



Innovation in tradition: the shifting function of Acehnese wedding stage from marriage reception to customary ritual as a mechanism of cultural inheritance



Lindawati ^{a,1,*}, Syakir ^{a,2}, Ponimin ^{b,3}, Eko Sugiarto ^{a,4}

^a Universitas Negeri Semarang, Faculty of Language and Arts, Doctoral Program of Art Education, Semarang-Indonesia

^b Universitas Negeri Malang, Faculty of Literature, Department of Art and Design, Malang-Indonesia

¹ lindawati@students.unnes.ac.id^{*}; ² kirmuharrar@mail.unnes.ac.id; ³ ponimin.fs@um.ac.id; ⁴ ekosugiarto@mail.unnes.ac.id

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

The Acehnese wedding stage has undergone changes in terms of shape and decoration, which is also accompanied by a shift in its function. This research aims to explore the shifting functions of the Acehnese wedding stage, which is typically used during wedding receptions but is now also employed in several traditional events, serving as an educational medium. The method used in this research is a descriptive-analytical approach with a qualitative orientation. Research data were collected through in-depth interviews with auction business owners and traditional leaders, observation of Acehnese wedding ceremonies, and documentary studies. Data were analyzed through the stages of reduction, data presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing. The research findings identified that there are three main functions of Acehnese wedding stages: first, as a reinforcement of cultural identity in rituals such as circumcision and seven months of pregnancy; second, as a socio-political representation that symbolizes local pride in welcoming guests of honor and other public contexts; and third, as an educational instrument in museums and tourism settings for cultural preservation and transmission. The findings highlight Aceh's cultural resilience by positioning the wedding stage not only as a passive visual culture but as an active medium that adapts to contemporary realities. These findings form the basis of recommendations for policymakers in designing cultural preservation strategies that are adaptive and contribute significantly to the survival of traditional cultural heritage for future generations.



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1. Introduction

Acehnese culture is one of the heritages of the archipelago's civilization, rich in philosophical, spiritual, and social values. One cultural element that holds a significant position in Acehnese society is the wedding stage, which traditionally serves as a symbolic centerpiece in wedding ceremonies. The Acehnese wedding stage not only reflects high aesthetics and craftsmanship, but also serves as a marker of status, tribal identity [1], and religious and cultural values [2] held dear by the people of Aceh. Acehnese wedding stages are typically decorated with gold thread embroidery or *kasab* on red, yellow, and green fabrics [3]. The colors contained in the *kasab* represent the social status of traditional Acehnese society, ranging from yellow, symbolizing the king, to red, as *hulubalang* or commander, and green, as *ulama* [4]. In today's global era, the form of Acehnese wedding stages has begun to change quite rapidly, especially in terms of shape and decoration. This is almost the case in all regions in Indonesia; the characteristics of traditional wedding stages are rarely used.

Acehnese wedding stages are no longer limited to the context of wedding receptions, but have expanded into various socio-cultural domains. Its existence can be found in various traditional events, such as circumcision and the seven-month tradition that marks the seven-month phase of pregnancy, as well as in state contexts, such as welcoming honored guests. In addition, the wedding stage is also presented as a permanent or semi-permanent installation in public spaces such as museums, Aceh Customary Council (MAA) offices, Religious Affairs Offices (KUA), and airports. This functional transformation reflects a dynamic cultural adaptation mechanism, where the wedding stage not only survives but also evolves in response to the demands of the times, while opening new channels for the transmission of traditional values to future generations. However, behind this adaptive flexibility, a critical question arises regarding its symbolic integrity: whether the essence of the cultural meaning attached to the wedding stage has been preserved intact, or has actually experienced reduction and simplification along with the shift in context and function.

