

JATI KASILIH KU JANTI IN THE SEREN TAHUN CEREMONY: RITUAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL MEANING

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Abstract. Abstract. This study examines how the Sundanese philosophical principle *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* is manifested and communicated through the *Seren Tahun* ceremony at Kampung Budaya Lembur Anyar, Bogor Regency. The research aims to: (1) describe the communicative architecture of the ceremony using the SPEAKING framework; (2) analyze how the philosophy is encoded in ritual speech genres and semiotic object systems; and (3) construct a Ritual Communication Model grounded in the ceremony findings. A qualitative design integrating ethnography of communication and semiotic analysis was employed, with data from observational fieldwork across three consecutive ceremony cycles (2022–2024), in-depth interviews with 19 informants, and semiotic analysis of 28 ritual symbols. Six ritual speech genres and four categories of symbolic objects were identified as primary philosophical encoding mechanisms. The proposed Ritual Communication Model (RCM-JKJ) integrates textual, symbolic, performative, and witness communication layers within a condensation-iteration-differentiated reception dynamic. This model contributes a locally grounded theoretical framework to ritual communication scholarship and advances the de-Westernization of organizational communication theory in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Seren Tahun*; ritual communication; *Jati Kasilih ku Janti*; semiotic analysis; Sundanese cultural heritage

I. INTRODUCTION

Ritual constitutes one of the most ancient and persistent forms of organizational communication in human society. In contemporary communication scholarship, ritual has been progressively recognized not merely as a cultural curiosity but as a communication system with genuine organizational governance capacity: a means through which communities construct legitimacy, transmit values, manage transitions, and sustain identity continuity [1]–[3].

The *Seren Tahun* ceremony at Kampung Budaya Lembur Anyar in Bogor Regency presents an exceptionally rich case for investigating ritual as organizational communication. *Seren Tahun* literally meaning a year dedicated in offering is an annual Sundanese agrarian harvest thanksgiving ritual. At Lembur Anyar, the ceremony has been preserved through a community-driven cultural governance initiative, maintaining a complete three-day ceremonial structure whose seventeen ritual sequences constitute a multidimensional communication event of remarkable philosophical depth.

Central to these philosophical commitments is the Sundanese principle of *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* the principle that the established (*jati*) will naturally, gracefully, and purposefully yield to the new (*janti*), carrying within it obligations of transmission, preparation, and endorsement that define the moral architecture of intergenerational relationship. This principle finds rich multi-modal expression in the *Seren*

Tahun ceremony: in the structured succession of ceremonial roles across generational lines, in the symbolic objects transferred between elder and successor participants, in the formal speech genres that explicitly invoke the principle, and in the spatial choreography of processions and ritual arrangements.

Despite growing scholarly attention to the *Seren Tahun* ceremony from ecological [4], performing arts [5], and social cohesion [6] perspectives, the ceremony has received limited systematic analysis as a communication phenomenon. This analytical gap is significant because it leaves unexamined the communicative architecture through which the ceremony accomplishes its most important organizational function: the transmission of philosophical values that sustain community identity and governance continuity across generational transitions.

This study addresses three research questions: (1) How is the communicative architecture of the *Seren Tahun* ceremony at Lembur Anyar organized as an organizational communication event? (2) Through which specific ritual speech genres and semiotic symbol systems is the *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* philosophy encoded and transmitted? (3) What theoretical model of ritual communication can be constructed from these empirical findings?

Three theoretical traditions inform this study. First, ethnography of communication [7], [8] provides the primary methodological and analytical framework. The SPEAKING model Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequences, Keys, Instrumentalities, Norms, Genre enables comprehensive mapping of the ceremony as a communicative event. Bauman and Briggs [9] extend this framework by attending to the intertextual dimensions of communicative genres: how ritual speech genres carry sediments of prior communicative occasions, deriving their authority from their embeddedness in a tradition of previous enactments.

Second, semiotic theory in the traditions of Peirce [10] and Barthes [11] provides tools for systematic analysis of the non-verbal communicative dimensions of the ceremony. Peirce's triadic sign model icon, index, symbol enables differentiated analysis of how ritual objects communicate. Barthes' two-order signification model distinguishes denotative meanings from connotative and mythological meanings, revealing how objects naturalize culturally specific values as universal or cosmic truths.

Third, performativity theory [12]–[14] provides conceptual resources for understanding the constitutive rather than merely expressive character of ritual communication. Austin's speech act theory demonstrates that ritual utterances oaths, blessings, declarations, invocations do not describe social reality but actively produce it. Conquergood's dialogic performance theory extends this to the embodied, relational, and politically consequential dimensions of ritual.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research Design

A qualitative research design integrating ethnography of communication [7] as the primary methodology with ritual analysis [15], [2] and semiotic analysis [10], [11] as complementary analytical instruments was employed. The three-methodology integration was selected because the research object the communicative architecture of a ceremony requires simultaneous analysis of its verbal, material, spatial, and embodied dimensions. Community authorization was obtained from Lembur Anyar governance leadership prior to fieldwork commencement, and informed consent was secured from all informants.

