



# The Power Dynamics of Sunda Wiwitan Traditional Leaders as Cultural Mediators in the Seren Taun Ceremony in Cigugur Village, Kuningan Regency

Irfan Khoerul Umam\*, Khaerudin Imawan, Novicky Alban Adiputra

Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati Cirebon

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\*Correspondence: Irfan Khoerul Umam

Email: [irfan.122100159@ugj.ac.id](mailto:irfan.122100159@ugj.ac.id)

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine the cultural meanings, communication practices, power dynamics, and the role of actor networks in the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village, Kuningan Regency. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that the cultural meanings of Seren Taun are conveyed through symbols, such as rice in the ngajayak procession, the Buyung Dance, Angklung Buncis, and the rice-pounding (nutu) ritual, which represent values of gratitude, social cohesion, balance in life, and the continuity of relationships between humans, nature, and the divine. Furthermore, the study reveals that traditional leaders play a central role as cultural communicators through verbal and nonverbal strategies. Verbal communication is expressed through traditional speeches that reinforce cultural values and authority, while nonverbal communication is reflected in exemplary actions and the involvement of the younger generation in ritual practices. From the perspective of power relations theory, the authority of traditional leaders operates symbolically and persuasively rather than coercively, enabling cultural values to be accepted and internalized by the community. In addition, Actor-Network Theory highlights that cultural meanings are produced through interactions between human actors such as traditional leaders and community members and non-human actors, including ritual symbols and artifacts. This interconnected network ensures the continuous reproduction and transmission of cultural values. Overall, the Seren Taun ceremony functions not only as a ritual tradition but also as a sustainable medium of cultural communication that maintains the identity and continuity of the Sunda Wiwitan community amid social change.

**Keywords:** Seren Taun, Cultural Communication, Power Relations, Actor-Network Theory, Sunda Wiwitan

## Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a rich cultural diversity, reflected in the presence of hundreds of ethnic groups, each with its own value systems, rituals, and symbols that serve as a guide for community life (Akhmad & Rini, 2020). This local wisdom, passed down from generation to generation, essentially serves to maintain a balanced relationship between humans and God, fellow humans, and the natural environment (Royyani, 2008). Over time, ongoing social transformations and changing value systems have led younger generations to become increasingly disconnected from their cultural heritage. This situation underscores the growing difficulty of maintaining traditional practices as a form of national identity.

One of the traditions influenced by these social transformations is the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village, Kuningan Regency. Seren Taun is a customary ritual of the Sunda Wiwitan community that centers on expressions of gratitude for agricultural yields and respect for nature, particularly the Rice Goddess, Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Asri. Originating from the period of the Pajajaran Kingdom, this tradition carries not only spiritual meaning but also embodies cultural symbols and messages that guide the way of life of the indigenous community (Amalia et al, 2022). Nevertheless, Alfina Damayanti (20), a representative of the younger generation in Cigugur Village, noted that youth participation in the ceremony has decreased over the past two years, both in the preparation stages and during the event itself. This decline indicates that the meanings and values embedded in the Seren Taun tradition are gradually becoming less understood by younger generations.

Traditional leaders within the Sunda Wiwitan community hold a significant role as guardians of cultural authority and key communicators in transmitting traditional values. Their responsibilities extend beyond leading rituals, as they community (Hasan Abdul Muh et al, 2022). Consequently, cultural communication in the Seren Taun ceremony involves not only the delivery of cultural messages, but also the ways in which the authority of these leaders is recognized, negotiated, and sustained within the community's social structure.

Earlier studies on the Seren Taun tradition, such as those conducted by Amalia (2022) and Wulandari et al, (2019), have primarily emphasized the preservation of traditions and the cultural meanings embedded in ritual practices. However, limited attention has been given to how the cultural authority of traditional leaders is exercised through communication strategies, as well as how these power relations shape the continuity of cultural understanding among younger generations. This gap is crucial to address, as cultural communication can function as a mechanism for reproducing symbolic power, especially within the context of increasingly modern and dynamic social environments.

This research is anticipated to offer a contribution to the field of cultural communication, especially in understanding how power relations shape the process of embedding cultural values within indigenous communities. In addition, the findings are expected to provide a reference for traditional leaders and related stakeholders in developing communication approaches that are more inclusive and adaptive to the needs of younger generations, so that cultural ceremonies.

Seren Taun remains can remain meaningful and continue to be sustained as an essential cultural identity of the Cigugur community. Therefore, this study is intended not only to explore the cultural messages embedded within the Seren Taun ceremony, but also to analyze how traditional leaders preserve their influence and position within the social structure of the Sunda Wiwitan community through processes of cultural communication. This study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how power relations are formed and exercised within local culture, as well as their impact on the involvement of the younger generation in the preservation of traditions.

Based on the above discussion, this study formulates three research questions: 1) What cultural messages do the traditional leaders of Sunda Wiwitan convey during the

Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village? 2) What communication strategies do the traditional leaders employ to convey cultural messages to the community? and 3) What is the power dynamic of the traditional leaders as cultural communicators during the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village, Kuningan Regency.

