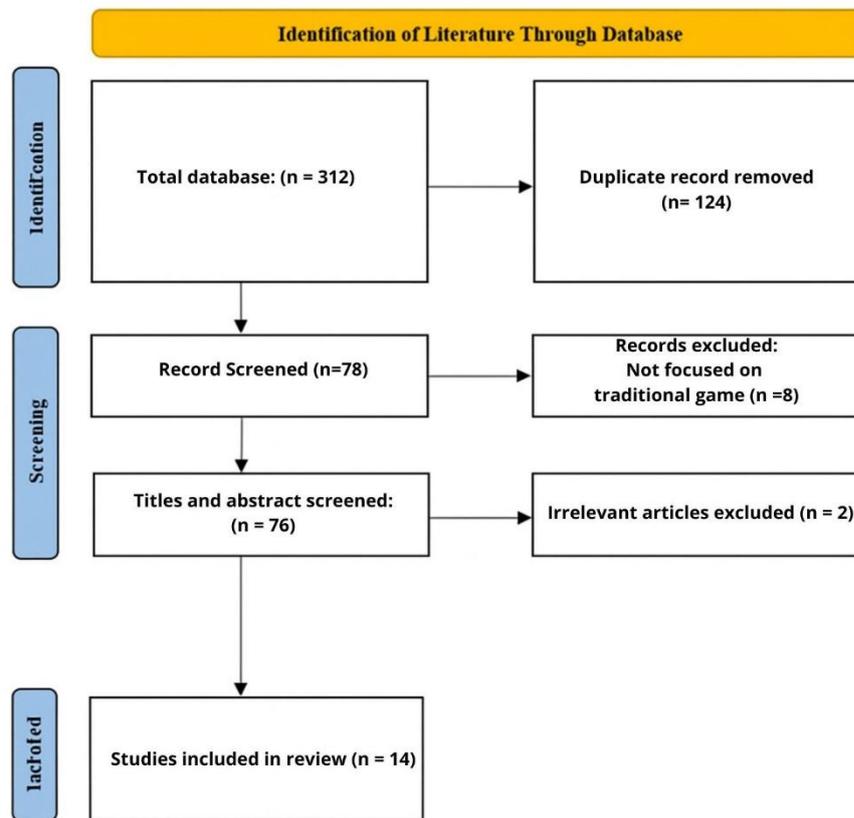
## METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the main approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research findings related to the contribution of the traditional game *Engklek* to early childhood social-emotional development. This method was chosen because an SLR is able to provide a comprehensive picture of the accumulation of scientific knowledge, while also highlighting the consistency of findings, variations in methods, and research gaps that remain unaddressed within a particular topic. The implementation of the SLR in this study follows general procedures that include the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and synthesis of findings. Literature searches were conducted through several academic databases that are relevant and widely used in early childhood education research and culture-based education, namely Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, ERIC, and higher education repositories. The use of these multiple databases aims to obtain broad literature coverage, from both national and international journals, and to minimize publication bias.

The keyword search strategy was constructed using combinations of Boolean operators to ensure coverage of variations in terms used in studies on traditional games and social-emotional development. The keywords used include: "*Engklek*" AND "anak usia dini", "permainan tradisional" AND "perkembangan sosial emosional", "traditional game" AND

