

## PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH THE STUDY OF SUMEDANG'S TRADITIONAL WEDDING ATTIRE

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the cultural meanings and values embedded in Sumedang's traditional wedding attire. The research utilizes a semiotic analysis framework drawing from Roland Barthes' theory (1972) of the signifier and signified. Qualitative descriptive is the method used in this research to interpret the symbolic meanings attached to various elements of the attire. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with cultural experts and traditional stakeholders, and supporting documentation. The results show that each component of the wedding clothing, such as the *Siger Binokasri* (bridal crown) and *Binokasih* (king's crown) conveys specific cultural values. These include compassion (*asih*), wisdom and leadership (*wibawa*), balance and harmony (*rukun*), and social responsibility within marriage. The choice of colors, such as yellow and black, fabrics, and accessories such as *mangle* (the flower arrangement worn by the bride and the groom), *kangkalung* (necklace), also reflects philosophical and spiritual aspects rooted in Sundanese traditions. This research concludes that Sumedang's traditional wedding attire is not merely a form of ceremonial fashion but a cultural artifact representing the region's rich heritage and collective identity. Therefore, the preservation and revitalization of this attire are essential not only for cultural sustainability but also for enhancing community pride and intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge.

**Keywords:** *Semiotics, Traditional Wedding Attire, Sundanese Culture, Sumedang*

### INTRODUCTION

Culture is an ancestral heritage that characterizes a country. This characteristic can be seen in the unique cultural values that only a country has. However, in this era of globalization and modernization, cultural values are starting to erode. This was conveyed by Lieutenant General Agus Widjojo, the Governor of the National Defence Institute of the Republic of Indonesia. He also urged the public to pay more attention to their own culture and start protecting it so that it would not be lost to time. This appeal is addressed to all Indonesian people, especially the younger generation. These cultural values can be eroded by the lack of public interest in learning about their own country's culture. This can be seen from the lack of public visits to museums, which are places where valuable items, including culture, are stored. Even in museums, we can learn many things, including culture, together with cultural stakeholders or tour guides. However, the number of visits to this museum has decreased. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency, museum visits in the capital city, namely Jakarta, in 2021 only reached 119,657 visits. This is far from the data in 2020, which reached 2,056,897 visits. Apart from the influence of COVID-19, according to CNBC, the lack of public interest in museums is because they think that museums are the only places to store ancient items. Because of this, as someone who cares about the importance of cultural values, researchers are looking for other alternatives to provide knowledge of cultural values to the community by utilizing current technology. According to Umam (2021), efforts to maintain and preserve culture are through cultural knowledge. Cultural knowledge is cultural preservation carried out by disseminating information related to culture in many forms. According to Kompasiana (2024), one way to disseminate information related to culture is through scientific journal publications. This is because many media often quote scientific articles published in journals, and the public can access them. Through the dissemination of these research results, the public can increase its knowledge. Some

researchers who have done so are Sugianto et al. (2019), with the title “Education Value in the Traditional Clothing of Panaragan Javanese Society: A Study of Semiotics”, and Sinaga and Damanik (2020), with the title “Symbol, Function, and the Meaning of Wedding Clothes in Implanting Simalungun Cultural Values”. Both have explored Indonesian traditional clothing using a semiotic approach, which reveals the cultural values preserved within traditional attire. This is because traditional clothing is always thick with cultural symbols. Additionally, Rizky and Putri (2022) examined “Fashion and Culture: The Semiotics of Traditional Wedding Attire in Indonesian Ethnic Groups”, highlighting how visual signs in clothing contribute to ethnic identity formation. Setiawan and Hanif (2023), in their study “Symbolic Meanings of Traditional Wedding Dresses in the West Java Region: A Semiotic Perspective”, emphasized the communicative role of attire in expressing local wisdom and regional pride. Most recently, Haryanto (2021), through “The Role of Traditional Wedding Clothes in Cultural Transmission: A Semiotic Study of the Sundanese Wedding Attire”, argued that traditional garments not only reflect aesthetic values but also serve as tools for intergenerational knowledge transfer within local communities. Their research contributes to promoting cultural awareness and revitalizing the younger generation’s interest in local traditions.

