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Seri Iskandar Campus, Perak, MALAYSIA



**PROCEEDINGS OF THE 16TH REGIONAL
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SIMPORA XVI: 2025**

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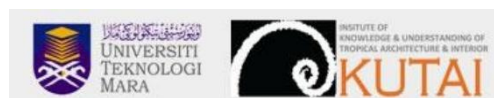
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FINDING LOCAL WISDOMS IN INDIGENOUS TRADITION OF MARRIAGE IN SIMEULUE ISLAND

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Abstract: This paper examines the traditional marriage process practiced by the people of Simeulue Island, Aceh Province, Indonesia, with a focus on the sequence of customary rituals and the symbolic meanings of wedding ornaments. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with community elders and cultural practitioners, as well as documentation of local traditions. The findings reveal that the traditional marriage ceremony consists of four main stages: Manutuk Anak Ammen, Lak o si Falu-falu, Manaek en Tando, and Baralek. Each stage embodies specific social and moral values, including politeness, respect for customary law, consensus-building, and communal cooperation. In particular, the Baralek stage is characterized by symbolic ornaments such as the wedding stage and bridal seats, which represent the aesthetic and spiritual ideals of the Simeulue community. Overall, the traditional marriage process reflects local wisdom that promotes harmony, cooperation, and social cohesion, highlighting its significance as an important cultural heritage that should be preserved in the face of socio-cultural change.

Keywords: indigenous tradition, local wisdom, simeulue, *manutuk anak ammen*, *lak o si falu-falu*, *manaek en tando*, *baralek*

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous traditions constitute important forms of cultural expression among the hundreds of ethnic groups in Indonesia. The capacity of these traditions to encompass various aspects of human life demonstrates that ancestral communities possessed profound life teachings embedded in what is commonly referred to as local genius or local wisdom, transmitted primarily through oral traditions across generations. The Simeulue ethnic community is one such group that has sustainably preserved its ritual traditions through intergenerational transmission. Among the cultural practices that remain actively observed is the traditional Simeulue wedding ceremony, which continues to play a significant role in social life on Simeulue Island, Aceh Province, Indonesia.

Local wisdom is closely associated with the concept of indigenous knowledge. According to UNESCO, indigenous or local knowledge refers to a comprehensive body of knowledge, skills, and practices maintained and developed by communities with long-standing interactions with their natural environments. Similarly, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines local wisdom as knowledge accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation within a particular community. Sibarani (2012) further conceptualizes local wisdom as cultural values that guide communities in managing social life wisely, distinguishing between local wisdom oriented toward peace and that oriented toward prosperity. In this study, local wisdom is understood as traditional values and cultural practices that embody noble principles supporting social harmony and communal well-being, preserved and transmitted across generations.

Traditional marriage ceremonies in Simeulue represent an important component of regional cultural heritage that requires continuous nurturing and preservation. In recent years, however, these traditional practices have increasingly declined and been replaced by more modern and prestige-oriented wedding ceremonies. Traditional weddings are often perceived as costly, impractical, and time-consuming. Such perceptions are not necessarily accurate, as contemporary wedding ceremonies frequently involve similarly high expenses and complex arrangements.

From a cultural perspective, traditional marriage ceremonies serve several essential functions. First, wedding traditions function as expressions of cultural identity. Alongside birth and death rituals, marriage ceremonies constitute a central element of cultural life through which ethnic identity is symbolically communicated, particularly through traditional attire and ceremonial practices. Second, wedding traditions act as repositories of ways of life. Each stage of the ceremony embodies values and symbols that reflect social regulations, discipline, politeness, and moral guidance that shape community behavior. Third, traditional marriage rituals contribute to social harmony and intimacy, which are fundamental elements in strengthening social cohesion within communities and supporting broader national unity.