Previous studies on Acehnese wedding stages have provided an important foundation by focusing on the symbolic dimensions and meanings of the ornamentation contained therein [5], [6], as well as examining its structure and physical form as an expression of material culture [7]. Some researchers have also examined the Wedding stage's response to modernization [6] and its design transformation through the lens of Islamic aesthetics [8]. Based on a review of previous studies, a research gap was identified, namely the absence of an in-depth exploration of the shifting function of the Acehnese wedding stage as a cultural inheritance mechanism in the context of non-marital traditional rituals. This research aims to address this gap by presenting a new perspective that views the shift in function not as a form of weakening or degradation of cultural meaning, but as an adaptive mechanism of a dynamic and contextual cultural strategy. This research aims to identify the shifting functions of the Acehnese wedding stage, which is not only used during wedding receptions, but also used in other traditional events. This makes the wedding stage function as an educational medium in introducing the cultural traditions of the Acehnese people. Through this article, a comprehensive understanding of Acehnese cultural adaptation strategies can be obtained in responding to changing times without losing its identity. The results of this research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the discussion of cultural sustainability and become a consideration for policymakers in designing relevant and contextual cultural preservation programs.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analytical methods [9]. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the phenomenon of shifting functions and meanings of Acehnese wedding stages as a cultural inheritance mechanism. This research was conducted in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, which were adjusted to accommodate the location of the wedding stage. Data collection techniques were employed through three primary methods. First, observations were made in various contexts where Acehnese wedding stages were used, including traditional events (weddings, seven-month celebrations, circumcision), installations in public spaces (museums, airports, government offices), and guest-welcoming events. These observations focused on documenting the physical form of the wedding stage, the social interactions surrounding it, and the context in which it was used. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten key informants who were purposively selected based on their expertise in understanding Acehnese wedding stages, including two traditional leaders, two wedding stage artisans and business owners, two cultural experts, two museum staff members, and two staff members from the Aceh Customary Council. The interviews were guided by a list of open-ended questions designed to explore the meaning, reasons behind the shift in function, and perceptions of cultural preservation. Third, documentation studies were conducted by analyzing supporting documents, including photographs, archives, local regulations, and articles discussing Acehnese wedding stages, to track changes and developments that have occurred over time. This research was conducted from March to May 2025.

The data collected is then analyzed interactively using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model [10], which involves three stages of activities carried out simultaneously: data

reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification [Fig. 1]. This model emphasizes that qualitative data analysis is a cyclical and interactive process, where the three components are closely intertwined and influence each other during the research process. The choice of this analysis model is based on its ideal suitability for processing complex qualitative data on cultural transformation; it provides a systematic framework through three stages that allows researchers to simplify rich narrative data without losing in-depth context. The initial step was to observe the wedding stages installed in several research locations and to obtain the wedding stages from the documentation of the wedding stage business owner. This process was accompanied by questions and answers with informants regarding the existence of the wedding stage. Several wedding stages are installed in offices without being dismantled (permanent), and some are used for traditional events that can be seen through photos, because the wedding stage is temporary. The second step of the reduced data is presented in the form of a structured descriptive narrative to facilitate the identification of the shift in the function of the wedding stage. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn through the interpretation of the findings presented, a process that continues during the analysis.

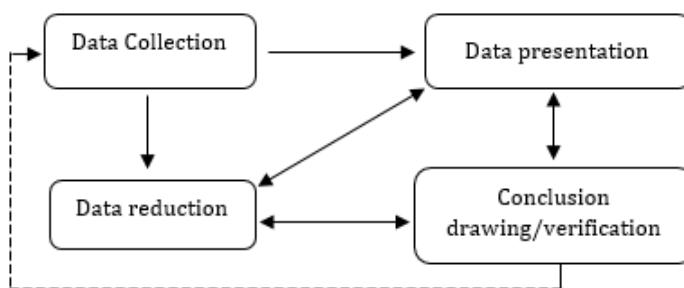


Fig. 1. Qualitative analysis by Miles and Huberman

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed triangulation techniques in accordance with the principles proposed by Guba and Lincoln [11]. This approach is carried out through two primary forms: source triangulation and method triangulation [12]. Researchers met with auction business owners, traditional leaders, museum staff, and traditional assembly staff to gather data on the use of wedding stages for purposes other than wedding receptions. The three informants confirmed that several traditional events utilized wedding stages. However, some used wedding stages as a whole; there were only some structures from the wedding stages used, such as for the seven-month event, only using curtains, daloeng, tika duek, and pillows. While related to the use of wedding stages in several agencies, this is better understood by museum staff, traditional assembly groups, and wedding stage makers, as they are directly involved in this matter. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were compared and verified to ensure the validity of data collected through different methods. This process not only ensures the accuracy and robustness of the data but also enriches the context of interpretation, allowing researchers to construct a more holistic and in-depth understanding of the transformation of the Acehnese wedding stage's function. The application of triangulation not only ensures the credibility of the findings but also enhances the contextual generalizability and reliability of the analysis [13], ultimately contributing to the internal validity of the research and its relevance in academic discussions on cultural resilience and adaptation.