Although there have been relevant studies, research related to traditional clothing from the West Java region, especially Sumedang, is very limited. Seeing this gap, the researcher decided to examine the traditional clothing of the Sumedang ancestral bride. This gap can also be seen from the limited information available on the internet regarding this outfit. With this gap, a deeper study of this wedding outfit is needed, because this wedding outfit has noble cultural values.

Sumedang’s traditional ancestral wedding clothes are the clothes used by the King of Sumedang and his descendants. This outfit is exhibited at the Sri Baduga Museum. This outfit has an iconic accessory, the *Binokasih* crown. This outfit will be analyzed through a semiotic approach as done by previous researchers. Through this study, the researcher hopes that it can contribute to the preservation of Indonesian culture. This research asserts that Sumedang’s traditional wedding clothing functions not only as ceremonial dress but also as a cultural text that communicates and preserves Sundanese identity and values.

## Review of Literature

The study of traditional wedding attire offers a rich intersection of cultural expression, identity, and symbolic meaning. In the context of Sumedang’s traditional wedding attire, Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory provides a powerful lens to explore how visual and material elements serve not only aesthetic functions but also as carriers of deep cultural narratives.

Barthes (1972) introduced a two-order model of signification: the first order, or denotation, is the literal meaning of a sign, while the second order, or connotation, represents the cultural or emotional meanings associated with that sign. A third and more abstract level of myth emerges when these connotations are naturalized into ideologies, shaping how a society understands itself.

### **Traditional Attire as a Sign System**

Traditional clothing, as a non-verbal sign system, fits well within Barthes’ semiotic framework. In *The Fashion System* (Barthes, 1967), he extended his analysis of signs to clothing, arguing that attire communicates messages through a structured set of codes. These codes are not arbitrary; they are steeped in historical, cultural, and ideological meanings. Sumedang’s traditional wedding attire—comprising intricate fabrics, specific color schemes, accessories, and patterns—functions as a complex semiotic ensemble. Each element becomes a signifier loaded with both denotative and connotative meaning.

### **Denotation and Connotation in Wedding Attire of Sumedang**

At the denotative level, elements such as the *kebaya Sunda*, *batik motifs*, and headpieces (*siger* or *mahkota*) serve practical and decorative functions. These garments denote traditional formal dress worn during wedding ceremonies. However, at the connotative level, these elements evoke meanings related to gender roles, spiritual values, social class, and ethnic identity. For instance, the choice of gold embroidery and the inclusion of traditional accessories often connote nobility, purity, and adherence to *adat* (customary law).

### ***The Myth of Cultural Continuity and Social Order***

Barthes' notion of myth is crucial to understanding how traditional attire contributes to the preservation of cultural values. In Sumedang, the wedding costume functions not just as clothing, but as a material myth—a sign that naturalizes specific ideologies. The repetition of traditional elements in modern weddings reinforces a myth of cultural continuity, suggesting that ancestral values are stable and eternal, despite broader social transformations.

The use of traditional attire in contemporary wedding ceremonies thus operates ideologically: it communicates a collective desire to maintain *Sunda wiwitan* values such as respect for elders, harmony with nature, and social hierarchy. These meanings become “naturalized,” appearing as timeless truths rather than socially constructed beliefs, precisely as Barthes described in *Mythologies*.

### ***Cultural Resistance and the Reproduction of Identity***

Recent literature (e.g., Chandler, 2017; Hall, 1997) builds on Barthes to examine how traditional symbols can resist or adapt to global cultural pressures. The wearing of Sumedang's traditional wedding attire, particularly by younger generations, can be interpreted as a form of cultural resistance—a symbolic stand against cultural homogenization. Through Barthes' lens, this practice reproduces not only fashion but identity, reasserting local heritage in a globalized world.

## **METHOD**

This qualitative descriptive method is expected to provide in-depth and comprehensive insight into the subject's experiences as well as the relevant social and cultural context. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to Moleong (2007), the qualitative descriptive method aims to understand social and cultural phenomena in depth through detailed depictions. This approach allows researchers to explore the views of research subjects through in-depth narratives.