However, the continuity of oral traditions in Simeulue Island faces challenges similar to those experienced by many indigenous traditions across Indonesia. Declining attention among younger generations has been influenced by various factors, most notably globalization. Giddens (2003) argues that globalization promotes the principles of modern culture, which can generate social problems and pose threats to human civilization. Through the spread of consumerist culture, globalization has contributed to social inequality, cultural conflict, and the emergence of new cultural forms. Moreover, globalization has weakened many traditional social structures and encouraged cultural homogenization, often at the expense of local values and group identities. This process poses a serious threat to the sustainability of local cultures, increasing the risk of cultural erosion and even extinction. While globalization facilitates mobility and access in various aspects of life, its negative implications for cultural continuity

are substantial. Beyond economic and technological domains, globalization affects cultural values and practices, including oral traditions that have been transmitted across generations as an integral form of local cultural heritage.

Recent developments in Simeulue Island indicate a declining awareness and practice of indigenous wedding traditions among local communities. Many families no longer possess adequate knowledge of the complete sequence of traditional Simeulue wedding rituals, resulting in the omission of several ceremonial stages that were historically inherited from their ancestors. In contemporary practices, wedding ceremonies often incorporate a combination of Acehnese, Minangkabau (Padang), and Western styles, rather than exclusively reflecting Simeulue traditional customs. Interviews with local community members reveal that these practices are largely influenced by prevailing trends introduced by migrant communities.

In response to this cultural shift, the local government has recently reaffirmed and promoted the existence of distinct Simeulue wedding traditions and customs. This initiative aligns with national cultural policy, as outlined in Government Regulation (PP) No. 20 of 2004, which acknowledges that globalization and advances in information and communication technology accelerate social change. Within such dynamic conditions, cultural development is expected to strengthen national identity grounded in Indonesia's noble values (Sinar, 2011). Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyze the core values embedded in Simeulue wedding traditions. The findings are derived from field research conducted through in-depth interviews with community elders and cultural practitioners who possess extensive knowledge of Simeulue customs and traditions.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the local wisdom embedded in the traditional marriage practices of the Simeulue community. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including traditional leaders (Azharuddin Agur, S.Pd; Chairil Anwar, M.Pd) and a former Head of the Tourism Office of Simeulue (Drs. Arsin Rustam). To strengthen data validity, the interview findings were supported by relevant written sources, including Makalah Meudrah (Azharuddin Agur, 2013) and Adat Perkawinan Etnis Simeulue (Dinas Kebudayaan Provinsi NAD, 2007). Fieldwork was conducted in Sinabang, East Simeulue. Initial visits were made to the Majelis Adat Aceh (MAA) office to obtain preliminary information regarding Simeulue traditions and to identify key informants. Direct observation of complete traditional wedding ceremonies was limited, as fully performed ceremonies are increasingly rare. Contemporary wedding practices tend to simplify traditional sequences due to time constraints and economic considerations. Consequently, data collection relied primarily on interviews and documentary sources to capture comprehensive information on the traditional wedding process.

DISCUSSION

3.1 The Local Wisdom in the Process of Wedding Tradition

The Simeulue community possesses a distinctive customary law system that governs various aspects of social life. This system encompasses a wide range of traditional practices, including house construction rituals, Khanduri Laot (sea feast), Khanduri Blang (agricultural feast), Shalawat Ahae (prayers for fields and farmland), Marompak (post-harvest rituals), and Turun Mek Uwik (a ceremony marking the cutting of a baby's hair after forty days). In addition, Simeulue cultural life is enriched by diverse forms of traditional arts and performances, such as Rafa'i Debus, Nandong, Malangum, Silat Gelombang, Angguk, Tari Silongor (a dance symbolizing efforts to protect rice fields from birds), Tari Mangasila (a dance depicting salt-making activities), and Tari Pedang (Sword Dance). This study focuses specifically on the ritual of traditional marriage in Simeulue and seeks to reveal the philosophical values embedded within it. The traditional marriage process consists of four main stages: Manutuk Anak Ameen, Lak O si Falu-falu, Manaek En Tando, and Baralek. Each stage embodies forms of local wisdom that promote social harmony, mutual respect, and peace within the community.