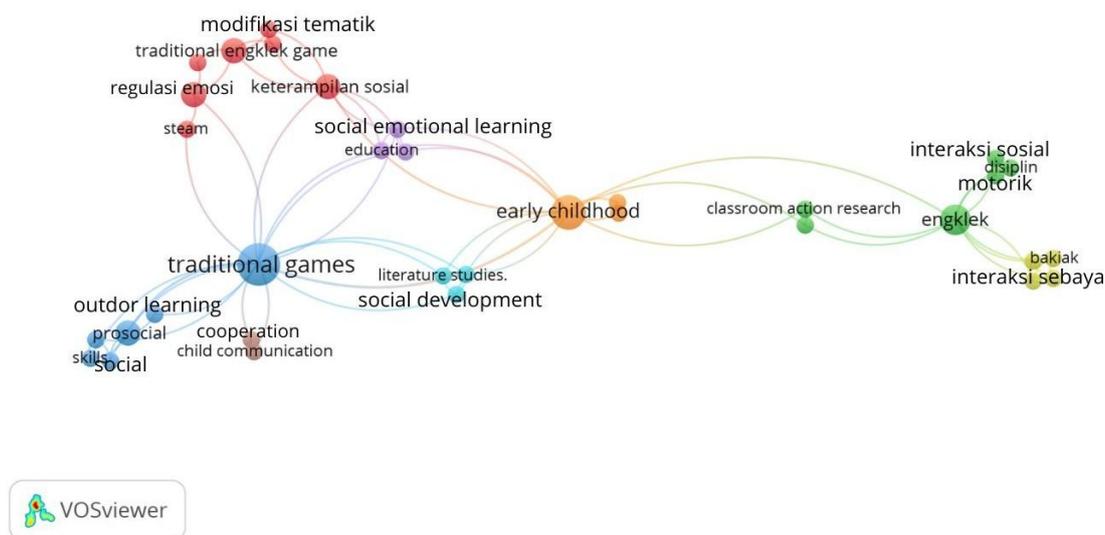
“early childhood”, and “local games” AND “social-emotional development”. Keyword variations were used to anticipate differences in terminology across researchers. The search period was limited to the last ten years, namely publications from 2015-2025, on the grounds that a decade-long range provides an overview of contemporary research developments while avoiding literature that is no longer relevant. Articles in Indonesian and English were included to ensure diversity of contexts and the quality of findings.

To ensure transparency and replicability, each article identified was recorded according to its title, year, database source, and selection status at each screening stage. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were then determined to ensure that the analyzed articles were truly relevant to the research focus. Articles were included if they met the following criteria: (1) they studied early childhood children aged 3–6 years; (2) they examined *Engklek* directly, or traditional games that incorporate *Engklek*-like activities in their practice; (3) they reported empirical research findings, whether qualitative, quantitative, quasi-experimental, or classroom action research (PTK); (4) they provided data or descriptions that measured social–emotional aspects, such as cooperation, communication, empathy, interpersonal skills, emotion regulation, or prosocial behavior; and (4) they were published in journals or proceedings with academic credibility (indexed or meeting scholarly publication standards). Articles were excluded if: (1) the research subjects were not early childhood children; (2) they did not provide empirical data (e.g., opinion pieces, essays, or purely theoretical reviews); (3) the research focused on other traditional games without mentioning *Engklek* or *Engklek*-like activities; (4) the articles did not provide clear methodological information, so they could not be verified; and (5) these criteria helped ensure that the synthesis included only relevant and credible studies. The article screening process was conducted through several stages, including: (1) Identification (across all databases, 312 articles were found that matched the keywords). (2) Duplicate removal (124 articles were removed due to duplication across databases). (3) Title and abstract screening (96 articles were eliminated because they were not relevant to the research focus. For example, examining modern games, gross motor skills only, or cognitive development). (4) Full-text eligibility assessment (at the final stage, 14 articles met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed in depth). (5) This process ensures that article selection was carried out systematically and transparently so that the synthesis results can be methodologically justified. The journal article selection flow used in this study is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Article Selection Flow

Next, in the data-processing stage, each eligible article was extracted using a matrix format that included: author(s), year, study location, methodological design, sample size, developmental focus, and key findings related to social-emotional aspects. These data were then analyzed using a thematic approach (thematic analysis). This approach was conducted through the process of coding research findings, grouping codes into categories, and identifying recurring patterns. The synthesis yielded three main themes: (1) social skills, such as cooperation, communication, negotiation, and the ability to follow rules; (2) emotion regulation, including the ability to manage disappointment, wait for one's turn, cope with failure, and maintain self-control; and (3) prosocial behavior and peer interaction, such as empathy, sharing, and peer support. The VOSviewer output flow is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** VOSviewer Results

These findings were then summarized and analyzed to produce a comprehensive overview of the contribution of the *Engklek* game to social-emotional development in early childhood.

**RESULT**

Out of the 312 articles retrieved, the researchers used 14 articles that matched the topic and the predetermined criteria. The summary of findings is presented in Table 1.