### **Traditional Leaders as Cultural Ambassadors**

Traditional leaders are figures within the community who are responsible for maintaining and safeguarding established customs and traditional norms. They are widely regarded as the main guardians of cultural heritage and often inherit this role through ancestral lineage. Traditional leaders serve as both leaders and advisors in various traditional and cultural activities within their communities (Rosnita et al, 2020).

In addition, traditional leaders play a role in preserving and maintaining traditions, as well as explaining the meaning of the symbols and noble values inherent in the community's customs (Hasan et al, 2022). The role of traditional leaders is not limited to performing rituals; they also serve as social mediators and guardians of balance within indigenous communities. They convey cultural messages, interpret the meaning of symbols, and bridge the teachings of ancestors with everyday practices. (Rohana & Ahmad, 2025).

In practice, communication by traditional leaders takes place through various media and ritual forms, such as traditional language, prayers, chants, traditional clothing, and symbolic objects used to convey meaning (Hermawan, 2013). The symbolic meaning of the Seren Taun ceremony represents the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the cycle of life. This ritual also serves as a medium of cultural communication that conveys the community's moral and spiritual values (Putri et al, 2024). Symbolic interactionism is a framework for understanding how people create a symbolic world together with others, and how that symbolic world, in turn, shapes human behavior (Imawan et al, 2025).

### **Seren Taun as a Cultural Phenomenon of Sunda Wiwitan**

Seren Taun is a traditional ceremony practiced by the Sunda Wiwitan community in Cigugur, Kuningan, West Java, which has been held since 1901. This ceremony goes beyond a mere performance, as it represents an expression of gratitude to the One True God conveyed through traditional symbols such as offerings, agricultural products, and customary attire. Each phase of the ritual illustrates the interconnected relationship between humans, nature, and the creator (Putri et al, 2024).

Seren Taun functions as a medium for transmitting local values that contain both moral and spiritual meanings. Within the context of cultural communication, the ceremony can be seen as a space of symbolic interaction, where meanings are exchanged between traditional leaders and the community. The people of Cigugur Village hold the Seren Taun ceremony every 22 Rayagung, the final month in the Sundanese calendar. The event is centered in Cigugur Village, particularly at Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal, the residence of Prince Djatikumah, which has existed since 1840. According to local history and tradition, Seren Taun has been carried out from generation to generation since the time of the Pajajaran Kingdom, and originated as a tribute to Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Asri, the Goddess of Rice in ancient Sundanese belief (Amalia et al, 2022). The Seren Taun ceremony consists

of a series of events that are not only performed by traditional leaders but also involve the younger generation from the surrounding community.

The Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur, Kuningan, consists of several processions rich in symbolic and spiritual meaning. The series begins with Damar Sewu, the lighting of a thousand lanterns as a symbol of the illumination of the soul and an opening prayer. Next, the Pesta Dadung features the Rajah Siliwangi prayer, the Budak Angon dance, and nature conservation activities such as tree planting and the “kentongan sewu” (thousand gongs) as a symbol of unity. As the event reaches its climax, the Malam Kidung Spiritual is held, where the community sings hymns and offers prayers at the Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal. The ceremony’s climax falls on the 22nd of Rayagung, marked by the Jamparing Apsasi dance, the Angklung Buncis, and the Buyung dance, followed by an offering of agricultural produce, the recitation of the Rajah Pwahaci, the rice-pounding procession (tumbu padi or nutu), and a folk festival as an expression of gratitude, unity, and harmony among humanity, nature, and the Creator (Amalia et al, 2022).

The participation of younger generations in the Seren Taun ceremony is essential for sustaining traditions and reinforcing the cultural identity of the Cigugur community. They are encouraged to take an active role in various aspects of the event, including preparation activities, performing tradisional arts, and promoting the ceremony through digital platforms (Halimah & Guntara, 2017).

### **Cultural Communication**

Cultural communication is the process by which messages, values, and meanings rooted in a particular cultural system are conveyed by people in social interactions. According to Samovar et al. (2010), Cultural communication is a form of interaction influenced by the belief systems, norms, values, and customs that have developed within a society. This communication is not only verbal but also encompasses nonverbal language such as rituals, symbols, and social practices that constitute the cultural identity of that group. Furthermore, cultural communication serves as a means of establishing and maintaining relationships between groups within society. According to Liliweri (2017) The primary functions of cultural communication are to maintain social cohesion, pass on values and norms, and reinforce a sense of identity within a society. These functions are increasingly evident through the use of cultural symbols, which serve as one of the mediums of cultural communication.

In the context of cultural communication, symbols are often used as a means of communication. According to Geertz (2017) Symbols serve as a means of conveying meaning, whereby every action, language, and ritual reflects a meaning that is understood and agreed upon by society. Through symbols, cultural meaning can be shaped, interpreted, and passed down from one generation to the next. According to Hall & Lenguaje (1997) The process of cultural transmission takes place through communication, via socialization, rituals, ceremonies, and practices that are passed down both orally and symbolically.

## Power Relations in Cultural Communication

According to Michel Foucault (2007) In explaining that power relations are an inherent part of every human relationship, he asserts that wherever there is a human relationship, an element of power is always present within it. Power is everywhere because it arises from the interaction of various forces, and its existence does not depend on individual consciousness. Foucault views power as a strategy that operates through systems, rules, and structures within society. Power does not come from the outside, but is born from within human relationships, which shape and regulate social life.

