



Eagle International Journal of Science, Technology and Innovation

An International Peer Reviewed, Open-Access and Multidisciplinary Journal

Volume 1 | Issue 1 | September 2026 |

Website: <https://ejrihs.com/index.php/eijsti/index>

**TECHNOLOGY AND THE “DEATH” OF AFRICAN GODS: A CRITICAL
EVALUATION OF DIGITAL MODERNITY AND AFRICAN INDIGENOUS
RELIGION**

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital technology has altered the ways Africans communicate, acquire knowledge, preserve culture and negotiate religious identity. These changes have raised a provocative question: has technology contributed to the “death” of African gods? This paper critically examines that question in relation to African Indigenous Religion (AIR), with particular attention to digital media, artificial intelligence, globalization, changing sacred spaces and the transmission of indigenous knowledge. Using qualitative documentary analysis, the study draws on recent scholarship in African religious studies, digital religion, media studies and indigenous knowledge preservation. The paper argues that technology has contributed to the weakening of some traditional institutions, reduced the public visibility of certain divinities and displaced some older forms of religious authority. Yet these developments do not amount to the literal extinction of African Indigenous Religion. Recent evidence points instead to adaptation, selective continuity, cultural resilience and renewed forms of digital representation. Technology is therefore neither simply the destroyer nor the saviour of indigenous religion. It is a contested environment in which indigenous knowledge can be marginalized, distorted, commercialized or preserved and revitalized. The paper concludes that the future of African Indigenous Religion will depend partly on the ability of communities, scholars, cultural institutions and technology practitioners to document indigenous knowledge responsibly while allowing communities to determine what should be shared, protected or kept sacred.

Keywords: Technology; Digital Modernity; African Indigenous Religion; African Divinities; Artificial Intelligence; Cultural Heritage.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Technology has become a defining feature of contemporary African life. Mobile phones, social media, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, online education and other forms of technological innovation have changed how people communicate, learn, work and participate in public life. Religion has not remained outside this transformation. Religious teachings are now encountered through websites, social media, livestreams, messaging applications, podcasts and digital archives. In African societies, where religion has historically been closely connected with community, culture, morality and everyday existence, technological change inevitably affects the way religious traditions are understood and transmitted.

African Indigenous Religion presents a particularly important case. Its knowledge has historically been transmitted through families, elders, ritual specialists, oral narratives, festivals, sacred places, symbols, proverbs and communal participation. Much of this knowledge was not originally preserved in books or formal institutions. Consequently, changes in family structures, urbanization, migration, formal education, religious competition and digital communication can alter the channels through which indigenous religious knowledge is reproduced. The issue is not simply whether traditional beliefs remain; it is also whether the social environments that once sustained them remain strong enough to reproduce them across generations.

The phrase “death of African gods” is therefore used in this paper as a metaphor for declining public authority, visibility and institutional influence rather than as a claim that African divinities have literally ceased to exist. Recent scholarship challenges the assumption that modernity necessarily produces the disappearance of indigenous African traditions. Nweke and Okpaleke (2019), for example, identify renewed interest in African spiritualities, while recent studies of African traditional thought emphasize continuity, adaptation and transformation under contemporary pressures. The important question is consequently not whether technology has simply killed African religion, but how technological modernity is changing the conditions under which indigenous religion survives, changes and becomes visible.

This study examines the relationship between technological advancement and the changing status of African Indigenous Religion. It asks three related questions: How is technology altering the transmission and public representation of indigenous religious knowledge? What factors account for the apparent decline of some African divinities? And can digital technologies become instruments for cultural preservation rather than merely forces of religious displacement?