a. *Manutuk Anak Ameen*

In the past, this stage marked the initial step of the traditional wedding process in Simeulue; however, in contemporary practice, it is performed only in a few remote areas and by a limited number of community members. The ritual functions as a preliminary inquiry into the character and family background of the prospective bride. It is typically conducted by the mother of the prospective groom and his female relatives, who discreetly observe the daily life of the bride candidate and her family to gain an authentic understanding of her personality. This practice is guided by the local philosophy Lao-lao Mahawali Uwek Singa Ma Matan Bao, which can be translated as "walking around to find water from its original spring." Philosophically, the expression emphasizes the importance of seeking purity and authenticity, symbolizing the desire to ensure that the prospective daughter-in-law possesses genuine moral qualities rather than superficial traits. The observers intentionally avoid announcing their presence to witness natural behavior in everyday settings.

The ritual reflects a broader concern for the long-term sustainability of marriage and serves as a moral lesson emphasizing good manners, courtesy, and politeness as enduring personal qualities. The gradual omission of this stage has reduced communal attention to character formation within families, potentially leading to a shift toward temporary or performative behaviors rather than deeply rooted moral habits.

b. *Lak O Si Falu-falu*

This stage represents the formal visit of the prospective groom's family to the parents of the prospective bride. During this visit, the groom's family brings traditional offerings, including bananas and sticky rice, which symbolically represent sweetness and intimacy

between the two families. Bananas signify sweetness, while sticky rice symbolizes cohesion and unity. In addition, the visitors carry taung si abang-abang (a small bag) containing betel leaves, which culturally signify harmony and peace. The ceremonial exchange reflects the understanding that marriage serves as a medium for uniting two extended families. Upon arrival, the guests are welcomed with the greeting “Angame fesang ahi” (“Here come our brothers and sisters”), to which they respond “Ngang ahi” (“Yes, brothers and sisters”). The bride’s family, typically represented by the father, expresses acceptance through the phrase “Mata bilik bak duwon dilungkop, mata luhan bak duwon dijungar,” which conveys openness and hospitality, symbolizing that no barriers are placed between the two families. Following the welcoming ritual, both families engage in a formal discussion regarding the next stage of the marriage process, namely the engagement. If mutual agreement is reached, the engagement is formally witnessed by family trustees, including Lulu (maternal relatives), Amarehet (paternal relatives), traditional leaders, and other close family members on an agreed date.

c. *Manaek En Tando (Formal/Adat Engagement)*

In Simeulue wedding traditions, the engagement process consists of two stages: Rasam Engagement (informal engagement) and Adat Engagement (formal engagement). Rasam Engagement is conducted based on a verbal agreement between the families of the prospective bride and groom, without the exchange of dowry or symbolic items as formal binding elements. In contrast, Adat Engagement represents a formal commitment to proceed with the marriage and includes discussions regarding the dowry and the timing of the wedding ceremony. This stage is referred to as Adat Engagement because it involves the participation of traditional leaders. During this process, the groom’s family, accompanied by customary leaders, formally proposes to the bride’s family and brings symbolic offerings, including taung si itok-itok (a small bag made of pandanus fiber) containing betel leaves and taung si abang-abang (a larger bag) containing katupek (rice wrapped in coconut leaves formed into various shapes). In this context, betel leaves symbolize peace, while katupek represents prosperity.

d. *Baralek*

This stage begins with the practice of malaulu, a ritual visit to maternal uncles to inform them of the forthcoming wedding and to invite them to attend and offer their blessings to the bride and groom. In the past, this stage was accompanied by an Inai ceremony, during which the bride’s hands and feet were decorated with henna at the uncles’ residence. The bride and her family would stay overnight at the lulu’s house, participating in communal celebrations that reinforced kinship ties. In contemporary practice, however, this tradition has largely disappeared. Relationships between extended family members, particularly between nieces and uncles, are no longer as close as they once were, and values of mutual belonging and respect within the extended family have diminished. Economic considerations are frequently cited as reasons for omitting this stage. Historically, such celebrations were held after harvest periods, when families relied

on available resources such as rice, coconuts, fish, and local produce rather than monetary wealth. These gatherings were not perceived as wasteful but as expressions of gratitude, happiness, and social harmony among extended family members. The stage concludes with the symbolic act of returning the bride to her parents' home while being carried on the back of her uncle. This gesture signifies the uncle's affection and responsibility toward his niece, symbolically treating her as his own daughter and reinforcing the moral values of kinship and care within the Simeulue community.