**Table1.** Summary of Findings

No	Title	Participants	Program	Article's Quality
1	<i>Penerapan Permainan Engklek dalam meningkatkan Perkembangan Sosial Emosional Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun</i> (Mutiara et al., 2025)	15 children (6 boys, 9 girls), Group B3, aged 5-6 years, at TK IT Darul Istiqamah, Palangka Raya	Research method: Qualitative. Focus: Implementation of the traditional <i>Engklek</i> game to improve social-emotional development. Social-emotional indicators include: recognizing and expressing one's own emotions, waiting for one's turn, controlling desires, helping peers in difficulty, cooperating, actively participating in discussion and collaboration, and leading peers in the game. Findings: An increase in the average achievement of children's social-emotional indicators from 32% (MB) in the pre-cycle stage to 52% (BSH) in	Moderate

				Cycle I, while Cycle II reached 88% (BSB), exceeding the target of 76%.	
2	<i>The Outdoor Learning Modules Based on Traditional Games in Improving Prosocial Behaviour of Early Childhood</i> (Junaedah et al., 2020)	Early childhood children aged 5-6 years		Research method: Mixed methods. Focus: Improving early childhood prosocial behavior. Findings: Conducting traditional games outdoors can improve students' prosocial behavior.	Low
3	<i>Perkembangan Aspek Sosial Emosional dan Sains Anak Usia Dini Melalui Permainan Tradisional Engklek</i> (Wariyanti, 2022)	15 early childhood children / 2 teachers at RA Miftahul Jannah, Langkat		Research method: Qualitative. Focus: Describing the implementation of the traditional <i>Engklek</i> game for social-emotional and science development using airplane, mountain, and propeller patterns to introduce science to young children. Findings: 9 of 15 children's social-emotional development was "developing as expected" (BSH), while 6 children showed "very well developed" (BSB) social-emotional development. In science ability, 6 children were "beginning to develop" (MB), 7 were BSH, and 2 were BSB. The data show <i>Engklek</i> can develop children's social aspects, but not optimally for science ability.	High
4	<i>Pengaruh permainan tradisional bakiak dan engklek terhadap perkembangan sosial emosional anak</i> (Fitri et al., 2022)	15 children aged 5-6 years (TK B), consisting of 11 boys and 4 girls, at RA Babussalam, West Nusa Tenggara		Research method: Quantitative. Focus: Testing the effects of the traditional <i>bakiak</i> game and the <i>Engklek</i> game—separately and jointly—on social-emotional development of children aged 5–6 years (Group B) at RA Babussalam. Findings: (1) <i>Bakiak</i> had a positive and significant effect on children's social-emotional development; the change reached 56.9%, with $t = 4.145$ greater than $t$ -table 2.145 at 5% significance. This indicates that through <i>bakiak</i> , children improve cooperation, communication, and patience in peer interactions. (2) <i>Engklek</i>	High

			also had a positive and significant effect; its contribution was 51.1%, with $t = 3.685$ greater than $t$ -table 2.145 at 5% significance. Jumping and following rules in <i>Engklek</i> train children to socialize, comply with rules, and regulate emotions.	
5	<i>Penerapan Permainan Engklek dalam Upaya Menstimulasi Aspek Perkembangan Sosial Emosional Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun di RA Al-Ikhwan Kota Tasikmalaya</i> (Nurlela et al., 2023)	All children in Class B1 aged 4-5 years at RA Al-Ikhwan, Tasikmalaya	Research method: Qualitative. Focus: Analyzing the implementation of the traditional <i>Engklek</i> game in stimulating developmental aspects of children aged 4-5 years at RA Al-Ikhwan. Findings: The implementation of <i>Engklek</i> improved social-emotional development of children aged 4-5 years. The achievement level of Group A children's social-emotional development at RA Al-Ikhwan reached "developing as expected" (BSH) and "very well developed" (BSB).	Low
6	<i>Efektivitas permainan engklek pada perkembangan psikomotorik anak usia dini</i> (Darmawan et al., 2024)	None (literature study)	Research method: Literature review. Focus: Analyzing the effectiveness of <i>Engklek</i> in supporting psychomotor development in early childhood. Findings: Based on several literature sources, <i>Engklek</i> plays an important role in supporting physical, psychomotor, social-emotional, and cognitive development. Physical activities such as jumping, maintaining balance, and building endurance are supported; it also trains problem-solving and decision-making, and optimizes social development.	Low
7	<i>Strategi inovatif dalam pendidikan anak usia dini: Mengurangi egosentrisme melalui permainan tradisional berbasis STEAM</i> (Citrasukmawati et al.,	Sample of 311 kindergarten children from Madura, East Java	Research method: Quantitative. Focus: Innovating learning through traditional game-based approaches to reduce children's egocentrism. Findings: STEAM-based traditional games stimulate cooperation, creativity,	Moderate