According to Foucault in (Arifudin, 2019) explains that power in real life can manifest in two forms. First, through violence and repressive actions that compel obedience through physical threats. Second, through subtle and hidden means, such as the influence of science and educational institutions. In the context of cultural communication, power is present through language, symbols, and rituals that determine who has the right to convey meaning. Traditional leaders serve as the focal point for the distribution of meaning because they possess cultural knowledge and enjoy social recognition from the community.

Power dynamics in the communication carried out by traditional leaders demonstrate that every cultural message contains values and a hierarchy of authority within it. Berker (2004) explains that communication serves as an arena for the negotiation of meaning where power operates symbolically. In this context, traditional leaders function not only as conveyors of messages but also as custodians of a system of meaning that upholds their social position. Within symbolic the use of language and symbols embedded in traditional practices. Language operates both as a means of social validation and as a channel of influence that reflects existing power relations (Kustyarini, 2016). In this way, power works in a subtle manner through the language and meanings articulated by traditional leaders to affirm their authority and sustain harmony within the indigenous community.

The power structure within the Seren Taun ceremony positions traditional leaders especially the chief as central figures responsible for safeguarding the ritual process and its symbolic elements. Through their knowledge, customary, practices, and process roles, they guide each stage of the ceremony, ensuring that their authority continues to be acknowledged by the community. This influence extends beyond ritual activities into everyday social life, where traditional leaders are regarded as intermediaries connecting the community with ancestral teaching. This dynamic reinforces their status and sustains their strong position within the Seren Taun traditional system (Anjany et al, 2021).

Power relations within the Seren Taun ceremony of the Sunda Wiwitan community are reflected in its hierarchical structure, where traditional or spiritual leaders occupy the highest level of authority. These figures guide the progression of the ritual, interpret the meanings of ceremonial symbols, and act as the main reference in shaping cultural values. Beneath them are the organizing committees and traditional groups, including community elders and members, who are tasked with preparing offerings, arranging the procession, and ensuring that each stage follows customary regulations. Meanwhile, the broader community participates by attending and engaging in the ceremony, thereby reinforcing its

meaning. This layered structure illustrates that power within Seren Taun is exercised symbolically, with traditional leaders maintaining a central role as custodians of cultural and spiritual values. (Kurniasih et al, 2022).

Hegemonic power within the Seren Taun is not solely vertical, but also fluid, operating in both top-down and bottom-up directions. In a top-down dynamic, traditional leaders employ symbols, rituals, and customary language as tools to assert cultural influence, thereby establishing moral and social legitimacy for their authority. Through these traditional values, they shape the community's social and cultural orientations, illustrating how hegemony is sustained within the structure of customary leadership (Fadrullah & Syam, 2024). On the other hand, a bottom-up process emerges when community members actively reinterpret the symbolic meanings of the ceremony through their participation, reinterpretation of local values, and everyday social interactions. In this process, communities express their identities through rituals as a form of negotiation with existing power structures (Makhsun, 2021).

Power relations among traditional leaders in the Seren Taun ceremony are intentional, symbolic, and continuously maintained. Their authority is expressed through the structuring of the procession, the use of ritual symbols, and the transmission of traditional knowledge to the community as a way to sustain cultural continuity. This authority is further strengthened by ancestral legitimacy and kinship connections, which help preserve the respect and recognition attached to their roles (Ramadhan & Yusuf, 2025). Therefore, power relations in Seren Taun should not be seen as a static traditional structure, but rather as an ongoing process that is constantly negotiated and renewed to support the continuity of Sunda Wiwitan culture.

Meanwhile, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) proposed by Latour (1996) provides an alternative lens for understanding social and cultural relationships. Latour argues that within social systems, not only humans act as agents, but also non-human elements-such as artifacts, symbols, and traditional musical instruments are not merely passive items, but are integral components of a communicative system that actively constructs cultural meaning.

Building on this perspective, Latour (2005) highlights that every element within a social network-both both human and non-human holds an essential role in shaping and sustaining cultural systems. Actors are not isolated entities, but are interconnected within a complex and dynamic process of meaning production. In the Seren Taun ceremony, the interaction between traditional leaders, the community, and cultural symbols such as offerings and traditional attire reflects a living and active network. Through these interconnected relations, culture is not simply inherited, but continuously produced and redefined through the ongoing interaction of multiple actors in social life.

The link between power relations theory and actor theory can be seen in their common perspective that power emerges from dynamic social interactions. Foucault (1980) argues that power is not concentrated in a single individual, but is instead distributed across discourse, symbols, and various forms of communicative practices. Meanwhile, Latour (2005) Actor-Network Theory explains that power emerges from the reciprocal relationships between people and cultural elements that influence one another within social networks.

The combination of these two concepts allows this study to examine not only the positions of power held by traditional leaders, but also how cultural symbols play a role in shaping communication and social relations within the community.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Soegiyono (2011), Qualitative research methods are used to study subjects in their natural settings, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument. This approach aims to holistically understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects—such as behavior, perceptions, and actions—and presents these findings in the form of in-depth narrative descriptions.