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The rapid advancement of technology has significantly transformed the religious, cultural, and social life of contemporary African societies. Modern education, scientific rationality, digital communication, social media, artificial intelligence, urbanization, and globalization have influenced how Africans understand religion and relate to indigenous beliefs and practices. Consequently, many African traditional deities and religious institutions appear to be losing their former influence, particularly among younger generations. Some indigenous practices are increasingly viewed as outdated, superstitious, or incompatible with modernity. However, the perceived decline of African gods raises an important question: Have African gods truly

“died,” or are they merely experiencing transformation in response to changing technological and social realities? The apparent decline may not necessarily mean their complete disappearance, as elements of African Indigenous Religion continue to exist through cultural festivals, oral traditions, traditional institutions, indigenous knowledge, and emerging digital platforms. The problem, therefore, is the tendency to interpret the declining visibility and influence of African divinities as their complete “death” without adequately examining the role of technology and other forces of social change. This study critically investigates whether the “death” of African gods is a historical reality, a cultural myth, or a process of religious transformation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

- (1) examine how digital technology is reshaping African Indigenous Religion;
- (2) assess the factors contributing to the declining public visibility of some African divinities;
- (3) evaluate whether the “death” of African gods is better understood as extinction, decline or transformation;
- (4) identify responsible ways technology can support the preservation of indigenous religious and cultural heritage.

1.4 Methodology

The paper adopts a qualitative documentary approach. It examines recent scholarly literature on African Indigenous Religion, digital religion, African cultural heritage, media and indigenous knowledge systems. The analysis is interpretive and critical rather than statistical. Particular attention is given to studies published within the last ten years so that the argument reflects current scholarship on digital transformation, artificial intelligence and indigenous knowledge preservation.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing scholarship on religion and technology by providing a critical examination of how technological advancement is reshaping African indigenous religious consciousness. It will be valuable to scholars of African Traditional Religion, Religious Studies, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, and Digital Humanities.

The findings will also assist policymakers, cultural institutions, religious leaders, and educators in developing strategies for preserving Africa's indigenous religious heritage while constructively engaging with the opportunities and challenges presented by modern technology. Furthermore, the study enriches contemporary discourse on the intersection of technology, religion, and African cultural identity.

2.0 TECHNOLOGY, MODERNITY AND AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGION (A REVIEW)

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the study on technology and the “death” of African gods. It examines scholarly discussions on technology, African divinities, and the relationship between technological advancement and indigenous religious traditions. The review also identifies gaps in existing scholarship, particularly the limited attention given to how modern technologies are reshaping the relevance, authority, and public perception of African gods.

2.1 Technology and Modernity

Technology should not be understood merely as a collection of machines. In contemporary society it is also a social environment through which people encounter information, establish relationships, construct identities and make decisions. Digital technology has therefore become part of everyday culture. In religious life, it can alter where knowledge is encountered, who is regarded as an authority and how communities understand sacred experience.

This development is important for African Indigenous Religion because indigenous religious knowledge has traditionally been relational and communal. Knowledge is often connected with people, places, rituals and lived experience rather than detached from them. Recent work on African religions emphasizes the continuing significance of power, materiality and social life in indigenous religious systems (Hellweg & Miller, 2019). This perspective cautions against treating indigenous religion as a fossilized remnant of the past. It is better understood as a living tradition that responds to historical and social change.

Digital modernity introduces a different environment. A young person who once depended mainly on an elder, priest, diviner or family member for knowledge can now search for information from multiple sources within seconds. This democratizes access to knowledge, but it also changes the relationship between knowledge and community. Information can be detached from the cultural context in which it originally had meaning. Sacred symbols can become images; ritual narratives can become social-media content; and complex beliefs can be reduced to short explanations designed for quick consumption.

The effect is not necessarily uniform. Nwankwo (2017) demonstrates that religion in Nigeria has increasingly entered a process of mediatization in which media technologies influence religious communication and experience. Although Christianity and Islam have generally benefited more visibly from digital infrastructures, African Indigenous Religion is not absent from this environment. Research in southeastern Nigeria, for instance, indicates that indigenous religious practitioners can also employ digital devices and mass media, suggesting that traditional religion can adapt to technological conditions rather than simply disappear (Ude-Akpeh, 2021).

