

# Revealing the philosophy of *Palang Pintu* in Betawi's wedding ceremony

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## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, wedding ceremonies in Indonesia are typically held in a manner distinct from the past. However, modern and traditional elements can be combined to ensure that the essence of preserving Indonesian tradition is always present in wedding ceremonies. *Palang Pintu* is one of the Betawi cultural traditions, which is typically performed during a wedding ceremony. This study aims to reveal the symbolic meanings and functions of *Palang Pintu* philosophy. The author utilized a qualitative approach to investigate the wedding traditions of Betawi. The dataset was compiled from academic articles and proceedings. In this study, the author applied Rolland Barthes' Semiotic approach to determine each symbol's connotative and denotative significance in the *Palang Pintu* tradition. Aside from it, the author also utilized Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity theory to examine how these symbols are viewed as the identity of Betawi. The findings indicate that *Palang Pintu* has religious, cultural, traditional, and aesthetic values. Those values symbolize the Betawi people's identity that must be preserved.

*Kata kunci:* betawi; identity; palang pintu; tradition; wedding ceremony

## ABSTRAK

*Prosesi pernikahan di Indonesia saat ini biasanya diadakan dengan cara yang berbeda dari masa lalu. Namun, pada dasarnya, unsur modern dan tradisional dapat dipadukan untuk memastikan esensi tradisi Indonesia selalu hadir dalam acara pernikahan di Indonesia. Palang Pintu merupakan salah satu contoh tradisi budaya Betawi yang biasanya dilakukan pada saat upacara pernikahan. Kajian ini bertujuan mengungkap makna simbolik dan fungsi filosofi Palang Pintu. Penulis menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk menganalisis tradisi pernikahan orang Betawi. Data dalam penulisan ini diperoleh melalui sumber artikel akademik dan prosiding. Dalam penelitian ini, penulis menerapkan pendekatan Semiotik Rolland Barthes untuk menentukan makna konotatif dan denotatif setiap simbol dalam tradisi Palang Pintu. Selain itu, penulis juga menggunakan teori Identitas Budaya Stuart Hall untuk mengkaji bagaimana simbol-simbol tersebut dilihat sebagai identitas Betawi. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa Palang Pintu memiliki nilai religi, budaya, tradisi, dan estetika. Nilai-nilai tersebut melambangkan identitas masyarakat Betawi yang harus dilestarikan.*

*Keywords:* betawi; identitas; palang pintu; tradisi; pesta pernikahan

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## INTRODUCTION

According to [Trisiantari et al. \(2020\)](#), Indonesia is the largest archipelago from Sabang to Merauke. Indonesia has lots of cultural heritages, ethnics, and customs. In this study, the author focused on one ethnic, which is Betawi.

[Trisiantari et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasized that Betawi is Jakarta's indigenous tribe. They also stated that the word "Betawi" derives from "Batavia," the name of a city constructed by Jan Pieterzon Coen in 1619 after he destroyed Jayakarta. They believed that, historically, Jakarta was referred to as the harbor of Sunda Kalapa. It was an assembly point for traders from throughout Nusantara (the name of Indonesia) and even from Thailand, Europe, and India. Biologically, the Betawi ethnic group is a mix of the immigrant tribes of Jakarta ([Trisiantari et al., 2020](#)).

According to [Budiaman \(2000\)](#), assimilation happens between native Jakartans and immigrant ethnic groups such as the Sundanese, Javanese, Minangkabau, Bugis, Makassarese, and Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, Arabs, and Indians. As a result, the Betawi ethnic group possesses a variety of cultures, including dances, games, meals, and ceremonies (599). Budiaman's statement is also supported by [Waliyyayasi \(2021\)](#). He stated that in the past, interethnic and international marriages produced the Betawi ethnic group, according to him. Even if the traditions and practices of the Betawi culture are not identical to those of the past, they are being practiced today. The culture of Betawi has persisted for generations. The Dutch and Chinese civilizations contribute to Betawi culture, beginning with language, traditional clothes, food, and musical instruments ([Waliyyayasi, 2021](#)). In addition, European, Chinese, and Arab cultures have affected the Betawi culture in Indonesia and vice versa ([Waliyyayasi, 2021](#)).