3. Results and Discussion

This research reveals that the Acehnese wedding stage no longer functions singularly in the context of marriage, but has undergone significant diversification of functions in response to socio-cultural changes. This transformation is also an adaptive strategy in maintaining the relevance of Acehnese culture in the contemporary era. The transformation can be classified into three main aspects. First, the diversification of functions and their contexts of use in an increasingly broad socio-cultural realm. Second, identifying the driving factors that influence the shift in meaning and function. Third, the role of the Acehnese wedding stage as an innovative and adaptive cultural inheritance mechanism. These three subsections will systematically

describe how the wedding stage not only survives but also develops into a relevant medium in maintaining Acehnese cultural values in the midst of changing times. The Acehnese wedding stage (Fig. 2) features a characteristic design element, highlighted by the gold thread embroidery that adorns the construction, utilizing distinctive colors such as red, yellow, and green. In Mainur's research [6], [7], it is explained that Acehnese wedding stage consists of 20 elements of the wedding stage structure, namely *tabeng* (curtain), *langet-langet* (ceiling), *biku-biku* (biku tassels), frame, *ayu-ayu* (ayu tassels), *sepre duek* (bench bed sheet), pole, *boh kelambu* (mosquito net fruit), *pinto gadong* (gadong door), *dalansi* (backcloth), *tika duek* (sitting mat), *guleng tampok* (long bolster), *aneuk tangga* (stairs), tie, *bantai kursi* (seat cushion), *seuhab* (serving layer), *kipah* (fan), *ayu-ayu daloeng* (serving tassels) and *tutop daloeng* (serving cover). Along with the development of the times, several Acehnese wedding stages no longer use some of these elements. This is also caused by the numerous wedding stage business owners who offer a variety of wedding stage decorations. Therefore, the strategic placement of the Acehnese wedding stage in museums, airports, Religious Affairs Offices (KUA), and the Aceh Customary Council (MAA) ensures its continued accessibility and scholarly appreciation, despite its diminishing prevalence in contemporary wedding ceremonies.



Fig. 2. Acehnese wedding stage

3.1. Diversification of Functions and Contexts of Use of Aceh Wedding Stages

Observations and interviews identified five new contexts for using Acehnese wedding stages outside marriage. First, in traditional ceremonies such as circumcision and seven-month celebrations, the wedding stage serves as a marker of the importance of the life cycle and a reinforcement of cultural identity. Second, in ceremonies to welcome honored guests (officials), such as the reception of important guests, the wedding stage becomes a symbol of honor and regional pride, placed in the regional head's hall and at Sultan Iskandar Muda Airport. Third, in the context of museology, wedding stages displayed in museums (such as the Aceh Museum) have transformed from functional objects to cultural heritage objects with educational and historical value. Fourth, in institutional spaces such as the Aceh Customary Council (MAA) office and the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), the wedding stage is a marker of identity and a cultural icon that convey messages about Aceh's local wisdom to the public. Fifth, in a commercial-tourism context, the wedding stage becomes a visual attraction that supports the promotion of culture and the creative economy, displayed at the Aceh Cultural Week (PKA) event held every five years.

Based on Table 1, the Acehnese wedding stage has undergone a significant expansion of functions, extending beyond its core properties in the wedding ceremony. Academically, this phenomenon can be understood through the theory of structural functionalism, which posits that a cultural artifact develops new roles to maintain its relevance in a dynamic society [14]. The function of the wedding stage can be categorized into three main domains. First, the customary function, where the wedding stage is used in life cycle rituals, such as circumcision ceremonies and seven-monthly events, plays an important role in strengthening social cohesion and cultural identity. Second, the socio-political function is demonstrated through its use in

welcoming guests of honor (*peusijuek*) [15], [16] at the regent's pavilion and Sultan Iskandar Muda Airport, where traditional symbols are adapted for modern protocol and the representation of power. Third, the function of education and preservation, where the presence of wedding stages in museums, cultural platforms (PKA), KUA, and MAA transforms them from ritual objects into museological artifacts for the documentation and transmission of cultural knowledge. The expansion of this function shows the flexibility of the wedding stage as a cultural symbol in responding to and integrating with contemporary needs.