A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, as this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural messages conveyed by Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders, the communication strategies they use to deliver these messages to the community, and the power dynamics that arise between traditional leaders and the community within the context of the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village, Kuningan Regency.

This approach allows researchers to explore cultural communication processes not only through spoken messages, but also by examining the symbols, actions, and social practices that take place within traditional ceremonies. Thus, this study is expected to reveal the meanings, strategies, and dynamics of symbolic power exercised by Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders as cultural communicators in preserving local traditional values.

In this study, the researcher first identified the research subjects and objects to clarify the direction of data collection and the focus of the study. The research subjects consisted of Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders as cultural communicators, representatives of the Cigugur Village government, and representatives of the younger generation who participated in the Seren Taun ceremony. Meanwhile, the research object focused on the process of cultural communication carried out by Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders during the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village, Kuningan Regency, which included cultural messages, communication strategies, and power relations between traditional leaders and the community. In line with Moleong's view in (Nur, 2024), who argue that qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of the social phenomena experienced by research subjects in a holistic and contextual manner.

The data collection techniques in this study employed three main methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders, village heads, and representatives of the younger generation using a structured interview guide to explore their understanding of cultural messages, communication strategies, and the power dynamics of traditional leaders during the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village. Participant observation was used to directly observe the social interactions and cultural activities of the Sunda Wiwitan community, while documentation was used to collect secondary data in the form of archives, photographs, and records of relevant activities. These three techniques complemented one another and were used repeatedly until the data was considered saturated, as explained by Soegiyono (2011) that qualitative data collection is conducted in

a natural and in-depth manner to understand the meaning behind the phenomena under study.

Once the data were gathered through interviews, observations, and documentation, the next stage involved analyzing them to uncover the meanings contained within the field findings. The analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, as outlined in Sugiyono (2013), which consists of three key steps : data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction phase, the researcher filters and concentrates on information related to cultural messages, communication strategies, and the power relations of Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders within the Seren Taun ceremony. The interpretation process is guided by Michel Foucault's theory of power relations and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory to examine the dynamics of symbolic power and the interactions among actors in cultural communication. The analyzed data are then presented as descriptive narrative form, followed by conclusion drawing and verification to ensure credibility of the research findings.

## Result and Discussion

The Seren Taun ceremony is a longstanding tradition of the Sundanese community that dates back to the era of the Pajajaran Kingdom and has been continuously passed down through generations. It is performed as an expression of gratitude to God for the harvest, as well as a form of respect toward nature as the source of life (Amalia et al, 2022). In Cigugur Village, Seren Taun functions not only as a customary ritual, but also as a medium of cultural communication through which values of life, social unity, and harmony between humans, nature, and the creator are conveyed.

The Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur, Kuningan, consists of several processions rich in symbolic and spiritual meaning. The series begins with Damar Sewu, the lighting of a thousand lanterns as a symbol of the illumination of the soul and an opening prayer. Next, the Pesta Dadung features the Rajah Siliwangi prayer, the Budak Angon dance, and environmental conservation activities such as tree planting and the striking of a thousand gongs as a symbol of unity. As the event reaches its climax, the Malam Kidung Spiritual is held, during which the community sings hymns and offers prayers at the Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal. The ceremony's climax falls on the 22nd of Rayagung, beginning with a welcome address by a Sunda Wiwitan traditional leader, followed by the Jamparing Apsasi dance, the Angklung Buncis performance, and the Buyung dance. After that, the traditional ceremony continued with the offering of agricultural produce or ngajayak, the recitation of the Rajah Pwahaci, the rice pounding procession or nutu, and a community feast as an expression of gratitude, unity, and harmony between humanity, nature, and the Creator (Amalia et al, 2022).

Based on the above description, this study aims to identify and analyze the cultural messages contained in various elements of the Seren Taun ceremony, specifically the harvest offering procession (ngajayak), the Buyung dance, the angklung buncis performance, and the rice pounding procession (nutu), and further, the power relations of Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders as cultural communicators in the Seren Taun ceremony. Data collection in this study was conducted through participant observation, in-depth

interviews, and documentation. Subsequently, the data obtained were analyzed using the perspectives of power relations theory and actor-network theory to understand the interrelationship between the role of humans as primary actors and the role of non-human entities as supporting actors in shaping cultural messages within the Seren Taun ceremony.

### The Cultural Message in the Seren Taun Ceremony

The first element discussed in relation to this study is the cultural message conveyed in the Seren Taun ceremony. Based on field observations, the cultural messages in the Seren Taun ceremony are conveyed through various cultural symbols present in the traditional procession. This nonverbal communication takes the form of harvest offerings or *ngajayak*, consisting of rice, fruits, and vegetables, followed by dances such as the *Jamparing Apsasi*, *Angklung Buncis*, and *Buyung* dances, after which the traditional rice-pounding ceremony or *nutu* is performed. The four prominent symbols with strong meanings are rice, the *Buyung* dance, the *Angklung Buncis*, and the rice pounding ceremony (*nutu*). These four symbols serve as a medium of nonverbal communication that conveys the values of gratitude, life balance, and social solidarity to the community.



