

## The Practical Value of Tradition *munjung* on Javanese Traditional Weddings: A Study in D. Tegalrejo Village, Tugumulyo District, Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra

Susanto<sup>1</sup>, Daroe Iswatiningsih<sup>2</sup>

Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang

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### Abstract

*This study examines the transformation of the munjung tradition in Javanese wedding ceremonies within the transmigrant community of Tegalrejo Village, Musi Rawas, South Sumatra. Munjung, a form of respect and invitation through the delivery of food, has undergone changes in form and meaning due to evolving times, economic conditions, and the impact of the pandemic. This research adopts a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation, with informants selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Analysis based on the Miles and Huberman model revealed three key themes: changes in the containers and contents of *munjung*, rationalization of practicality, and the persistence of symbolic values in an adaptive form. Despite physical transformations, the social and cultural functions of *munjung* persist as symbols of respect and social bonding. This study enriches the understanding of cultural adaptation among migrant communities and emphasizes the importance of preserving local traditions in a contextualized manner. The implications include strengthening character education based on local culture, informing policies on cultural preservation, and providing direction for future research on symbolic and ecological aspects.*

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### Corresponding Author:

Susanto

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang

Email: [sus.54nto@gmail.com](mailto:sus.54nto@gmail.com)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a country with rich cultural diversity, has a variety of unique traditions passed down from generation to generation. Traditions, essentially, are a series of practices or customs that have been in place for a long time and are passed down from generation to generation within a community. (Sudirana, 2019).

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, tradition is defined as a custom passed down from generation to generation (from ancestors) that is still practiced in society (KBBI VI Online). In Javanese culture and traditions, sharing food has profound meaning. It reflects not only the values of togetherness and mutual cooperation but also a sense of unity with nature. Examples include the traditions of *rasulan*, *sedekah bumi* (earth offering), *labuhan* (land offering), *kenduri* (celebration), or *slametan* (slametan). (Fitriyani et al., 2024)

Various forms of local wisdom passed down through generations are threatened with being displaced by instant and pragmatic lifestyles. However, some traditions persist through a dynamic process of social adaptation. One interesting tradition to study is the practice of *munjung* in Javanese traditional wedding ceremonies, particularly among Javanese transmigrant communities residing outside Java. This phenomenon reflects how

communities maintain cultural values through symbolic transformations adapted to contemporary realities. Nationally, transmigration has created unique multicultural communities and served as a social laboratory for exploring local-based cultural changes.

In Tegalrejo Village, Tugumulyo District, Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra (Muhidin, 2021). The practice of *munjung* or *punjungan*—sending food to relatives and community leaders as a form of respect and wedding invitation—still persists as a distinctive form of social relations. However, its form and substance have shifted. Based on field observations and interviews with local traditional leaders, there has been a transformation from the use of traditional containers such as tiered food containers to packaging made of plastic. The contents of the food have also changed from beef *rendang* to simple side dishes such as fried chicken or instant noodles. These findings indicate a shift in values from symbolic to practical aspects, without losing its main essence as a means of strengthening social relations and demonstrating respect for fellow community members (Wijaya, 2025).

This issue is important to examine not only from an anthropological perspective, but also from an educational and socio-cultural perspective. The *munjung* tradition is not merely a customary practice, but also a means of educating people about values, respecting social structures, and strengthening community solidarity. In the context of Javanese transmigrants, this practice demonstrates how the original culture is adapted to a new environment, taking into account the socio-economic context of the community. Therefore, this research is significant because it offers new insights into cultural adaptation strategies in the context of migration and social change. This is in line with studies by Wahyuningsih (2021) which states that cultural practices such as *punjungan* can be widely accepted as long as they do not conflict with the moral principles of society and religion.

Although several studies have examined Javanese traditions in the context of transmigration and modernization, most have focused solely on historical or legal-formal aspects. Few studies have examined the experiential dimensions, subjective meanings, and value negotiation processes undertaken by traditional practitioners in their daily practices. This literature gap highlights the need for a qualitative approach that emphasizes in-depth understanding of social and cultural practices. (Kartinawati, 2024). Tradition *bower* in D. Tegalrejo Village has not been widely studied from a practical perspective as a form of cultural adaptation, especially in the context of the pandemic and economic constraints. Therefore, this research contributes to enriching local cultural studies and theories of traditional adaptation.