B. Research Site and Fieldwork

Kampung Budaya Lembur Anyar, Kecamatan Cigombong, Kabupaten Bogor, West Java was selected as the research site through purposive sampling based on four criteria: (1) the community maintains an uninterrupted and complete Seren Tahun tradition documented across at least fifteen consecutive annual cycles; (2) the ceremony retains its full three-day structure and seventeen ritual sequences; (3) the community demonstrates strong multi-generational participation; and (4) the community granted research access.

Fieldwork comprised participatory observation across three consecutive annual Seren Tahun ceremonies (2022, 2023, and 2024), enabling longitudinal comparison of ceremony consistency, variation, and evolution. Total fieldwork duration was twenty-seven months, with concentrated fieldwork periods

around each annual ceremony supplemented by ongoing community presence for interviews and documentary collection.

C. Informant Selection and Interviews

Nineteen informants were recruited across five category groups: ceremonial leaders (*Ama/Bapa Adat*), $n=4$; ritual knowledge specialists (*girang serat, juru pantun*), $n=3$; active ceremony participants (*pangaping, pangurus upacara*), $n=5$; community elders who have participated in more than ten consecutive Seren Tahun cycles (*kasepuhan*), $n=4$; and younger community members (under 30 years), $n=3$. In-depth semi-structured interviews averaging 82 minutes per session were conducted with all nineteen informants, with follow-up interviews with seven key informants.

D. Semiotic Analysis and Data Processing

Semiotic analysis was conducted on 28 ritual objects, 6 ceremonial costume configurations, 4 spatial arrangement systems, 11 performative text excerpts, and 7 embodied movement sequences. Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [16] in three coding cycles using ATLAS.ti 9 software. Data validity was ensured through multi-cycle source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking with three ceremonial leaders after each fieldwork phase.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Communicative Architecture of the Seren Tahun Ceremony

Application of Hymes' [7] SPEAKING framework to the Seren Tahun ceremony at Lembur Anyar reveals a highly structured communicative event with a tripartite macro-architecture, seventeen discrete ritual sequences, and four distinct communicative settings. The three macro-phases are the Preparatory Phase (*Fase Persiapan*, Day 1), the Culminating Phase (*Fase Puncak*, Day 2), and the Closing Phase (*Fase Penutup*, Day 3). Each phase corresponds to a distinct dimension of the philosophy: the Preparatory Phase enacts tanggung jawab moral (moral responsibility); the Culminating Phase enacts ikhlas melepas (graceful relinquishment) and amanah dalam menerima (trustworthy reception); and the Closing Phase enacts kesinambungan (continuity) through communal celebration and generational blessing.

The four principal ceremonial sites *sawah adat* (ritual field), *leuit* (granary), *bale pertemuan* (communal hall), and the open performance space function as distinct communicative environments that frame and amplify the ritual acts performed within them. Participant roles are organized in a three-tier communicative hierarchy that mirrors the actor architecture of *Jati Kasilih ku Janti*: the *Ama Adat* and senior *kasepuhan* (first tier, transmitter), middle-generation ceremony role-bearers (second tier, performer-receiver), and younger participants in the witness role (third tier, witness-validator).

B. *Six Ritual Speech Genres: Verbal Encoding of Jati Kasilih ku Janti*

Analysis of recorded and transcribed ceremonial speech across three ceremony cycles identifies six distinct ritual speech genres, each encoding specific value dimensions of *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* through characteristic linguistic forms, performative functions, and communicative occasions. Their consistency across three cycles confirms their status as normatively prescribed communicative forms.

Rajah Pamuka (Opening Invocation). The *rajah pamuka* opens the ceremony on Day 1, addressed to ancestral spirits and cosmological forces by the *Ama Adat*. Analysis across the 2022–2024 cycles reveals consistent deployment of a temporal continuity formula: the explicit verbalization of the ceremony's position within the unbroken chain of past and future ceremonies through the Sundanese temporal sequence *ti baheula ka ayeuna, ti ayeuna ka hareup* (from the ancient past to the present, from the present to the future ahead), performing the *kesinambungan* value in its most temporally expansive form.

Sawer (Ritual Verse-Prose). Performed during the *ngajayak* sequence when the harvest is formally carried from field to granary, the sawer constitutes the most philosophically explicit verbal encoding of *Jati Kasilih ku Janti*. Through extended agricultural metaphor, it constructs the rice (*pare*) as simultaneously a physical harvest and a philosophical inheritance. Analysis across three cycles identifies a consistent three-part structure: gratitude for the received harvest, acknowledgment of the labor of those who cultivated it, and explicit commitment to preserve and transmit what has been received.