The data in this research were collected through three techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews involved direct interaction with informants. In this case, researchers interviewed several experts on Sumedang's ancestral traditional wedding clothes, Sri Baduga Museum tour guides, traditional clothing craftsmen, descendants of the Sumedang royal family, and members of the local community with cultural knowledge of the wedding attire. As for observation, the researchers examined the clothing directly to find out what elements can be studied. Finally, the researcher carried out documentation by photographing the wedding clothes as research evidence.

After collecting data, researchers analyzed the data through three stages: data reduction, presentation of data, and conclusion. In the data reduction process, the researchers sorted written data into detailed descriptions. This aimed to enable researchers to filter important information so that only relevant data was retained. After that, the researchers carried out a presentation of the data. The researchers presented data to provide an overall picture of the research. The data were presented with clarity and methodological consistency, so that it was easy for readers to understand.

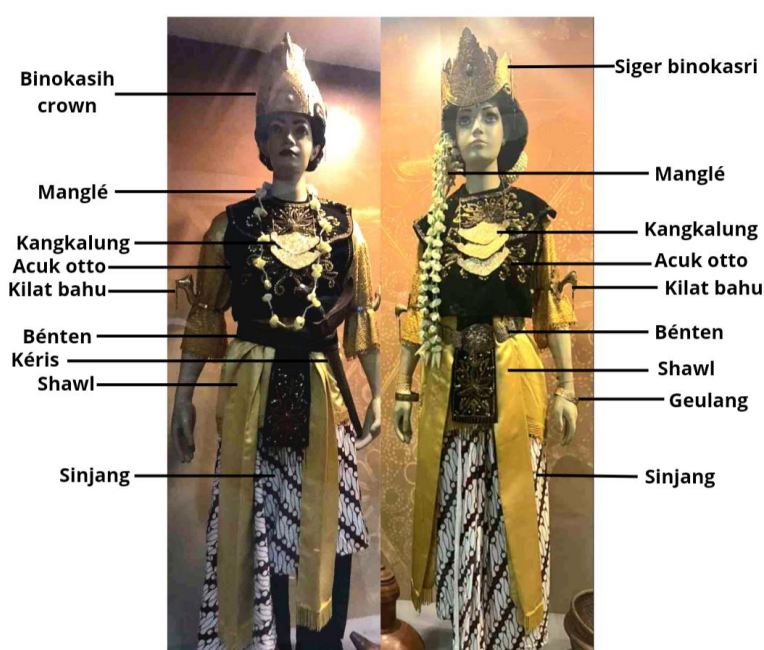
## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The traditional wedding attire of the Sumedang royal heritage is more than just a beautiful ensemble; every element carries its meaning, carries a message, and reflects the values passed down through generations. These attires are not only visual representations of beauty and status but also function as symbols that communicate values such as leadership, loyalty, affection, and social harmony. By analyzing these elements through a semiotic study, the cultural values preserved by the Sumedang community, particularly the principles of *silih asah* (mutual learning), *silih asih* (mutual affection), and *silih asuh* (mutual care), are reflected clearly. These are not just philosophical ideas, but guiding principles reflected in the very clothing worn on one of life's most important days.

The following section explores the deeper meanings behind each element of the bride and groom's attire, showing how tradition, identity, and moral teachings are woven together in this cultural legacy.

## Findings

Based on the results of in-depth interviews conducted with key informants namely, Bapak Sutresno, a guide at the Sri Baduga Museum in Bandung; Ibu Peti, a fashion designer at the Sumedang Museum; Bapak Abdul, a guide at the Sumedang Museum; and Raden Luky, one of the guardians of noble values and traditions of Sumedang Larang, it was found that each element of the Sumedang traditional wedding attire not only serves an aesthetic function but also contains philosophical, social, and spiritual values that reflect the local wisdom of the Sumedang community. These symbolic meanings are reflected in the choice of motifs, shapes, colors, and the placement of traditional accessories such as *Binokasih* and *Binokasri* crowns, *Manglé*, *Kangkalung*, *Acuk Otto*, *Kilat Bahu*, *Béntén*, *Kéris*, *Geulang*, Shawl, and *Sinjang*. Each of these elements is understood and passed down from generation to generation and continues to be preserved in traditional wedding practices as part of efforts to maintain the cultural identity and noble values of the Sumedang people. The following is a description of the research findings based on the classification of elements in the *Kasumedangan* wedding attire.