According to [Waliyyasi \(2021\)](#), under the Dutch East Indies' reign, the Central Betawi, also known as Betawi City, and the Betawi Pinggiran, also known as Betawi Ora, under the Dutch East Indies' reign, were two subgroups of the Betawi people based on their cultural traits and places of settlement. Waliyyasi argued that geographically, they are subdivided into Central Betawi (*Kota*), Betawi Pesisir, and Betawi Pinggir. He believed Central Betawi settled in a region of Jakarta historically known as Batavia's residential district (now Central Jakarta-urban), significantly influenced by Malay (Islamic) culture. Central Betawi

clings to a traditional way of life, including marriage ceremonies, circumcisions, Eid festival traditions, and religious and cultural observance. The Betawi of Central Jakarta has experienced the highest urbanization, modernization, and multicultural marriage rates. Betawi Pinggiran, or Betawi Udik or Ora, consists of two distinct groups. First, northern and western Jakarta and Tangerang are impacted by Chinese culture; second, eastern and southern Jakarta, Bekasi, and Bogor are influenced by Sundanese culture and traditions ([Waliyyayasi, 2021](#)).

According to [Shahab \(2006\)](#), the Betawi ethnic group considers birth, marriage, and death three of the most sacred aspects of daily life ([Shahab, 2006](#)). *Buka Palang Pintu* (open the door's latch) is one of the rituals that must be performed in Betawi wedding ceremonies. In this context, the author views that most wedding ceremonies in Indonesia nowadays rarely apply the traditional aspects, either in the procession or in the bride and groom's costumes. Indonesian people need to know that they have unique traditions and cultures that must be preserved, especially the custom of wedding ceremonies. Hence, in this study, the author intended to build more awareness among Indonesian people or readers to see that preserving the tradition is a must, and Palang Pintu is the focus of the author's study.

According to [Trisiantari et al. \(2020\)](#), Palang Pintu is one of the fundamental steps of the Betawi marriage ritual. Before obtaining an *Ijab in Kabul*, one procession must be done (wedding vow). *Buka Palang Pintu* (open the door's latch) is part of the wedding ritual and represents the traditional heritage of the Betawi ethnic group. Consequently, this study aims to elucidate the symbolic significance of Palang Pintu performances and their relevance to literary appreciation education ([Trisiantari et al., 2020](#)).

According to [Shahab \(2004\)](#), a Betawi wedding ceremony, there is a sequence of actions beginning with *negesin* (looking about), *ngelamar* (proposing), *nentuin* (concluding), *enjotan* (bringing foods), *serahan* (gift), *akad nikah* (wedding vow), *maulidan*, *kerjaan*, *kiras*, and *ngunduh mantu* (bridal visit).

Several studies have been conducted on the Palang Pintu tradition, which has been analyzed from various perspectives. Previous research by [Anggraeni et al. \(2019\)](#) examined the Palang Pintu tradition as an effort to build national civilization and religiosity based on the cultural value of the local community. In addition, the study investigated whether the Palang Pintu tradition in

Betawi has Islamic significance. In addition to being an effort to preserve culture, it is anticipated that Palang Pintu Betawi will be able to integrate religious and cultural values into daily life ([Anggraeni et al., 2019](#)). Then, [Attas et al. \(2023\)](#) carried out the research. They elaborated on how the Tidung Island community preserves its oral literature through the use of indigenous knowledge and creative industries. Their study employed ethnography with observation, interview, and documentation techniques. The theory of performance structure by Koster as the theory used in this study, the value of local wisdom with the concept of John M. Echol and Hasan Syadily which is consistent with the local wisdom of the people of Tidung Island, and the creative industry by Sariono in the form of creative work by the people of Tidung Island. This study's findings are (1) the performance structure of Palang Pintu on Tidung Island in 2022; (2) the value of local Islamic wisdom in the Palang Pintu performance in the Tidung Island community; and (3) the creative industry of the Palang Pintu show on Tidung Island, which was developed through a collaborative performance between Mandar silat as a local culture of the Tidung Island community and by creating rhymes in Betawi that are in accordance with the language ([Attas, 2023](#)). Meanwhile, the author focused on analyzing the Palang Pintu philosophy seen from symbolic meanings and its functions in this study.