**Figure 1.** The *Ngajayak* Procession at the Seren Taun Ceremony @serentaun June 19, 2025  
Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLExSNnOSTK/?igsh=MXy5OTVvaGR4M2drbg==>

The primary cultural symbol that dominates the Seren Taun ceremony is the harvest procession, or *ngajayak*. The *ngajayak* procession is a ceremony in which the harvest is carried, beginning with the gathering of the harvest at a villager's home as a meeting point; then, during the procession, the harvest is taken and carried by the *ngajayak* group. In this procession, rice is the central element of the Seren Taun ceremony, as seen in Figure 1, which shows rice placed at the very front of the harvest procession or *ngajayak* group, followed by the harvest of fruits and vegetables.

As shown in Figure 1, the prominence of rice in the procession's arrangement indicates that non-human actors play a more prominent role than human actors in shaping the ritual's meaning. From the perspective of actor-network theory, the harvest—particularly rice—functions as a non-human actor that symbolically directs the course of the procession and the community's collective interpretation of the values of gratitude, the continuity of life, and the harmony of relationships between humans, nature, and God, while human actors serve as intermediaries who enact the system of meaning constructed through these symbols. Although Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders are not directly

engaged in the *ngajayak* procession, their presence still forms an essential part of the meaning-making framework surrounding the event. The positioning of rice at the forefront of the procession, along with the ordered arrangement of other harvest products, is not incidental, but reflects a structured system of traditional values that is preserved and directed through the authority of the traditional leaders.

The symbols of rice and the harvest in the *Seren Taun* ceremony are not only interpreted as an expression of gratitude for the blessings of life, but also as a medium of cultural communication that conveys a message of life's continuity to the community. This message is conveyed through a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication, one of which is through the harvest offering procession, or *ngajayak*. In this procession, the harvest is first gathered at residents' homes as a starting point, then paraded together by the community in a formation that holds symbolic meaning. The front row is filled by the younger generation as a representation of the future, followed by a row of women carrying hopes and prayers for the continuity of the generations, and a row of men at the back as a symbol of the guardians and protectors of the family. The arrangement of the procession reflects the values of togetherness, intergenerational responsibility, and the continuity of social life in the *Cigugur* community (Putri,2025).



**Figure 2.** The Buyung Dance in the Seren Taun Ceremony @serentaun 19 Juni 2025

Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLExSNnOSTK/?igsh=MXy5OTVvaGR4M2drbg==>

In addition to the harvest offering procession, or *ngajayak*, the cultural message of the *Seren Taun* ceremony is also conveyed through performing arts, one of which is the Buyung Dance. This dance is performed by female dancers wearing shawls and carrying a buyung, or water jar, as the main prop, as shown in Figure 2, with the buyung placed on their heads and carefully balanced to prevent it from falling throughout the dance. From the perspective of actor-network theory, the buyung and the water act as non-human agents that significantly shape the meaning of the dance, as their presence influence the dancers' movements, posture, and concentration. In this setting, human actors adjust to the symbolic requirements imposed by these non-human elements, allowing cultural messages related to balance in life, self-discipline, and carefulness to be expressed through the interaction between the dancers' bodies and the ritual objects involved.

Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders are not directly involved in performing the Buyung dance however, their influence remains essential in defining its meaning. While the buyung and water, as non-human actors, regulate the dancers' movements and sense of balance, the interpretation of these symbol particularly those related to life balance and self

control is grounded in the system of traditional values maintained by the leaders. Therefore, the meaning of the Buyung Dance emerges from the interaction between the dancers' bodies, the ritual objects, and the broader framework of traditional values within the overall sequence of the Seren Taun ceremony.

The Buyung Dance is understood as a medium for conveying life lessons rich in symbolic meaning. This dance represents the harmony of life and humanity's role in maintaining the balance of nature and social life. The buyung—or water jar—carried on the dancer's head is interpreted as a symbol of the source of life, given that water plays a vital role in agriculture and the survival of communities. Furthermore, the way the dancer carries the buyung without holding it with their hands teaches the values of self-control, caution, and a patient and calm attitude in navigating life to ensure that life's balance is maintained. The role of female dancers in the Buyung Dance is also interpreted as a symbol of fertility and the continuity of tradition, underscoring the importance of women's role in preserving the continuity of the community's cultural values (Putri, 2025).



**Figure 3.** The Buncis Angklung Dance at the Seren Taun Ceremony @serentaun June 19, 2025  
Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLExSNnOSTK/?igsh=MXy5OTVvaGR4M2drbg==>

In addition to the Buyung Dance, the cultural messages in the Seren Taun ceremony are also represented through the symbols embodied in the Angklung Buncis Dance performance. This dance is an artistic performance that combines dance movements with the accompaniment of the traditional angklung musical instrument, as seen in Figure 3, which depicts a group of male dancers performing while playing the angklung buncis as the central element of the performance. From the standpoint of actor-network theory, the angklung buncis operates as a key non-human actor, as it regulates the rhythm, movement, and coordination of the dancers. Its role extends beyond that of a musical instrument, as it also shapes patterns of social interaction and collective harmony within the performance, prompting human actors to align their movements and roles with the rhythm it produces. Consequently, cultural messages related to cooperation and gratitude are expressed through the relational network between the dancers and the angklung buncis as the central symbolic element.