**Figure. 1** Picture of Sumedang's traditional ancestral wedding clothes.

### a) *Binokasih* Crown

The *binokasih* crown is the crown used by the groom in the *kasumedangan* wedding ceremony. This crown symbolizes the leadership that a husband must have in the household. The meaning of *binokasih* in this crown is love. So that besides being a leader, he is also expected to have affection for his family. This is relevant to the principles held by the Sumedang people, namely *silih asah*, *silih asih*, and *silih asuh*. In addition, because this crown is specifically used by royal descendants, it also represents a person's high position in the Sumedang social environment. This representation of position is also related to the gold color used in this *binokasih* crown.

### b) *Siger Binokasri*

*Siger binokasri* is the crown used by the bride in the *kasumedangan* wedding ceremony. This *siger* symbolizes the companionship of a wife for her husband. The meaning of *binokasri* on this *siger* is love. This is where a wife is expected to have affection for her family as the perfection of marriage in her household. This is relevant to the principle of *silih asah*, *silih asih*, and *silih asuh* owned by

the Sumedang community. Similar to the *binokasih* crown, the *binokasri siger* represents a person's high position, which can be seen from the color of the *siger* used.

c) *Manglé*

*Manglé* is a flower arrangement worn by the bride and groom that symbolizes fragrance and longevity. They are expected to live their home life with happiness and longevity. *Manglé* is a symbol of loyalty and happiness in marriage, so Sumedang brides use this accessory. This shows that the Sumedang people highly value sacred relationships.

d) *Kangkalung*

*Kangkalung* are accessories used by the bride and groom, which have different numbers. Two chains symbolize two lovers getting married or a symbol of commitment to the bride and groom. While three chains symbolize the principle of the Sumedang people, namely *tri tangtu dibunana*. This means that the marriage bond between two people must be lived based on the principle of *tri tangtu dibunana*, namely a marriage that must have values of love, values of education, and values of caring.

e) *Acuk otto*

*Acuk otto* is an outer garment that has a lotus motive. The lotus motive on this wedding outfit symbolizes wisdom. It means that both bride and groom are expected to live wisely, as well as not burdening others. In Sumedang culture, the lotus flower is believed to have noble values that can show wisdom and benefit others.

f) *Kilat bahu*

The *kilat bahu* is an accessory worn on the shoulders of the bride and groom. The two *kilat bahu* have different shapes, namely the shape of the *paksi* dragon and the *julang* bird. The *paksi* dragon shape used by the groom symbolizes strength and leadership. He is expected to be a responsible husband. While the shape of the *julang* bird used by the bride symbolizes protection. A wife is expected to be a protector for her children, because she acts as the first school for her child. In addition, this also symbolizes that those who use *julang*-shaped *kilat bahu* are native to Priangan. In Sumedang culture, the *paksi* dragon symbolizes good spirit and courage, while the *julang* bird is a symbol of harmony and respect for each other.

g) *Bentén*

*Bentén* is an accessory used on the waist of the bride and groom. This *bentén* symbolizes sufficiency. Where the bride and groom are expected not to be greedy and always feel enough of what they have, then they will be far from bad things. In the belief of the Sumedang people, they believe that greed can destroy their lives. Therefore, they should be content and grateful for what they have.

h) *Keris*

The *keris* is an accessory that the groom wears around his waist. This *keris* is not only a physical protector, but also an inner one. In this case, both brides are expected to have *pepeling* or life guidelines that can lead them to household harmony. *Pepeling* in Sumedang culture is believed to solve all problems. Therefore, the use of *keris* symbolizes determination, honesty, and protection from all negativity.