	2025)		and reduce egocentrism.	
8	<i>Engklek Game and Its Benefits for Early Children's Development</i> (Sukoyo et al., 2021)	2 boys and 5 girls in Boyolali	Research method: Qualitative. Focus: Benefits of <i>Engklek</i> for children's development. Findings: <i>Engklek</i> improves motor skills, discipline, and social interaction.	Low
9	<i>Pengaruh Permainan Tradisional Engklek dan Puzzle terhadap Kemampuan Sosial Emosional Anak Usia Dini</i> (Hayani, 2023)	43 students aged 5-6 years at TKIT DOD Medan	Research method: Quantitative experimental. Focus: Effects of <i>Engklek</i> and puzzles on social-emotional development. Findings: <i>Engklek</i> and puzzles significantly improve children's social-emotional abilities.	Moderate
10	<i>Developing the Educational Game Tool to Improve Reading Ability of Early Childhood</i> (Khadijah et al., 2022)	Early childhood children aged 5-6 years	Research method: Qualitative. Focus: Improving early childhood reading ability. Findings: Developing an educational game tool in the form of a "word tree" not only improves children's reading ability but also creates enjoyment for learning.	Low
11	<i>The Role of Traditional Games In Improving Early Childhood Social Skills</i> (Sari, 2025)	None (literature study)	Research method: Literature review. Focus: Describing the role of traditional games in improving early childhood social skills. Findings: Traditional games play an important role in shaping young children's social skills. Through these games, children learn to communicate, cooperate, understand rules, and resolve conflicts positively. In addition, interaction in traditional games helps develop empathy, leadership, and self-confidence. Although the digital era has changed children's play patterns, traditional games still hold high educational value.	Moderate
12	<i>Social-Emotional Learning Through Traditional Games at BA 'Aisyiyah Jotangan Klaten</i> (Kartikasari et al., 2025)	27 children (12 boys, 15 girls)	Research method: Mixed methods. Focus: Social-emotional learning. Findings: Using traditional games as a medium for social-emotional learning is an effective strategy that can integrate cultural and spiritual aspects	Moderate

			comprehensively.
13	<i>The Influence of Traditional game Engklek on the Development of Numeracy Literacy in Batam Early Childhood Education Institutions</i> (Imamah & Suhardja, 2024)	13 RA students in Batam	Research method: Quantitative. Low Focus: Traditional <i>Engklek</i> game for numeracy literacy development. Findings: Learning while playing makes it easier for children to remember information and stimulates their numeracy literacy. In addition, <i>Engklek</i> has various other positive impacts for children.
14	<i>Pengaruh Permainan Tradisional Engklek dalam Mengembangkan Motorik dan Sosial Emosional Anak</i> (Wariyanti, 2021)	11 Group B children from RA Miftahul Jannah (Kecamatan Wampu, Kabupaten Langkat)	Research method: Quantitative. High Focus: socio-emotional indicators such as self-control/self-regulation, responsibility, and prosocial behavior. The study reported a significant improvement in children's socio-emotional (and motor) outcomes after the intervention.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from the journals analyzed, several main aspects of children's social-emotional development were identified, namely that the *Engklek* game consistently has a positive impact on improving early childhood social-emotional skills. The study by Arda Sulis Mutiara et al. (2025) shows a significant increase from the pre-cycle stage (32%) to 88% in Cycle II, indicating that *Engklek* activities are able to stimulate children's ability to recognize emotions, control themselves, cooperate, wait their turn, and resolve conflicts. This finding is strengthened by the research of Fitri et al. (2022), which proves that the *Engklek* game contributes 51.1% to children's social-emotional development. Several other studies, such as Wariyanti et al. (2022) and Ruri Nurlela et al. (2023), found that interactions occurring during play, such as helping friends, engaging in discussion, or following game rules, encourage children to become more cooperative and responsible. This social interaction becomes a key factor in developing empathy and emotional control, which are central to early childhood social-emotional development.

Second, emotion regulation is one important aspect of child development. In Wariyanti (2021), socio-emotional development is described as a core domain of early childhood development that includes recognizing one's own feelings, exercising self-control, adapting to others, obeying rules, self-regulation, and taking responsibility for one's behavior—all of which are foundational to emotion regulation in early childhood education. The author also argues that playing *Engklek* trains children to wait patiently for their turn, uphold sportsmanship and honesty, and follow game rules; during the intervention, the teacher emphasized these rules and children practiced taking turns while managing their reactions to success and failure, suggesting that emotion regulation is a key prerequisite for healthy interaction, cooperation, and effective learning.