Table 1. Function of Acehnese Wedding Stages

Event	Description	Use of the Wedding Stage	Function
Circumcision Ceremony	A celebration for a boy who is about to be circumcised.	The wedding stage used is smaller than that used for wedding receptions	Used in traditional ceremonies
Seven-Month Ceremony	A seven-month ceremony for the birth of the first child.	The platform used is not complete, only curtains, a mat, pillows, and a <i>daloeng</i>	Used in traditional ceremonies
Wedding stage at the KUA	Placed in the room used for wedding ceremonies at the KUA	The wedding stage used is intact, but slightly smaller than usual	Wedding documentation tools
The wedding stage in the Regent's Hall	Used during the welcoming ceremony for important figures	The wedding stage used is a <i>Keuta</i> , the traditional wedding stage of West Aceh.	Reception of guests (<i>peusijuek</i>)
Wedding stage at Sultan Iskandar Muda Airport	Used during the reception of important figures	Complete Acehnese wedding stage with all its accessories	Guest reception (<i>peusijuek</i>)
Wedding stage at the Anjungan	Documentation and educational facilities	A complete Acehnese wedding stage set up on the platform during the PKA event	Documentation and education
Wedding stage at MAA	Placed in a room that serves as a documentation of Acehnese wedding stages	The wedding stage used is relatively small	Documentation and education
Wedding stage at the museum	Documentation and educational resources	The wedding stage used was a <i>Keuta</i>	Documentation and education

3.2. Factors Driving Functional Shifts

Data analysis revealed that changes in the function of the Acehnese wedding stage did not occur spontaneously but were influenced by the complex interaction of various factors. The results of this study identified three main factors for the diversification of the Acehnese wedding stage's function. First, internal cultural factors, including the existence of collective awareness among traditional stakeholders and cultural experts, play a crucial role in preserving the wedding stage through the dynamization of its function, thereby preventing it from being eroded by changing times. This effort is not only reactive to the threat of extinction, but also a form of proactive cultural authority from traditional leaders. They strategically transform the meaning and use of the wedding stage from a ritual to a broader context, encompassing the realms of visual arts, education, and identity representation. For example, in West Aceh District, the wedding stage is no longer just part of the wedding procession. However, it is also integrated into the P5 program (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project), a co-curricular program within the Merdeka Curriculum that aims to develop students' characters and competencies in accordance with Pancasila values through a project-based learning approach [17]. In this activity, students made wedding stage curtains in groups. This kind of initiative demonstrates that preservation is not only achieved through preservation, but also through creative contextualization and reactualization. Thus, the wedding stage manages to maintain its relevance without losing its cultural essence.

Second, external factors such as globalization and the development of tourism also encourage this diversification. The tourism industry's demand for cultural representations that are easily recognizable and have visual appeal encourages the transformation of [18] such as Acehnese wedding stages into more flexible cultural icons. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of cultural economy, where traditional artifacts experience a commodification process that actually extends their cultural life cycle [19]. At PKA activities, Acehnese wedding

stages are installed on each district platform, displaying the characteristics of each region. This attracted local and even national tourists to visit each platform to take pictures on the wedding stage. This transformation is not only physical, but also involves a shift in value from sacred to secular profane, [20] which is adapted to the context of tourist consumption. Therefore, the wedding stage functions as cultural capital that not only attracts tourists but also serves as a medium for cultural diplomacy [21], projecting Aceh's identity, which remains rooted in tradition.

Third, political-institutional factors play an important role through government policies and customary institutions. The local government actively makes the wedding stage as part of a cultural strategy to strengthen Aceh's Islamic and cultural identity. The implementation of this policy is not only symbolic. However, it is supported by a comprehensive institutional framework through Qanun No. 9 of 2008 concerning the Development of Customary Life and Customs, Qanun No. 10 of 2009 concerning Customary Institutions, and Qanun No. 8 of 2019 concerning the Aceh Customary Council, which is the legal basis for the existence of custom in Aceh [22]. These local regulations (*Qanun*) specifically mandate the protection of traditional cultural expressions, including wedding stages. Educational institutions, such as Syiah Kuala University, also play a role by integrating the study of the wedding stage into the scientific work of students in the form of a thesis, thus creating a link between tradition preservation and academic innovation. Through this multi-sectoral approach, the wedding stage is not only preserved as a static artifact but also developed as a living culture that continues to adapt to contemporary socio-political dynamics, thereby strengthening the narrative of a unique and sustainable identity