2.2 African Gods/Divinities

African gods or divinities are spiritual beings believed to derive their authority from the Supreme Being and to serve as intermediaries between God and humanity. They are distinct from the Supreme Creator but possess delegated powers over different aspects of nature and human existence. According to Kanu (2015), African divinities function as ministers of God, each associated with areas such as fertility, justice, rivers, thunder, agriculture, healing, and protection. Okorie(2021) explains that these divinities are expressions of divine governance rather than independent supreme beings. Among the Igbo, examples include Ala or Ani, the earth divinity associated with morality and fertility; Amadioha, associated with justice and thunder; Agwu, associated with healing and divination; and Ikenga, a symbol of achievement and personal strength. These divinities traditionally maintained social order through rituals, taboos, festivals, sacrifices, and moral sanctions. Today, belief in these divinities has declined in some communities because of Christianity, Islam, modernization, urbanization, formal education, and technological advancement. Scientific explanations, digital information, and global religious interactions increasingly challenge traditional understandings of divine power, causing some younger Africans to regard indigenous divinities primarily as cultural symbols rather than living spiritual realities.

3.0 Technology and the Changing Status of African Gods

Technology has significantly transformed the religious and cultural landscape of contemporary Africa. Digital communication, social media, artificial intelligence, scientific innovation, urban development, and globalization have changed how people acquire knowledge, communicate beliefs, interpret reality, and relate to religious traditions. These developments have affected African Indigenous Religion (AIR), which was traditionally sustained through oral transmission, communal participation, sacred spaces, rituals, festivals, and the authority of elders and religious custodians (Okorie, 2021). The expansion of digital culture has weakened some traditional systems of religious transmission by exposing Africans, especially young people, to global religions, scientific explanations, and diverse cultural values. At the same time, technology has created opportunities for documenting indigenous languages, preserving oral traditions, and promoting African religious heritage. Technology should therefore be understood as both a disruptive and regenerative force.

3.1 CHANGING SACRED SPACES AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

African Indigenous Religion has historically attached significance to particular places: groves, rivers, hills, shrines, ancestral lands and other locations associated with sacred memory. These places are not simply physical sites. They can embody relationships among people, ancestors, divinities, history and the natural environment. When such places are destroyed, neglected or disconnected from community life, the religious knowledge associated with them may also become weaker.

Urban development and changing patterns of settlement are important parts of this process, but technology intensifies it by making religious experience increasingly portable. People can now obtain information without physically visiting traditional sites or learning directly from custodians. The movement of religious knowledge from embodied communal settings into digital spaces can weaken the authority of traditional specialists. Yet the process can also work in the opposite direction. Digital photographs, oral-history recordings, geographical documentation, digital exhibitions and community archives can preserve information about sacred places that might otherwise disappear.

The central issue is therefore not whether sacred space is replaced by digital space in a simple manner. Rather, technology changes the relationship between physical heritage and cultural memory. Digital preservation can help people remember a sacred site, but a digital record cannot automatically reproduce the social relationships, ritual responsibilities and community meanings attached to that site. Preservation must therefore be community-based rather than merely technological.

3.2 Social Media and Religious Consciousness

Social media has become an important arena in which religious identities are negotiated. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram and other platforms allow individuals to encounter beliefs outside their immediate communities. Research on religion and online community in African contexts shows that digital communication can strengthen connection while also challenging established forms of religious leadership and community (Musa & Lando, 2022).

For African Indigenous Religion, this creates both opportunity and danger. On one hand, social media can give indigenous communities a public voice. Festivals can be documented, oral histories can be shared, indigenous languages can be promoted, and younger people can encounter aspects of their heritage that may not be taught at home. Digital cultural production in Nigeria has already demonstrated the potential of technology to represent Igbo cultural materials and support cultural longevity (Morgan, 2020).

On the other hand, digital representation can simplify or distort indigenous religion. A complex divinity may be presented merely as a “god of thunder,” a ritual may be detached from its ethical meaning, or a sacred practice may be described using categories imposed from outside the community. Such representations can reproduce old stereotypes even when they appear technologically modern. The problem is therefore not only lack of representation but also the quality, ownership and cultural context of representation.

The digital environment can also encourage religious competition. Indigenous beliefs are encountered alongside Christianity, Islam, secular philosophies, popular culture and global spiritual movements. This plural environment may weaken the exclusive authority of any one tradition, but it can also stimulate renewed interest. The re-emergence of African spiritualities documented by Nweke and Okpaleke (2019) illustrates that modernity does not always produce religious disappearance. In some circumstances, new forms of communication can support religious and cultural revival.