The author applied the Semiotic approach from Roland Barthes and Cultural Identity theory from Stuart Hall to support the observation. Barthes uses the phrase signifying orders ([Barthes, 1983](#)). According to [Muslimin \(2017\)](#), the first order of signification is the denotation, while the second is connotation. He argued that Roland Barthes' idea of semiotic connotations asserts that when a system analyzes a sign, it does not maintain its essential meaning but instead strives to gain it through connotations. He believed that denotation is the explicit or direct meaning or set of meanings of a word or expression, the association or set of associations that a word typically elicits for the majority of speakers of a language, as opposed to those elicited for an individual speaker due to their personal experience ([Muslimin, 2017](#)). This indication is called the denotation meaning. The sign above generates the second meaning, an additional mental concept connected with the sign (signifier). This new category came to be known as connotation. According to the theory of Roland Barthes ([1961](#)), not only does the connotative sign have additional meaning, but it also

consists of the two elements of the denotative sign that support its existence. In addition, the connotation is the concealed meaning of the sign as interpreted by the interpreter. In other words, the connotation is the meaning gained from the self-interpretation of the sign by the interpreter. Connotation refers to "second-order signifying systems" or cultural meanings obtained from an image or text ([Muslimin, 2017](#)).

Another theory used by the author is the Cultural Identity from Stuart Hall. [Hall \(1996\)](#) examines explicitly two definitions of "cultural identity." The first is an essentialist identification that emphasizes the similarities that ostensibly constitute the "oneness," or fundamental essence, of "a people" ([Hall, 1996 pp 111-112](#)). According to [Hussey \(2014\)](#), that persona engages in representational practices. The second meaning of "cultural identity" highlights the similarities and distinctions within a fictitious cultural group ([Hussey, 2014 p. 201](#)). Hall, like historical materialists, emphasizes that identity is contingent and not ahistorical or immutable; however, he takes ideas about identity, representation, and race more seriously and is concerned with them more centrally than in the accounts of many historical materialists, which focus more exclusively on class and class consciousness ([Hussey, 2014](#)). Hence, the author wishes this study could contribute to the Cultural Studies Department. Aside from it, the author expects it could assist future researchers in analyzing Indonesian culture, especially in the context of the Betawi traditional wedding custom, Palang Pintu.

## METHOD

This research analyzed the philosophy of Palang Pintu in Betawi's wedding ceremony as part of Betawi's identity. The author applied a qualitative approach. To support the analysis, the author utilized the Semiotic approach from Roland Barthes to analyze the connotative and denotative meanings of the symbols that appeared in the Palang Pintu. Aside from it, the author also applied the theory of Cultural Identity from Stuart Hall to elaborate on the symbol's significance.

The author did several stages to figure out the philosophy of Palang Pintu in Betawi's wedding ceremony. First, the author selected several instruments for the Palang Pintu wedding ceremony. The chosen instruments were analyzed using the Semiotic approach from Roland Barthes. Then, the author integrated the findings with the Cultural Identity

theory from Stuart Hall. Finally, the author concluded the entire observation from the symbolic meanings and functions of Palang Pintu that had been analyzed before.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To examine the philosophy of Palang Pintu in Betawi's wedding ceremony, the author provided the history of palang pintu, which can be seen in [Figure 1](#).



Figure 1. Palang Pintu in Betawi's Wedding Ceremony

In [Figure 1](#), we can see two people fighting, usually known as Beklai. Denotatively, the beklai (fighting) is accompanied by a verbal or physical conflict. Combat at the Palang Pintu ceremony is a form of martial arts that fulfills the bride's criteria. If the groom wins, he can enter the bride's house ([Siregar, 2022](#)). Meanwhile, fighting in the Palang Pintu custom connotatively relates to the groom's willingness to defend his family from attack. In addition, martial arts show a man who is confident and unafraid to face problems in the future, as well as the seriousness of his pursuit of his hero. [Siregar \(2022\)](#) also stated that as a young Betawi, one must possess the three principles of the Quran, prayer, and martial arts, which are intrinsic to and define the Betawi people. This principle derives from the story of Si Pitung, who is clever, courteous, respectful to instructors and parents, a champion of truth and justice, skilled at silat, devout in worship, and maintains Islamic law-based principles. From then on, the Betawi utilize the Pitung figure's underlying premise ([Siregar, 2022](#)).

Another point we could analyze from [Figure 1](#) is the two people wearing unique clothes called Pangsi. That is the unique costume for jawara, the people who wear a *peci* (hat), *golok* (machetes), and a *sarung*. This attire is

also prevalent among Sundanese and Malay peoples and has been inspired by Chinese culture. Pangsi attire in Palang Pintu is defined by color: black for the locals, red for the guests, and green for the Marawis entertainers. In addition, [Amanah \(2018\)](#) asserts that contemporary Pangsi garments take on new hues to enhance Palang Pintu's ambiance.