This study aims to describe the implementation of the traditional *bower* in Javanese traditional weddings in transmigrant communities, identifying the practical dimensions that develop in these practices, and interpreting their meaning within a Javanese cultural framework. The focus of the study is directed at the dynamics of the transformation of form and content of *bower*, and how communities negotiate ancient values with contemporary practical needs. Thus, a qualitative approach is used to holistically explore the narratives and experiences of cultural actors through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in its attempt to enrich the theory of cultural adaptation in migrant societies, particularly through symbolic practices such as *bower*. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a reference for community-based local cultural preservation using a contextual approach, and can inspire the development of local wisdom-based character education in schools. Furthermore, this research can also form the basis for cultural policies that respect the diversity of cultural practices in transmigration areas, while supporting inclusive social development rooted in local values.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study type. The case study was chosen because the main focus of this research is to understand in-depth the practice of traditional *power in* the cultural context of the Javanese transmigrant community in Tegalrejo Village, Tugumulyo District, Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra. This approach is relevant because case studies allow researchers to explore phenomena contextually, holistically, and in-depth in the real lives of the subjects studied. (Alfitri & Hambali, 2013). In this study, data was collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation to gain a better understanding of the practice.

This research was conducted from April to May 2025 in D. Tegalrejo Village, a residential area for second- and third-generation Javanese transmigrants. Subjects included community leaders, traditional leaders, ritual practitioners, and family members of the event organizers who were directly involved in the practice *bower*. Informants were selected purposively, with the following criteria: (1) having direct experience in activities, (2) considered as a traditional reference by the local community, and (3) willing to provide in-depth information. This study aims to identify cultural practices related to *munjung* in the context of transmigrant communities, as well as to understand the role of community leaders and traditional leaders in carrying out the ritual.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in person using an open-ended guide that allowed for the exploration of informants' personal narratives and subjective interpretations of traditions *bower*. Observations were made during the activity *bower*. The process of preparing and handing over the *punjungan* was conducted to observe social gestures, nonverbal language, and etiquette in a social context. Documentation in the form of photographs, notes on traditional activities, and written invitations were used to supplement the information. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation techniques of sources and methods, as well as member *checking*, namely verifying the results of interviews with informants to ensure the conformity of the researcher's interpretation with the informant's intentions. This triangulation technique is important to increase the credibility of the research and ensure that the data obtained reflects a more accurate reality. (Mekarisce, 2020).

**Table 1. Evolution of Punjungan in D. Tegalrejo Village**

Period Time	Type Receptacle	Head Food	Reason Change
The Beginning of Transmigration 1938	Plate	Rice Cooked vegetables side dish (Shadow)	-
	food container	Rice Cooked vegetables side dish (rendang, chicken)	-
Around 2010	Plastic Basket	Rice Instant noodles side dish (rendang, chicken, canned fish eggs)	More practical

Covid Pandemic of 2020	Plastic Basket Cardboard Box	Rice Vegetables side dish (rendang, chicken, canned fish eggs)	More practical Cheaper
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Table 1 Results of Interviews with Mr. Babang Santoso and Mr. Atma Wijaya

### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (12 Pt)

Based on the results of interviews with community leaders such as Mr. Atma Wijaya and Mr. Bambang Santoso (2025, April), as well as the results of observations in the field, three main themes emerged that stood out from the research data, namely: (1) Transformation of the Container and Contents of Punjungan, (2) Rationalization of Practicality in Tradition, and (3) Persistence of Symbolic Values in Adaptive Practices.

#### 3.1 Transformation of the Container and Contents of the Punjungan

One of the most striking changes in the munjung tradition is the shape of the containers and the contents of the food. Initially, people used plates and tiered food containers to serve food. The contents of the munjung were considered luxurious, such as rice with beef rendang and green beans. However, from the 2010s until the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift towards the use of more practical and economical plastic containers or cardboard boxes. The contents of the munjung have also been simplified, such as replacing them with instant noodles, plain fried chicken, or even canned fish.

Mr. Bambang explained, "Previously, the punjungan used a four-tiered food container, but now they use plastic so it's easier to return. The contents are also simplified, sometimes just one piece of fried chicken and two packets of instant noodles." (Interview, April 25, 2025). These changes are recorded in the table "Evolution of Punjungan in Tegalrejo Village," which shows the shift in contents and types of containers over time as an adaptive strategy to the practical needs of the community.

#### 3.2 Rationalization of Practicality in Tradition

The rationalization of practicality is the common thread connecting these transformations. People are consciously simplifying the form and content of munjung for reasons of time efficiency, ease of distribution, and cost savings. Especially during the pandemic, people are increasingly opting for methods that minimize physical contact and expense.

Using plastic or disposable boxes is considered more hygienic and practical. Senders of punjungan (traditional gifts) don't have to collect the return of the containers, which in traditional practices was once part of social interactions. However, this choice has ecological consequences that many people are unaware of.