3.3 Artificial Intelligence and Indigenous Religious Knowledge

Artificial intelligence introduces a new stage in the relationship between technology and indigenous knowledge. Search engines, conversational systems, translation tools and generative AI can provide explanations of African religions to users who have little direct contact with traditional custodians. This creates unprecedented possibilities for learning, but it also raises questions about accuracy, ownership and cultural authority.

A central problem is the uneven digitization of indigenous knowledge. Where African knowledge remains oral, locally held or deliberately restricted, digital systems may contain only fragments of the tradition. AI systems can then reproduce what is available online

without necessarily knowing what is missing. Recent scholarship warns that artificial intelligence can reproduce epistemic biases against non-Western knowledge systems when those systems are poorly represented in digital datasets (Lewis, Whaanga, & Yolgörmez, 2025; Ofosu-Asare, 2025).

This concern is particularly serious for sacred knowledge. Not every indigenous teaching should automatically be digitized. Some knowledge may be restricted by age, initiation, lineage, ritual status or community consent. Turning such knowledge into searchable data without permission can amount to cultural extraction rather than preservation. Recent African scholarship on digital preservation therefore stresses community ownership, cultural sensitivity and ethical governance as conditions for meaningful technological preservation (Gontor, 2025; Tella, Jatto, & Ajani, 2025).

At the same time, AI can be useful when communities and scholars control its application. It can assist with transcription, translation, indexing, language preservation, archival organization and the creation of educational resources. The goal should not be to allow machines to become the final authorities on indigenous religion. Rather, technology should support the custodians, scholars and communities who possess the cultural knowledge. The principle should be simple: technology may assist preservation, but cultural authority should remain with the people whose heritage is being preserved.

3.4 Globalization, Digital Culture and Religious Change

Globalization has increased the circulation of religious ideas across geographical boundaries. Digital platforms make this process faster because users can encounter global religious content without leaving their local communities. African Indigenous Religion therefore operates within a highly competitive religious and cultural environment. Christianity and Islam possess extensive institutional and digital networks, while indigenous traditions are often more locally organized and less systematically represented online.

Yet unequal visibility should not be confused with extinction. African religious traditions may survive through family practices, festivals, names, moral expectations, traditional institutions, healing systems, artistic forms and cultural memory even when formal adherence appears weak. Recent studies of African spiritualities demonstrate that indigenous traditions can persist and re-emerge in contexts shaped by Christianity, modernity and globalization (Nweke, 2019; Nweke & Okpaleke, 2019).

This suggests that religious change in Africa is better understood through adaptation and negotiation than through a simple opposition between tradition and modernity. African communities select, reinterpret and combine elements of different cultural systems. Digital culture becomes another arena in which these negotiations take place.

4.0 THE “DEATH” OF AFRICAN GODS: EXTINCTION, DECLINE OR TRANSFORMATION?

The central metaphor of this paper requires careful qualification. To speak of the “death” of African gods can be useful if the expression draws attention to declining public authority, shrinking ritual institutions and reduced visibility. It becomes misleading, however, if it suggests that African Indigenous Religion has completely disappeared. The available evidence does not support such an absolute conclusion.

There has undoubtedly been decline. Some shrines and sacred spaces have lost influence; some ritual specialists have fewer apprentices; oral traditions are threatened by generational change; and many young Africans encounter indigenous religion primarily as culture or history rather than as a comprehensive religious worldview. Christianity, Islam, formal education, urbanization, migration and technological change have all contributed to this situation. Technology is therefore one factor within a much larger historical process.

At the same time, decline and continuity can exist together. Ude-Akpeh's (2021) study of nature worship in Anambra State found that practitioners were using digital devices and mass media, indicating that indigenous religious practice can adapt to contemporary communication environments. Nweke and Okpaleke (2019) likewise point to the re-emergence of African spiritualities in contemporary settings. These examples complicate any claim of straightforward extinction.

The more convincing interpretation is transformation. Transformation does not mean that every traditional belief survives unchanged. Some beliefs decline, some practices disappear, some are reinterpreted, and others are revived. What remains may be expressed differently from the way it was expressed in the past. A divinity may cease to occupy a dominant public religious role while its associated symbols, stories, moral concepts or cultural practices remain significant. In this sense, religious continuity may be cultural, ethical, symbolic or spiritual rather than institutional.