Third, traditional games, including *Engklek*, strengthen children's prosocial behavior. The study by Junaedah et al. (2020) found that outdoor play activities can improve children's ability to share, cooperate, and support one another among peers. This aligns with the view of Kartikasari et al. (2025) that traditional games integrated into social-emotional learning encourage children to respect rules, understand peers' perspectives, and act prosocially. Thus, traditional games not only stimulate interpersonal skills, but also shape children's character through direct experience in social interaction.

New findings in this study can be seen from the literature study by Wahyu Hari Darmawan et al. (2024), which strengthens the finding that *Engklek* plays an important role in supporting early childhood psychomotor development. Activities such as jumping, maintaining balance, and large-muscle coordination performed in *Engklek* can improve children's gross motor skills. This activity also trains physical endurance, agility, and body control, all of which are part of psychomotor development. In addition, this game provides an integrated learning experience between physical and social activities, making the child development process more comprehensive.

Another finding is found in the research by Imamah & Maelawati Suhardja (2024), which proves that *Engklek* also contributes to children's numeracy literacy. In this game, children are involved in activities such as counting squares, estimating steps, and understanding position and sequence. These processes enable children to learn number and measurement concepts naturally. This finding confirms that numeracy learning through traditional games provides meaningful learning experiences, in which children understand numbers through real contexts rather than mere memorization.

The results of the study by Citrasukmawati & Kristanto (2025) show that STEAM-based traditional games are effective in reducing children's egocentrism. By combining elements of science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics into traditional games, children are encouraged to think creatively, build collaboration, and consider peers' points of view. The integration of STEAM also increases children's curiosity and exploration, so that traditional games can be modified to meet more modern educational needs without losing cultural value.

Furthermore, the study by Wariyanti (2022) also shows that *Engklek* can be introduced in thematic modified forms, such as airplane, mountain, or propeller patterns, as a means to introduce basic science concepts. However, this study also emphasizes that the game's impact on science development has not been optimal, indicating that more targeted integration is needed in designing play activities to support children's cognitive and science development. Then, from the two literature studies analyzed (Darmawan et al., 2024; Sari, 2025), there is consistent evidence that traditional games have high educational value. Traditional games are considered capable of fostering children's communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and leadership skills. This reinforces previous empirical findings that traditional games are effective learning media that are low-cost, easy to implement, and relevant to cultural contexts.

Although the included studies generally report improvements in children's social-emotional outcomes after *Engklek*-based activities, the overall strength of evidence remains uneven. The review synthesizes heterogeneous designs (classroom action research, pre-

experimental and non-randomized quantitative studies, qualitative descriptions, and literature reviews), which differ substantially in their capacity to support causal claims. Many empirical studies rely on small samples and single-site settings, limiting generalizability. In addition, social-emotional outcomes are frequently assessed through teacher observations or locally developed checklists, and the validity/reliability of these measures is not consistently reported, raising the possibility of measurement and rater bias. Several studies also lack control/comparison groups and long-term follow-up, so observed gains may partly reflect maturation, teacher effects, or novelty effects rather than the game itself. Finally, some included papers focus primarily on non-social-emotional outcomes (e.g., motor or numeracy development) and should be interpreted as ancillary evidence. Therefore, conclusions should be read as suggestive rather than definitive, and future research would benefit from more rigorous comparative designs, standardized socio-emotional measures, and multi-site studies.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, this review indicates that traditional games, particularly *Engklek*, exert multidimensional benefits for early childhood development. Beyond consistently supporting core socio-emotional domains (social skills, emotion regulation, and prosocial peer interaction), the synthesized evidence also suggests positive contributions to psychomotor functioning, selected cognitive competencies, and emerging numeracy literacy. Moreover, studies that adapt traditional play through a STEAM-oriented design point to additional gains, including reduced egocentrism, enhanced creativity, and richer, more integrated learning experiences. Taken together, these findings position *Engklek* as a culturally grounded and pedagogically viable approach for early childhood education, with clear relevance to contemporary curricula that aim to balance developmental outcomes, meaningful learning, and local cultural continuity.

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