During the main wedding ceremony, the bride and groom are formally married by officials of the Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama / KUA). As the majority of the Simeulue population is Muslim, the marriage is conducted according to Islamic law through the *ijab kabul*, a formal exchange of marital consent between the groom and the bride's guardian. Upon completion of the *ijab kabul*, the couple is officially recognized as husband and wife and prepared for the subsequent ceremonial stages. Following the marriage contract, preparations are made for the ceremonial seating of the bride and groom. The bride is escorted by her parents to be dressed in traditional wedding attire, while the groom is taken by the *teulangkee* to his home or a nearby borrowed house to wear the *Rajo Sahari* costume. During this interval, the host family prepares a communal meal arranged according to customary order under the guidance of traditional leaders.

The groom is then ceremonially escorted back to the bride's house, accompanied by traditional drumming instruments, *angkum* and *kedang*. Upon arrival, the bride's family greets the procession with the customary expression, "*Naiklah si marapulai kami, iko janjangnyo*," which is answered by the groom's entourage with "*Itaya ek matan bilik iye tuo, tolong mi buka kajib?*" ("Who is behind the door? Please open it."). This exchange initiates a ritual dialogue containing moral advice and philosophical reflections on life, carefully composed to express mutual respect.

In this ceremony, language holds a role that extends beyond hospitality and ritual performance, serving as a medium for transmitting cultural values and ethical guidance. Through this process, the bride and groom are formally acknowledged as *ausarumpun* (a married couple), no longer *pinang sebatang* (single individuals), marking their new social status within the Simeulue community (Munthasir, 2007).

2.2 Local Wisdom Reflected in Wedding Ornaments

An important finding of this study is the widespread tendency among the Simeulue community to adopt wedding customs originating from migrant cultures rather than maintaining their own indigenous traditions. Contemporary wedding practices frequently incorporate Acehnese, Minangkabau (Padang), and Western-style attire—locally referred to

as “sleyer,” characterized by a white gown and headscarf worn by the bride—rather than traditional Simeulue dress. In response to this cultural shift, traditional leaders, representatives of the Majelis Adat Simeulue, officials from the Tourism Department, and community members concerned with the preservation of Simeulue heritage, in collaboration with Dharma Wanita, have initiated efforts to standardize Simeulue cultural expressions. These initiatives include the development of standardized Simeulue batik motifs, traditional foods, wedding ornaments, and bridal attire. Within this broader cultural revitalization effort, the present paper focuses specifically on Simeulue wedding ornaments and traditional dress.

Wedding Ornaments :

Simeulue wedding ornaments share several visual similarities with Acehese wedding decorations; however, distinct differences can be observed, particularly in the form of the domes positioned above the bridal seats. These domes convey strong religious symbolism, reflecting the Islamic values embraced by the majority of the Simeulue community. Golden-colored domes are generally perceived as more prestigious than multicolored ones and are typically used by families with higher social status or prominent roles within the community. While the overall color palette resembles that of Acehese wedding ornaments, a distinctive feature of Simeulue wedding stages is the presence of six colorful pillars located behind the bridal seats. Each color carries specific philosophical meaning: green represents religious leaders; yellow symbolizes traditional leaders; red signifies community leaders or commanders; white reflects respect for law and justice; black represents intellectuals; and pink symbolizes the richness and beauty of Simeulue customs. In addition, the carpet used on the wedding stage is predominantly blue, symbolizing the surrounding ocean that characterizes Simeulue Island and reflects the community’s close relationship with the maritime environment (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Simeulue Wedding Stage. Makalah Meudrah (2013).