Recent scholarship on African traditional thought similarly challenges the assumption that modernity simply destroys indigenous systems. Contemporary African traditional thought can show selective continuity and strategic transformation as communities negotiate globalization, technology, urban life and changing belief systems (Chikelo, 2026). The question, therefore, is not whether technology has won a battle against tradition, but how communities are deciding what to retain, reinterpret, reject or transmit.

4.1 The Reality of Religious Decline and Marginalization

Although African gods may not have literally “died,” there is evidence that many indigenous religious institutions have experienced a decline in public influence. Traditional shrines, priesthoods, rituals, sacred spaces, and systems of religious education no longer occupy the same position they held in many precolonial African societies. Colonialism and Christian missionary activity contributed significantly to this decline. Indigenous religious practices were often described as pagan, idolatrous, primitive, or demonic. Such interpretations weakened the social legitimacy of African religion and encouraged many Africans to distance themselves from traditional beliefs. Western education also promoted new systems of knowledge that frequently placed scientific and European ideas above indigenous worldviews. Technological development has intensified these historical changes. Digital media provides access to global religions, scientific explanations, secular philosophies, and alternative cultural values. Many young Africans now obtain religious knowledge through the internet and social media rather than through elders, traditional priests, and community institutions (Kanu 2015, Okorie 2024). The “death” of African gods therefore reflects the decline of social influence, public recognition, and institutional power rather than the disappearance of all indigenous religious beliefs.

4.2 Critical Evaluation and the Way Forward

The view that technology is solely responsible for the “death” of African gods oversimplifies a complex historical and cultural process. The changing status of African Indigenous Religion has resulted from the combined influence of colonialism, missionary activities, formal education, urbanization, globalization, religious pluralism, scientific rationality, and technological development (Okorie 2024). The evidence suggests that the “death” of African gods is neither a complete myth nor an absolute historical reality. It is a useful metaphor for the decline in the public authority, institutional influence, and social visibility of some indigenous religious traditions. At the same time, the continuing presence of African religious values in cultural practices, traditional institutions, moral systems, and spiritual beliefs demonstrates that indigenous religion has not become extinct. Transformation therefore provides the most convincing explanation. There is a need for greater documentation of oral traditions, indigenous languages, sacred histories, festivals, religious symbols, and cultural practices. Universities, museums, cultural institutions, traditional authorities, and local communities should collaborate in creating reliable digital archives and educational resources.

Ultimately, the future of African gods should not be understood as a choice between tradition and technology. Technology can become a means of cultural renewal when it is used responsibly and supported by accurate scholarship, community participation, and respect for indigenous values.

5.0 TECHNOLOGY AS BOTH THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY:

5.1 Implications for African Religion, Culture, and Christianity

The changing relationship between technology and African Indigenous Religion has important implications for African cultural identity, religious coexistence, heritage preservation, and ethical development. As digital modernity reshapes religious knowledge and practice, indigenous traditions are exposed to both new challenges and new opportunities. While some traditional institutions have declined in influence, technology has also created platforms for cultural documentation, education, dialogue, and renewed engagement with African heritage. The implications of these changes extend beyond African Indigenous Religion. Since religion is closely connected with culture, morality, family life, and communal identity, the marginalization of indigenous religious traditions may also affect the preservation of African values and historical memory

5.2 Cultural Identity and Memory

The decline of indigenous religious knowledge has implications beyond religion. African Indigenous Religion is interwoven with language, history, art, festivals, kinship, moral expectations and communal identity. When indigenous religious knowledge disappears without documentation, associated cultural memories may also be weakened. Digital technology can help address this problem through audio archives, video interviews, digitized manuscripts, language resources, virtual exhibitions and community databases.

Digital technology and globalization have exposed Africans to foreign cultures and lifestyles. While this exposure promotes cultural exchange, it may also encourage cultural imitation and alienation. Many young Africans are more familiar with global digital trends than with indigenous languages, folktales, proverbs, religious symbols, and traditional histories. Technology can support cultural resilience through digital archives, online cultural education, documentaries, podcasts, and social media platforms. These tools can preserve oral traditions and make indigenous knowledge accessible to younger generations.