Another finding indicates that pangsi is associated with Si Pitung's legend. According to [CNN Indonesia \(2022\)](#), Si Pitung, whose real name is Ahmad Nitikusumah, is the courageous son of Pinah and Piung from Jakarta's Kampung Rawa Belong. In the past, around the nineteenth century, Rawa Belong was known as ommelanden, which meant Batavia's outskirts. This neighborhood was known to be extensively populated during the time. Si Pitung's upbringing in a Hadji Naipin Islamic boarding school enabled him to recite the Koran and develop a positive disposition. Si Pitung allegedly began committing robberies in 1892-1893. However, it was done for a purpose. The inciting act was a robbery during which he attacked his family. Initially, Si Pitung assisted his father in selling goats. One day, a bunch of Dutch and Chinese thieves stole money from the sale of his father's goats. Pitung, angered and saddened by the bandits' acts, learned martial arts to combat them until he eventually located them. Due to this experience, Pitung learned a great deal about the bandit gang. However, people began to view him as if he were one of the bandits. Even though Si Pitung's objective was to master self-defense, he did not become a village champion solely to be feared. Instead, he desired the ability to combat the bandits, also Dutch landlords who frequently mistreated the poor and vulnerable with arbitrary actions.

Ultimately, Si Pitung's martial arts skills were sufficient to cause the landlord's concern ([CNN Indonesia, 2022](#)). Thus, the author views that the pangsi cloth that Betawi people usually wear symbolizes Si Pitung's character and costume. Citing Stuart Hall's concept that Cultural Identity emphasizes the similarities that ostensibly constitute the "oneness," or fundamental essence, of "a people" ([Hall, 1996 pp. 111-112](#)). The author views pangsi, jawara, and Si Pitung always correlate with Betawi. Thus, the author believes that all symbols in [Figure 1](#) represent Betawi people's identity.

The following observation could be seen from several instruments in Betawi wedding ceremony (Palang Pintu). The instruments needed in Palang Pintu are *roti buaya* (crocodile bread) in [figure 2](#), *petasan* (fireworks) in [Figure 3](#), and *kembang kelapa* in [Figure 4](#).



Figure 2. *Roti Buaya* (Crocodile Bread)

According to [Herryani et al. \(2016\)](#), in the Betawi culture, crocodile bread is typically served at wedding ceremonies. Herryani, Sinaga, and Brahmantyo believed that initially, crocodile symbols were made of wood, and even when they were later created of bread, the bread had a tough texture and little flavor. They think that it was rarely consumed. Crocodile bread must always be served at marriage ceremonies in the Betawi community. The perception of crocodile bread as a symbol of wealth is evolving, as bread is regarded as a costly food ([Herryani et al., 2016](#)). In addition, they also stated that the philosophical significance of crocodile bread is marriage fidelity through generations of children and grandkids, as well as having a permanent domicile. A pair of crocodile bread is the "seserahan," or a gift from the groom to the bride ([Herryani et al., 2016](#)).

According to [Herryani et al. \(2016\)](#), crocodile bread should not be consumed; instead, it should be displayed on a table and occasionally affixed to the wall near the altar. Bread crocodile is used to exalt in the Betawi community, and the white crocodile is a sign of a successful marriage. The white crocodile is a legendary creature revered by the Betawi. A pair of crocodile bread represents a supernatural force that will protect the newlyweds at the time of the wedding reception. Besides that, crocodile bread symbolizes loyalty since crocodiles are monogamous reptiles: the

female mates for life with the same male and builds a permanent nest. Crocodiles typically mate only once or are monogamous; their nests are permanent and do not relocate. According to discussions with sources, bread crocodiles originated during the Dutch colonial period. With time and technology, crocodile bread is increasingly formed of sweet bread dough and typically contains chocolate, cheese, or strawberry; it is now widely available to the bride's family ([Herryani et al., 2016](#)).

The instrument in palang pintu is *petasan* (fireworks), which can be seen in [Figure 3](#), and *kembang kelapa* in [Figure 4](#).