Pantun Sunda (Epic Oral Narrative). The *pantun* performance, conducted by a specialist *juru pantun* over several hours on Day 2, constitutes the most temporally extended verbal communication event in the ceremony. *Pantun* narratives draw on a repertoire of ancestral stories featuring recurring motifs directly parallel to *Jati Kasilih ku Janti*: ancestral heroes who fulfill their purposes, consciously prepare successors, and withdraw at the appropriate moment. The *pantun* functions as a mythological archive [11] that naturalizes the succession model as cosmically ordained rather than humanly contingent.

Babasan jeung Paribasa (Proverbial Citation). Ceremonial speakers systematically deploy Sundanese philosophical proverbs throughout the ceremony, including explicit citation of *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* itself. This genre functions as what Carbaugh [17] terms a cultural communication code activation: the citation of a recognized philosophical formula signals to all competent cultural participants that the communicative context is one of philosophical obligation. Younger participants who lack the Sundanese philosophical vocabulary to fully decode the citations nonetheless recognize their communicative weight through the behavioral responses of experienced participants.

Sumpah atau Ikrar Adat (Customary Oath). The *ikrar adat*, spoken at the formal ceremony of role transfer, constitutes the most powerful performative speech act in Austin's [12] sense. The oath does not describe the

succession event but constitutes it. Analysis of the *ikrar*'s linguistic structure reveals a three-part performative sequence: (1) acknowledgment of the role being received and its associated obligations; (2) explicit commitment to honor the wisdom and tradition of predecessors; and (3) declaration of the commitment to prepare successors in turn enacting not only the current succession but the entire *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* cycle.

Pangalap Berkah (Blessing-Seeking Utterances). Distributed throughout the ceremony at multiple points, these brief collective utterances create the communicative texture that contextualizes and sustains the major speech genres. Their iterative, distributed character operationalizes the *kesinambungan* value in the temporal structure of the ceremony itself, constituting the community as a unified communicative subject co-producing the ceremony's meanings.

C. *Semiotic Architecture: Four Symbol Categories*

Semiotic analysis identifies four principal categories of symbolic communication, each carrying distinct philosophical meanings in the ceremony's value system.

Category 1: Agrarian Transmission Symbols. The *pare gede* (large ritual rice sheaves) and the *leuit* (granary) constitute the most materially central symbolic system. At the denotative level, the *pare gede* is the season's harvest; at the connotative level, it embodies the accumulated labor, knowledge, and care of the cultivating generation; at the mythological level [11], it naturalizes the transfer of accumulated communal resource as a cosmic obligation. The physical act of carrying the *pare gede* from sawah to *leuit* simultaneously performs *ikhlas melepas*, *amanah dalam menerima*, and *kesinambungan* no other single moment achieves this philosophical comprehensiveness.

Category 2: Governance Succession Objects. The *kujang* (traditional Sundanese blade), *iket kepala* (ceremonial head wrap), and *selendang* (ceremonial shawl) constitute the primary material vehicles of governance succession communication. Each operates as a Peircean legisign a sign that is a cultural convention whose communicative force derives from the tradition of previous ceremony cycles in which the same objects have been transferred between generations. The *kujang* is the most semiotically complex: iconically referencing historical Sundanese weaponry; indexically pointing to the governance succession event; symbolically encoding the obligations of protective authority and *tanggung jawab moral*.

Category 3: Spatial Semiotic Systems. The spatial organization of ceremony participants encodes the *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* succession dynamics in the physical arrangement of bodies. In the opening procession (*helaran*), elder ceremonial leaders occupy the front and center positions. As the ceremony progresses to the Day 2 climax, this arrangement undergoes a choreographed reversal: at the *ngadiukeun* threshold moment, elder leaders physically step back and younger participants step forward to carry the rice into the granary enacting *ikhlas melepas* in the most bodily possible form.

Category 4: Costume and Material Semiotics. Three principal costume configurations encode governance identity and relational position: the full elder regalia worn by *Ama Adat* and senior *kasepuhan* (incorporating white fabric, gold-thread motifs, and the full *kujang-iket-selendang* ensemble); the

transitional costume worn by middle-generation role-bearers (incorporating the *iket* but not the full *kujang*); and the simplified attire of younger participants. The progression from simplified to transitional to full regalia across a participant's ceremony career constitutes a material narrative of the *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* succession cycle: the costume itself tracks the journey from *janti* to *jati*.