Morgan (2020) demonstrates the potential of digital media for representing Nigerian cultural materials and supporting cultural longevity. More recent work on digital preservation in Africa likewise shows that structured digital tools can help safeguard indigenous knowledge, provided that preservation is guided by community participation and ethical safeguards (Gontor, 2025).

5.3 Religious Coexistence and Dialogue

Africa's religious landscape is plural. Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religion interact within families, communities and public institutions. Digital media has intensified this interaction. It can encourage dialogue and mutual learning, but it can also amplify ridicule, misinformation and hostility. For this reason, digital engagement with indigenous religion should not become a new platform for religious denigration.

For Christians in Africa, serious engagement with indigenous heritage does not require a return to traditional worship. It requires historical honesty and cultural respect. African Christians can reject practices they consider inconsistent with their faith while still recognizing the intellectual, moral and historical significance of African religious traditions. Such an approach can contribute to healthier interreligious relations and a more balanced understanding of African history.

5.4 Preservation, Ownership and Ethical Responsibility

Digitization is not automatically preservation. A digital file can survive while the meaning of the knowledge it contains is lost. Worse still, knowledge can be digitized without the consent of the community that owns it. This is why current scholarship emphasizes cultural protocols, intellectual property, indigenous data governance and community participation (Tella et al., 2025; Perera et al., 2025).

Universities, museums, libraries, traditional institutions and government agencies should therefore develop preservation projects with indigenous communities rather than merely collecting materials from them. Communities should have a voice in deciding what can be publicly accessible, what should be restricted and how sacred materials should be described. AI systems should likewise be developed and evaluated with greater attention to indigenous epistemologies and the risk of reproducing cultural bias (Lewis et al., 2025; Ofosu-Asare, 2025).

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has examined the provocative claim that technology has brought about the “death” of African gods. The analysis shows that technology has contributed to major changes in the social environment within which African Indigenous Religion is transmitted and practised. Digital communication, artificial intelligence, globalization and changing patterns of knowledge access have weakened some traditional forms of authority and reduced the public visibility of certain indigenous religious institutions.

Nevertheless, the evidence does not justify the conclusion that African gods have simply disappeared. Indigenous spiritualities continue to demonstrate resilience, adaptation and, in some contexts, renewed visibility. Technology can contribute to decline when it displaces local custodians, spreads stereotypes or reduces sacred knowledge to decontextualized information. It can also contribute to preservation when communities use it to document languages, oral traditions, sacred histories, cultural practices and religious knowledge on their own terms.

The phrase “death of African gods” is therefore most useful as a critical metaphor for the decline of some traditional institutions and forms of authority. It should not be treated as proof of religious extinction. The more defensible conclusion is that African Indigenous

Religion is undergoing transformation within a changing technological and religious environment. Its future will depend not simply on resisting modern technology, but on negotiating it intelligently and ethically.

Technology should ultimately serve human memory rather than erase it. If digital tools are placed under responsible scholarly, community and ethical guidance, they can help ensure that Africa's indigenous heritage is not lost to silence, distortion or neglect. The challenge is to build a digital future in which technological progress and cultural memory are not enemies, but partners in preserving the richness of Africa's religious and intellectual heritage.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governments should recognize indigenous religious and cultural heritage as part of Africa's historical and intellectual resources and support responsible documentation programmes.
2. Universities, libraries, museums and cultural institutions should establish digital archives for indigenous languages, oral histories, festivals, sacred histories and cultural materials, with community participation in governance.
3. Traditional authorities and knowledge custodians should be involved from the beginning of digitization projects so that sacred or restricted knowledge is not exposed without consent.
4. Researchers and technology developers should improve the representation of African indigenous knowledge in digital systems and actively address cultural and epistemic bias in artificial intelligence.
5. Educational institutions should teach African Indigenous Religion objectively as part of African history, culture and religious studies, avoiding both romanticization and derogatory stereotypes.
6. Religious leaders should encourage respectful engagement among Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religion, particularly in digital spaces where misinformation and hostility can spread rapidly.
7. Further empirical research should investigate how particular African communities are using social media, artificial intelligence and digital archives to preserve, reinterpret or contest indigenous religious knowledge.

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