i) *Geulang*

*Geulang* is an accessory that the bride wears on her hand. This *geulang* symbolizes the sacred relationship between her and her partner. In this sacred relationship, both brides must communicate, support, and help each other in accepting differences. Sumedang people uphold the



values of loyalty, responsibility, and mutual respect in domestic life, and it is symbolized through the use of this *geulang*.

j) Shawl

The shawl is an accessory that the bride wears around her waist. It symbolizes the sacredness and holy bond between the bride and groom. This shawl represents the concept of “merging into one”, which is related to the legend of Prabu Tajimalela, who tied the Simpai mount. Sumedang people believe that the use of this shawl symbolizes a binding that can maintain balance and harmony in life. This shawl serves as a reminder for the couple to care for each other, complement, and support each other to create a happy family according to Sumedang’s cultural values.

k) *Sinjang*

*Sinjang* is the lower part of the wedding dress that has a *lorèng* motif. The *lorèng* motif on this *sinjang* symbolizes harmony and balance. This means that the bride and groom are expected to live in harmony and balance their perspective roles and responsibilities. This is conducted to achieve perfection in their household. In Sumedang culture, they uphold this value, where they live in balance with others and the environment. They believe that by living in harmony and balance, they can achieve wisdom and peace that benefits those around them.

## Discussion

This study identifies the symbolism that exists in the bride and groom’s clothes and accessories using a semiotic approach, particularly drawing upon Roland Barthes’ theory of denotation and connotation. According to Barthes (1977), every cultural object function as a *sign*, consisting of a signifier (the physical form) and a signified (the cultural or emotional meaning attached to it). Every element, like the *binokasri siger* and the *binokasih* crown, more than promotes the beauty but also represents compassion and leadership. The bride and groom are reminded of their leadership positions within the family and the value of encouraging each other by these crowns. The three fundamental principles of Sumedang society’s interpersonal relationships *silih asah*, *silih asih*, and *silih asuh*, are strongly related to this symbol.

Items like the *manglé* and *kangkalung* serve as examples of the commitment and dedication that are expected in a married relationship. A happy sign, such as a *mangle*, conveys the desire for a peaceful home life. In addition, the *kangkalung* highlights the value of education and marriage through the symbolism of various numbers of chains. Furthermore, the lotus pattern of *acuk otto* and other clothes designs reflects the wisdom that the bride and husband are supposed to possess. This shows that a marriage involves intelligence and understanding in daily life as well as love. In light of these findings, traditional wedding clothing can be viewed as a semiotic system, a structured set of signs that communicate collective values and beliefs. As Hall (1997) notes, culture is produced through shared systems of meaning, and clothing serves as one of the most visible expressions of identity and ideology. Its continued existence of these deeply symbolic traditional clothes has to be maintained these days. To motivate interest in local culture, it is necessary to educate the public about the significance of these clothes. Furthermore, new generations can be inspired to value and conserve cultural heritage by digitising knowledge about traditional clothes and making it simpler to access through social media platforms or cultural exhibitions.

It was decided that this study would increase public awareness of the value of cultural preservation and inspire researchers to look into other aspects of Sumedang culture. Wedding clothing not only defines a person’s identity, but also serves as an image for understanding frequently family-based and society beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

The traditional ancestral wedding clothes worn by the Sumedang are not only beautiful to look at, but also hold significant cultural value. Every element of the outfit, which includes the accessories and crown, has a symbolic meaning that embodies Sumedang society’s values of balance, love, and

commitment. This study highlights the importance of maintaining these cultural values so that future generations may recognize, appreciate, and continue to preserve them. Sumedang's cultural legacy, which is rich in cultural heritage, depends on efforts to understand and preserve these traditional clothes. Therefore, it is important to raise public awareness and attention to protect these traditional values from being lost in the middle of globalization. The preservation of Sumedang's cultural legacy, which is rich in symbolic tradition, requires a conscious effort to understand and protect traditional wedding attire as a vital element of intangible heritage. In the face of rapid globalization, raising public awareness and promoting cultural literacy are essential steps to ensure that these traditional values are not lost. Therefore, collaborative efforts involving education, digital dissemination, and cultural promotion are necessary to maintain and revitalize the relevance of traditional attire within contemporary society.

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