D. The Ritual Communication Model (RCM-JKJ): Theoretical Contribution

Drawing on the empirical findings and the three-framework theoretical synthesis, this study proposes the Ritual Communication Model for *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* (RCM-JKJ). The model comprises four structural layers: (1) **Ritual Text Layer** — the verbal dimension comprising the six speech genres, each encoding distinct philosophical value dimensions; (2) **Ritual Symbol Layer** — the material-semiotic dimension comprising the four symbol categories encoding philosophical values through iconic, indexical, and symbolic sign functions; (3) **Performative Layer** — the embodied dimension comprising spatial semiotic systems, procession choreography, and collective movement sequences that constitute organizational realities through their enactment; and (4) **Witness Layer** — the community as active co-constructor of the ceremony's philosophical meanings, whose collective presence and participatory enactments validate the communicative claims made in the other three layers.

Three dynamic principles animate the model. **Condensation** describes the ceremonial principle of concentrating multiple philosophical value dimensions into single ritual moments: the *ngadiukeun* sequence simultaneously enacts all five dimensions of *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* through the convergence of verbal (*sawer*), material (*pare gede* transfer), spatial (elder stepping back), and collective (community witness) channels, creating peak moments whose philosophical meaning is accessible to participants across different levels of cultural competence. **Iteration** describes the temporal dimension: the ceremony's communicative authority accumulates across annual cycles such that participants who have attended many ceremonies possess richer philosophical knowledge than first-time participants. **Differentiated Reception** describes the distributional principle through which philosophical content is received at different levels of elaboration by different participant categories: full philosophical articulation by elder participants, partial elaboration by middle-generation participants, and primarily affective and embodied reception by younger participants.

The RCM-JKJ advances the existing ritual communication literature in four specific ways. First, it provides a multi-layer integration accounting for verbal, material, embodied, and witness dimensions within a single analytical framework. Second, it foregrounds the Witness Layer as an active communicative component a co-constructor of philosophical meaning rather than a passive audience. Third, it introduces condensation as an explicit model principle, identifying the ceremonial peak moment as a specific communicative mechanism. Fourth, it establishes the model from empirically grounded Indonesian ritual communication data, contributing to the de-Westernization of ritual and organizational communication scholarship.

The three-cycle longitudinal design reveals a dimension that single-observation ethnographic studies cannot access: the communicative significance of repetition across annual cycles. Informants who had participated in ten or more consecutive *Seren Tahun* ceremonies described qualitatively different experiences from those with fewer cycles not merely familiarity but depth of reception, in which ceremony elements that had initially appeared opaque gradually revealed philosophical meanings that required repeated exposure. This experiential trajectory is precisely what the Iteration principle of the RCM-JKJ predicts. The finding also has significant implications for cultural preservation policy: preservation interventions that focus exclusively on documenting verbal layers while neglecting material, spatial, and embodied layers systematically underestimate the communicative architecture they are trying to preserve.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the *Seren Tahun* ceremony at Kampung Budaya Lembur Anyar as a multidimensional ritual communication event through which the *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* philosophical principle is manifested, enacted, and transmitted, producing four substantive findings and one theoretical contribution. The first finding establishes the tripartite macro-architectural organization of the ceremony as a communicative event through the SPEAKING framework, demonstrating that each macro-phase corresponds to specific philosophical value dimensions of *Jati Kasilih ku Janti*, the four ceremonial sites function as distinct communicative environments, and the three-tier participant role hierarchy operationalizes the transmitter performer witness actor architecture. The second finding identifies six ritual speech genres: *raja pamuka*, *sawer*, *pantun Sunda*, *babasan jeung paribasa*, *sumpah atau ikrar adat*, and *pangalap berkah* as the primary verbal encoding mechanisms for *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* values. The most significant finding is the identification of the *ikrar adat* as a compound performative speech act that enacts not only the current succession but the entire *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* cycle in a single utterance sequence. The third finding documents four categories of symbolic communication: agrarian transmission symbols, governance succession objects, spatial semiotic systems, and costume and material semiotics constituting a parallel non-verbal communicative text encoding *Jati Kasilih ku Janti* values. The most philosophically potent ceremonial moment, the *ngadiukeun* sequence, achieves its communicative intensity through the simultaneous convergence of verbal, material, spatial, and embodied channels captured by the condensation principle. The fourth finding identifies generationally differentiated reception: elder participants demonstrate full philosophical articulation, middle-generation participants demonstrate value recognition with partial elaboration, and younger participants demonstrate primarily affective and embodied reception that develops into explicit philosophical articulation over repeated ceremony cycles. The theoretical contribution is the Ritual Communication Model (RCM-JKJ), comprising four structural layers (Ritual Text, Ritual Symbol, Performative, Witness) and three dynamic principles (Condensation, Iteration, Differentiated Reception).

Practical implications encompass cultural preservation practice, community governance and tourism development, and communication education. Future research should conduct comparative studies across multiple Sundanese communities practicing Seren Tahun and examine how the ceremony communicates in digital documentation contexts.

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