Traditional Sunda Wiwitan leaders are not directly involved in the Buncis Angklung Dance performance, yet their presence remains an integral part of the underlying framework of meaning surrounding the dance. While the angklung, as a non-human

“actor,” does indeed set the rhythm and coordinate the dancers’ movements, the values of community and gratitude embodied in the performance are rooted in a traditional framework upheld by these leaders.

The Angklung Buncis Dance is a performance that has evolved since the 1970s, featuring the angklung buncis as its main musical accompaniment. It portrays the lively, energetic, and cheerful character of youth, while also symbolizing values such as optimism, cooperation, and social harmony. Additionally, the Angklung Buncis Dance is interpreted as a symbol of gratitude for the harvest and a plea for divine protection. This meaning also reflects the harmony between humans and nature, as well as efforts to preserve the continuity of tradition through dance movements performed with deep devotion as a form of surrender to God. Thus, the cultural message conveyed in the Buncis Angklung Dance encompasses the values of gratitude, togetherness, and living in harmony with nature (Putri, 2025).



**Figure 4.** The Rice-Pounding Ceremony at the Seren Taun Festival @Serentauncigugur June 19, 2025

Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLExSNnOSTK/?igsh=MX5OTVvaGR4M2drbg==>

In addition to the harvest procession (ngajayak) and dance performances, a key part of the Seren Taun ceremony is the rice-pounding procession (nutu). This procession is a sacred ritual that begins with the arrival of the harvest, followed by a traditional welcome and the presentation of the alu—the primary tool for pounding rice—and then proceeds with the rice-pounding activity, which is first performed by traditional leaders of the Sunda Wiwitan community and subsequently carried out collectively by the community, as shown in Figure 4.

From the perspective of Actor-Network Theory, the nutu ceremony reveals a more direct relationship between traditional leaders and non-human actors—namely, rice, the pestle, and the mortar. In contrast to other processions, traditional leaders are directly involved in initiating the rice pounding activity, making the interaction between traditional authority and ritual symbols visible through concrete actions. Rice and the pounding instruments function not structure of collective participation. At the same time, the direct engagement of the ritual. As a result, cultural messages related to corporation, respect for process, and the continuity of life are produced through the dynamic network of

relationships between traditional leaders, ritual elements, and the community within these cultural practices.

The rice pounding (nutu) procession in the Seren Taun ceremony is understood as a form of cultural education that encourages the community to recognize and appreciate the process through which rice is produced as a vital food source. This procession is perceived not only as a customary ritual, but also as a medium for learning about the values of process, patience, and cooperation in everyday life. The rice pounding activity conveys a message of gratitude for the harvest while symbolizing prosperity and the continuity of life. During the ceremony, a specific amount of prepared ranggeuyan rice is set aside, though not all of it is pounded. Some of the rice is pounded together in the lisung hut as a symbol of unity and cooperation, while the rest is set aside as seed for the next planting season (Putri, 2025).

The amount of rice was determined based on the timing of the peak of the Seren Taun festival, which falls on the 22nd of Rayagung according to the traditional calendar and also marks the last month of the Sundanese calendar (Kuningan, 2018). Thus reflecting order, continuity, and harmony in the relationship between humanity, nature, and God (Putri, 2025).

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the cultural messages conveyed in the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village are communicated through a symbolic network involving close relationships between human and non-human actors. The ngajayak procession, the Buyung Dance, the Angklung Buncis Dance, and the rice pounding (nutu) procession demonstrate that non-human elements such as rice, buyung, angklung, pestles, and mortars do not merely serve as ritual accessories but actively shape the progression of the procession, guide human actions, and jointly construct cultural meaning. From the perspective of actor-network theory, this cultural meaning arises from the interconnectedness between ritual symbols and the authority of traditional figures as guardians and validators of traditional values. In the ngajayak procession, the Buyung Dance, and the Angklung Buncis Dance, although traditional figures are not physically involved, their authority remains the framework reinforcing symbolic meaning. Meanwhile, in the nutu procession, the direct involvement of traditional figures demonstrates a more active relationship between traditional authority and non-human actors in shaping messages of mutual cooperation and the sustainability of life. It is this network of relationships that ensures the values of gratitude, togetherness, life balance, and the sustainability of the relationship between humans, nature, and God continue to be reproduced and passed down to the community, particularly the younger generation, as part of the Sunda Wiwitan cultural identity.

### **Power Relations Among Sunda Wiwitan Traditional Leaders as Cultural Communicators**

Traditional leaders are community leaders who play a role in preserving and maintaining traditional values and culture that have been passed down through generations (Rosnita et al, 2020). In addition to performing rituals, traditional leaders serve as cultural communicators who explain the meaning of symbols, convey noble values, and bridge the teachings of the ancestors with the lives of the community (Hasan et al, 2022). This process

of cultural communication occurs through a range of symbolic forms and traditional rituals, which in turn shape the community's understanding of the meaning behind the Seren Taun ceremony (Putri et al, 2024). Thus, this study aims to identify and analyze the strategies employed by Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders as cultural communicators during the Seren Taun ceremony, both verbally and nonverbally.