#### 3.3 Persistence of Symbolic Values in Adaptive Practices

Despite changes in form and content, the symbolic values in the traditional therapists. Social functions such as expressing respect, inviting, and fostering friendship remain the primary goal. "What's important isn't the food, but its meaning. We come to someone's home because we are respected," said Mr. Atma Wijaya (Interview, April 20, 2025). Socially, the recipient of a punjungan feels more obligated to attend an event when receiving a munjung than when simply receiving a written

invitation. In this case, *it remains* a powerful symbolic medium of communication in transmigrant Javanese culture.

This shows that adaptation in practice does not immediately erase traditional values, but rather reconstructs them within a contextual, practical framework. This is in line with the social constructionist theory of Berger & Luckmann (1966), which states that humans are structurally influenced by the environment in which they live. (Handaka et al., 2018). The Tegalrejo community proves that tradition is not a static entity, but rather a system of meaning that is flexible to environmental changes, including economic pressures and pandemics.

In Kartinawati's study (2024), the tradition is said to remain relevant in modern society because it contains educational and spiritual values. This research strengthens this argument by showing how society transforms *bower*. It becomes more practical without losing its primary purpose, namely respect and strengthening social ties. Compare this with Wahyuningsih's (2021) study, which states that *punjungan*, in the context of Islamic law, does not conflict with sharia as long as it does not involve elements of coercion or showing off. (Wahyuningsih, 2021). In the context of Tegalrejo, the community still carries out *bower* with sincere and selfless intentions.

However, this study also shows a developing pragmatic dimension, such as the expectation of reciprocity from the recipient, as well as a tendency to use status symbols through the packaging and contents of the *punjungan*. This phenomenon can be compared to Alfauq Hasyim's (2022) study in Central Lampung, which found that *punjungan* can be a symbol of hidden social pressure because it is seen as a form of mandatory invitation to attend. (Hasyi et al., 2022). The implications of these findings are important both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research adds to our understanding of how transmigrant communities negotiate culture through symbols and practices. This contributes to the development of cultural adaptation theory, particularly in the context of rural communities experiencing structural migration. Practically, these findings are useful for policymakers in local culture and character education. Traditions such as *bower* can be included in the local content curriculum as a form of learning social values, mutual cooperation, and etiquette.

Critical reflection on the data also reveals a tension between preservation efforts and the demands of modernization. While simplifying the contents of the *munjung* provides a practical solution, it also has the potential to trigger a decline in symbolic value if not accompanied by a strong reinterpretation. Therefore, it is important to encourage the community to continue emphasizing the noble values of this tradition through informal education and the role of community leaders. This research opens up space for further studies exploring ecological dimensions (the impact of plastic use in the *punjung*), gender aspects (the role of women in *munjung* preparation), or semiotic approaches to understanding the symbolism of food contents. Thus, this research is not merely descriptive but also paves the way for broader scientific development in the realms of culture, anthropology, and social education.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the traditional *bower* in Javanese traditional weddings in the transmigrant community of Tegalrejo Village, significant transformations have occurred in terms of form, content, and meaning. Changes from traditional vessels such as *food containers*. The shift to single-use containers like plastic and cardboard, as well as the simplification of food contents, reflects a cultural adaptation process based on practicality, efficiency, and the socioeconomic conditions of the community. Despite these changes in

form, core traditional values such as respect, friendship, and invitation remain symbolically and functionally embedded in the community's daily practices.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its in-depth understanding of how migrant communities negotiate cultural heritage and the demands of modern pragmatism. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on cultural adaptation through a local community-based case study and demonstrates how cultural symbols and meanings are not lost but rather recontextualized. Practically, these findings provide a concrete illustration of how traditions can be maintained in a simplified yet meaningful form, and provide inspiration for strengthening character education based on local culture.

The policy implications of this research relate to the need to support the preservation of adaptive local traditions, whether through local content curricula, empowerment of indigenous communities, or community-based cultural regulations. Local governments and cultural institutions can incorporate practices such as *bower as* part of a strategy to preserve cultural identity amidst changing times.

For future development, it is recommended that further research be conducted using a multi-site semiotic and ethnographic approach to understand the symbolic meaning in traditions. Bowering other transmigrant communities. Furthermore, studies on the ecological impacts of changes in packaging and the gender dimensions of *punjungan* implementation can enrich multidisciplinary perspectives in local cultural studies.

This research confirms that traditions are not frozen legacies, but rather dynamic practices that live in ever-changing social spaces—and *bower* is an example: a tradition that continues to adapt without losing its soul.

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