Figure 3. *Petasan* (Fireworks)

According to [Melinda & Paramita \(2019\)](#), *petasan* is typically presented during the groom's procession to enliven the occasion. This firecracker signifies informing the bride and her neighbors that the groom is about to depart and is approaching the bride and groom's domain ([Melinda & Paramita, 2019](#)). Meanwhile, *kembang kelapa* represents the living philosophy of the Betawi people ([Figure 4](#)).

[Figure 4](#) shows *kembang kelapa* in the Betawi's wedding ceremony. The philosophy of the *kembang kelapa* provides advantages from its roots to its fruit. Hence, the goal is that the groom and bride will always lead a life that gives good fortune to their marriage ([Melinda & Paramita, 2019](#)). Another perspective is taken from Sri Sumarni. She argued that *Kembang kelapa* is made from oil paper. During its evolution, the decorative shape of the *kembang kelapa* has exhibited numerous variations in function and location. In other words, the shape of the *Kembang kelapa* is not fixed. Some are in the shape of pillars, which can be placed in any available space or dangling from the ceiling; some are even combined with electric power to produce

lovely coconut blossoms, especially at night ([Sumarni, 2018](#)).

*Kembang kelapa* has a noble philosophical significance: humans should be as valuable as coconut trees. Nothing on a coconut tree is worthless, including its roots, stalks, fruit, and leaves. The idea was then enlarged to indicate that human life must be nurtured and articulated in a lively, open, mutually beneficial, compact manner, regardless of social status. So, whoever is in power in "Bumi Kalapa" or Jakarta should defend unity, openness, honesty, decency, and human dignity ([Sumarni, 2018](#)).



Figure 4. *Kembang Kelapa*

The last symbolic meaning of Palang Pintu is reading salawat. Salawat contains praises to Prophet Muhammad. It is usually read by Betawi ethnic group in several moments, namely maulidan, khitanan, death, birth, and wedding. Reading salawat in the Palang Pintu procession indicated that Betawi ethnic group is religious people. They always carry out Islamic teachings in daily life. Furthermore, in family life, they are expected to obey the almighty commands ([Trisiantari et al., 2020](#)).

According to [Siregar \(2022\)](#) in "Islamic Values in Palang Pintu Procession in Semiotic Perspective", the literal meaning of "selawat" is an appeal to God or a supplication to the prophet Muhammad and his family and companions, but "dustur" in the KBBI refers to the state constitution. However, the preceding term, "Selawat", signifies "dustur," a rhyming sentence that praises the prophet, Muhammad. At the Palang Pintu selawat dustur ceremony, the call to prayer is chanted for the groom before he leaves for the bride's home. After the beklay (fighting) ceremony, the bridegroom is chanted so that she has a noble heart ([Siregar, 2022](#)).

Meanwhile, connotatively, chanting the Selawat dustur describes the Betawi people who create Islamic beliefs and sharia. During the Palang Pintu parade, praises are sung to the prophet Muhammad SAW, which displays affection for him. In addition, as a type of groom, comprehension of the sunnah of the prophet Muhammad SAW. Islam's tenets have evolved into an ideology in Betawi civilization, a Muslim community. In addition to practicing Islamic religious beliefs, adoration for the prophet Muhammad SAW is fostered at a young age. In Islam, love for the prophet Muhammad is compulsory and must take precedence over all other forms of love ([Siregar, 2022](#)). This practice is vividly seen as the identity of the Betawi people.

## CONCLUSION

The Palang Pintu custom is an integral aspect of the Betawi wedding ritual. In the palang pintu procession, a variety of metaphorical meanings manifested themselves. The symbols of palang pintu are reading salawat, the allure of beklay (fighting), crocodile bread, pangsi cloth, petasan (fireworks), and kembang kelapa. Each of these elements has its significance and objectives. This tradition shows sincerity and respect for the wedding and married life. All Indonesians are responsible for preserving the Indonesian culture. As the palang pintu is a sign of Betawi identity, it is everyone's duty to uphold the custom of the Betawi wedding ceremony.

The author realized that this study has limitations. This study only focused on several symbols or instruments in Palang Pintu. In comparison, there are lots of other symbols that could be analyzed deeper. Aside from it, the author also noticed that this study still needs further resources and analysis. It is expected that additional researchers could examine the symbols of Palang Pintu more closely in the form of meanings and functions. Aside from its weakness, the author wishes that this study could contribute to the Cultural Studies or Humanities Department so that future researchers could dig more analysis about this Betawi tradition.

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