The second element discussed in relation to this study is the power dynamics of Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders as cultural communicators in the Seren Taun ceremony. Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders were seen playing a central role throughout the entire series of Seren Taun ceremonies in Cigugur Village. These traditional leaders are present from the opening procession through to the climax of the event, such as during the opening remarks and the rice pounding (nutu) procession. The role of these traditional leaders is also crucial in engaging the younger generation in the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village.



**Figure 5.** Remarks at the Seren Taun Ceremony @serentauncigugur June 19, 2025

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLExSNnOSTK/?igsh=MXy5OTVvaGR4M2drbg==>

The power dynamics of Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders as cultural communicators are evident in their addresses during the Seren Taun ceremony. These leaders utilize verbal communication by delivering traditional speeches to the community, as illustrated in figure 5. The speeches take place at the peak of the ceremony, after the initial stages have been completed, when community members, invited guests, and government representatives are all present. At this point, the traditional leader assumes the role of a spiritual authority as well as a representative of customary leadership, holding the responsibility to communicate cultural messages to the audience. The communication is carried out in a formal manner through direct verbal expression within the ritual setting.

From the perspective of power relations theory, the traditional welcoming speech functions as a medium for generating and strengthening cultural meaning, where traditional leaders occupying the highest positions within the customary social hierarchy hold symbolic legitimacy to define the values and interpretations of the ceremony. The form of power exercised is persuasive and symbolic, allowing cultural messages to be accepted willingly by the community. Through this address, traditional leaders reaffirm their authority as spiritual figures and custodians of ancestral values, while directing the community's shared understanding of the significance of the Seren Taun ceremony.

The Seren Taun ceremony is a heritage passed down from the ancestors that serves not only as a traditional ritual, but also carries essential life values that need to be consistently maintained and preserved. The continuity of this tradition depends on the involvement of the younger generation as cultural heirs; therefore, an understanding of the cultural significance and messages of Seren Taun must be instilled from an early age. Through the traditional addresses and advice delivered during the ceremony, traditional leaders play a role in reminding the community of the importance of preserving cultural identity, strengthening a sense of togetherness, and maintaining the balance of the relationship between humans, nature, and God so that the Seren Taun tradition remains alive amidst the changing times (Putri, 2025). The delivery of cultural messages is carried out directly by traditional leaders through traditional speeches, which serve as a medium for reaffirming traditional values and strengthening the community's understanding of the ceremony's meaning (Damayanti, 2025).



**Figure 6.** The Rice-Pounding Ceremony at the Seren Taun Festival @serentaun June 19, 2025  
Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLExSNnOSTK/?igsh=MXy5OTVvaGR4M2drbg==>

In addition to verbal communication strategies, the power dynamics among Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders are also maintained through nonverbal communication strategies. Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders personally lead the rice-pounding (nutu) procession, as shown in Figure 6. At this moment, the traditional leaders act as ritual leaders who personally initiate the rice-pounding process before the community follows suit. The form of communication used is not through words, but rather nonverbal communication in the form of symbolic actions and exemplary behavior in ritual practice.

From the perspective of power relations theory, the act of initiating the nutu represents symbolic power exercised through concrete examples. The authority of traditional leaders is not demonstrated through coercion, but through practices that serve as a reference for collective behavior. Their structural position as traditional leaders lend legitimacy to their actions, so that the community spontaneously follows the rhythm and patterns. These patterns demonstrate how power operates persuasively and productively in shaping collective participation.

The rice-pounding ceremony (nutu) is understood as a form of nonverbal communication strategy carried out directly through symbolic actions. In this ceremony, traditional leaders first begin the rice-pounding activity, followed by the collective

participation of the community. This pattern represents the authority of traditional leaders exercised in a persuasive and symbolic manner, where the structural position of traditional leaders as spiritual leaders serves as a reference for community behavior. Through this practice, the values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and respect for the process are instilled in the community through direct experience in the Seren Taun ritual (Putri, 2025)

Traditional leaders are not merely present in a symbolic capacity; they are also directly involved in the rice-pounding ceremony by demonstrating how it is performed. This direct involvement is understood as a form conveying cultural messages through example, enabling the younger generation to learn and comprehend the meaning of the ritual not only through verbal explanations but also through active participation in the Seren Taun ceremony (Damayanti, 2025).



**Figure 7.** Youth Participation in the Seren Taun Ceremony @Serentauncigugur June 19, 2025  
Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLExSNnOSTK/?igsh=MXy5OTVvaGR4M2drbg==>

Furthermore, Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders play a significant role in involving the younger generation as part of the cultural communication strategy within the Seren Taun ceremony. Young people actively participate in various stages of the ritual, as illustrated in Figure 7, which highlights their engagement in the ceremonial process. In this context, traditional leaders act as cultural mentors and guides who entrust the younger generation with responsibilities in carrying out the rituals. The communication employed extends beyond verbal forms such as guidance and advice to include nonverbal communication through the direct allocation of roles in ceremonial practices.