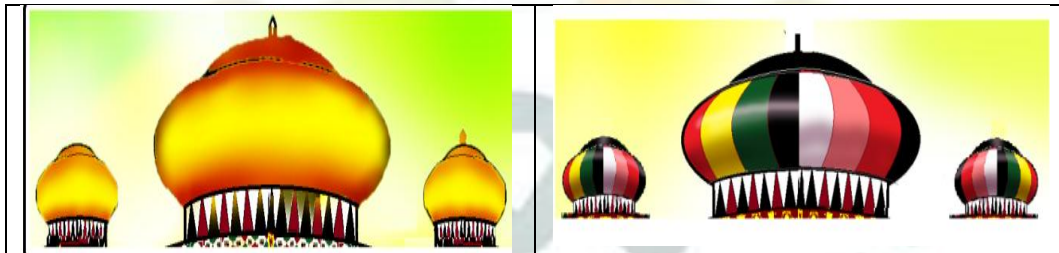


Figure 2: Dome of the Bride Seats. Makalah Meudrah (2013)

The detailed wedding stage ornaments and their associated symbolic values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Symbolic Meanings of Ornaments in the Simeulue Wedding Stage

FORMS	FUNCTIONS	VALUES
Mata Barambang 	The sun-shaped form symbolizes a source of life, signifying marriage as the foundation for prosperity and continuity in the future.	Peace: Positive thinking Prosperity: Motivation for success
Mata Lolak 	The eye motif represents collective vision, symbolizing pride and leadership within the Simeulue community	Peace: Guiding principles for ways of life and patterns of thinking

Mata Empat 	The four-sided eye motif represents collective awareness and mutual cooperation within the Simeulue community.	Peace: Togetherness in harmony prosperity: Mutual cooperation
Mata Sembilan 	The nine-eye motif symbolizes cultural diversity, reflecting the harmonious coexistence of nine ethnic groups in Simeulue	Peace: Social solidarity Prosperity: Mutual cooperation
Mata Kaok Alian 	The Kalok Alian (centipede) motif symbolizes protection and security, reflecting the community's belief in safeguarding harmony from external threats.	Peace: Protect and anticipate from any hazards and conflicts
Mata Tapak Itik 	The duck-eye motif symbolizes vigilance and carefulness, emphasizing the importance of performing even small actions with diligence and responsibility	Prosperity: Discipline Work hard
Mata Lidah-Lidah 	The tongue-shaped motif represents ethical speech, emphasizing politeness and mindfulness in verbal communication.	Peace: Politeness

CONCLUSION

The traditional marriage process in Simeulue Island, which consists of four main stages—Manutuk Anak Ameen, Lak O si Falu-falu, Manaek En Tando, and Baralek—embodies substantial values of local wisdom for peace, including politeness, gratitude, honesty, harmony, and social solidarity. In addition, these stages reflect values of local wisdom for prosperity, particularly mutual cooperation and togetherness in harmony. Furthermore, the ornaments used in the Simeulue wedding stage convey profound philosophical meanings associated with peace, such as ethical conduct, social cohesion, collective pride, positive ways of life and thinking, and a strong awareness of protection and anticipation against potential hazards and social conflict. At the same time, they symbolize values of prosperity, including motivation for success, discipline, hard work, and mutual cooperation as foundations for collective well-being.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that Simeulue traditional marriage practices represent a rich repository of local wisdom that contributes to both social harmony and sustainable prosperity. Therefore, it is recommended that all stakeholders, particularly local government institutions and cultural preservation bodies, actively encourage the revitalization of Simeulue indigenous wedding traditions. Such efforts may include promoting local cultural identity among younger generations, integrating cultural education into formal and informal learning contexts, and disseminating information through various media platforms. Preserving and revitalizing these traditions is essential to counter the assumption that modern wedding practices are inherently superior and to reaffirm the cultural values embedded in Simeulue heritage.

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