From the perspective of power relations theory, the participation of younger generation indicates that the authority of traditional leaders is exercised in a productive rather than restrictive way. Power is not simply viewed as a form of control, but capacity to organize the distribution of roles and influence social participation. By creating opportunities for involvement, traditional leaders symbolically distribute their authority, thereby creating a mechanism for the transmission of values through direct participation in ritual structures.

The participation of younger generations in the Seren Taun ceremony is regarded as an important strategy for maintaining the continuity of cultural meanings and values. Traditional leaders intentionally engage not only older members of the community but also children and youth in various ceremonial activities, including traditional games (kaulanan

barudak), ngajayak, and dance performances. Beyond their direct involvement, younger participants are also given guidance and stage of the procession, both during rehearsals and the ceremony itself. These efforts aim to ensure that the transmission of cultural values continues across generations, allowing the Seren Taun tradition to remain understood and practiced by future generations (Putri, 2025).

Traditional leaders have given trust to the younger generation to take an active role in the Seren Taun ceremony, even though some are still relatively new to the process. This trust goes beyond a symbolic gesture, reflecting the openness of traditional leaders in fostering youth participation as part of the transmission of cultural values. Moreover, traditional leaders demonstrate a positive outlook toward the growing involvement of younger generations, viewing it as an essential effort to sustain the continuity of traditions and strengthen the cultural identity of the Cigugur community (Damayanti, 2025).

The communication strategies of Sunda Wiwitan traditional leaders in the Seren Taun ceremony are enacted through forms of power relations that are symbolic, persuasive, and productive. These dynamics are evident in their cultural authority as well as nonverbal communication, including leading by example in the rice pounding procession and involving younger generations directly in various ritual stages. The structural position of traditional leaders as spiritual figures and custodians of ancestral values grants them strong symbolic legitimacy, allowing cultural messages to be accepted and understood by the community without coercion. In addition, the participation of younger generations reflects how this authority operates as a mechanism for transmitting values across generations, where trust and opportunities for involvement become key means of reproducing cultural meaning. This, the communication strategies of traditional leaders in the Seren Taun ceremony serve not only to convey cultural messages but also as an effort to maintain traditional authority and ensure the continuity of traditions and the cultural identity of the Sunda Wiwitan community in Cigugur Village.

### **The Dominance of Traditional Leaders and Binary Opposition in the Seren Taun Ceremony**

The dominance of traditional leaders in the Seren Taun ceremony can be examined through the lens of power relations theory, which views power as operating through positions, roles, and social practices within a structured society. In the context, traditional leaders assume the role of spiritual authorities who possess the capacity to define the meaning of symbols, regulate the sequence of the procession, and guide the transmission of cultural values. These roles give rise to binary oppositions such as leading-following, directing-being directed, and interpreting- being interpreted, such oppositions reflect differentiated positions within the cultural structure, where one group holds a dominant role while the other occupies a subordinate position. In this case, traditional leaders take a more dominant role in shaping meaning, while community participates by carrying out and adhering to the established ritual framework (Syafiuddin, 2018).

This dynamic of power is expressed not only through direct instructions but also through symbolic forms that operate within discourse and ritual arrangements. In the context of traditional ceremonies, traditional leaders become the central figures in conveying cultural messages, while the community takes on the role of recipients and interpreters of meaning. This structure highlights that the authority of traditional leaders is not coercive, but rather productive, as it shapes the way symbols and cultural values are understood and internalized by the community through ritual practices (Heriyawati, 2012).

The participation of external stakeholders, such as the Department of Culture, the Department of Education, and the Regent of Kuningan, also reflects wider power dynamics in the implementation of the Seren Taun ceremony (Sumardiyono, 2025). The involvement of these government institutions illustrates the interaction between traditional authority and formal governance structures, which together reinforce the social legitimacy of the tradition's continuity. From a power relations perspective, this condition suggests that power is not concentrated in particular individuals, but is distributed across a network of interconnected and mutually influential social relations (Heriyawati, 2012).

## Conclusion

Based on the findings the Seren Taun ceremony in Cigugur Village can be understood as a significant medium of cultural communication that conveys rich symbolic meanings reflecting the core values of the Sunda Wiwitan community, such as gratitude, life balance, togetherness, and harmony between humans, nature, and the divine. These values are expressed through a network of interactions between human and non-human actors such as traditional leaders, the community, ritual symbols, and ceremonial practices highlighting the relevance of ActorNetwork Theory in explaining how cultural meaning is continuously constructed and sustained. The study also reveals that traditional leaders play a central role as cultural communicators through both verbal and nonverbal strategies, operating within symbolic and persuasive power relations that are productive rather than coercive, particularly through role modeling and the active involvement of younger generations. The implication of these findings emphasizes the importance of maintaining inclusive and adaptive cultural communication strategies to ensure the continuity of tradition in the face of social change. Therefore, future research is recommended to further examine how younger generations interpret and negotiate cultural meanings in contemporary contexts, especially through digital media and everyday practices, while also exploring alternative theoretical approaches such as reception theory, cultural memory, and mediatization to better understand the transformation and sustainability of cultural values in modern society.

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