Based on Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration [23], the diversification of the function of the Acehnese wedding stage can be understood as the result of a dialectic between agency and structure, where traditional elites and cultural experts as knowledgeable agents reflectively utilize authoritative and allocative resources to transform the meaning and function of the wedding stage, while structures include traditional norms, government regulations as well as the pressures of globalization and tourism not only limit but also empower agents through a framework of legitimacy and innovation opportunities, thus creating a dynamic process where the wedding stage is not only reproduced as a traditional cultural symbol but also creatively adapted in a contemporary context without losing the essence of its fundamental values.

3.3. Acehnese Wedding Stage as an Innovative Mechanism for Cultural Inheritance

The findings of this research suggest that the shift in function is not merely a utilitarian change, but an innovative cultural inheritance mechanism. The resemanticization process that occurs from the sacred meaning of rituals to identitarian symbolic meanings actually allows the core values of Acehnese culture, such as *ulee balang* (wisdom), *syarak* (sharia), and *adat* (tradition), to be passed on to the younger generation through more diverse channels and in accordance with the current context [24], [25]. The presence of a wedding stage at the airport, for example, provides a constant visual reminder of cultural identity for Acehnese youth who are increasingly exposed to global culture. Thus, this innovation in tradition demonstrates that cultural preservation does not have to be rigid, but can be achieved through creative adaptation without compromising the essence of its value.

The Acehnese wedding stage as an innovative cultural inheritance mechanism is a significant study in understanding how local cultural traditions can be maintained and developed in a changing modern context. The Acehnese wedding stage not only serves as an aesthetic symbol in the wedding ceremony, but also as a medium of cultural communication that embodies the historical, social, and spiritual values inherent in Acehnese society. This function makes the wedding stage a vehicle for transmitting the noble values of Acehnese culture to the younger generation, so that the tradition is not only a static heritage, but also alive and relevant in contemporary life. Within the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural inheritance [26], the concepts of habitus and cultural capital are particularly relevant for analyzing this phenomenon. Habitus, as a dispositional system that shapes the mindset and behavior of individuals in society [27], allows Acehnese wedding stages to become symbolic representations of cultural identities that are passed down from one generation to the next. This

is as conveyed by the owner of the wedding stage business, where almost all *kasab* craftsmen and businesses in the wedding stage field have been passed down from generation to generation, either from their parents or closest relatives.

Cultural capital, in this case, encompasses philosophical and technical knowledge about the wedding stage, as well as objectified wedding stages that are physical artifacts, and is institutionalized through socially recognized customary legitimacy and authority. It is strategically transmitted from one generation to the next. This process does not simply transfer heirlooms, but also reproduces habitus, namely a system of dispositions, values, and practical logic that upholds and preserves customs in the heirs. This capital serves to strengthen the identity of the Acehnese community as well as an innovative tool in maintaining the sustainability of local culture in the midst of globalization as done by several auction business owners who make modified auction [28], by combining traditional and modern elements, such as the use of *kasab*, which is modified by the use of wood carvings and floral decorations, so that the auction remains relevant and attractive to the younger generation without eliminating the traditional values contained in it. Thus, the Acehnese wedding stage is not only an aesthetic symbol but also an important instrument in the process of adaptive and innovative cultural inheritance.

The Acehnese wedding stage, as a cultural inheritance mechanism, not only maintains traditional values but also contains elements of innovation that reflect the evolving social and cultural dynamics of the Acehnese people. This innovation is evident in various aspects, including the design of the wedding stage, which has undergone aesthetic modifications with a contemporary touch, and the selection of materials that are more diverse and environmentally friendly. This approach aligns with Everett Rogers' theory of cultural innovation, which posits that cultural innovation occurs through the processes of adoption, diffusion, and adaptation [29], [30]. This process enables traditions to remain alive and relevant in a society undergoing social and technological change [31]. Acehnese wedding stages now often incorporate lighting and audio-visual technology to create a more engaging and interactive atmosphere, which was previously not found. This transformation demonstrates that the Acehnese wedding stage is not a static cultural heritage, but a dynamic cultural practice that continues to evolve creatively. Innovation in Acehnese wedding stage plays an important role in preventing cultural stagnation, while strengthening the appeal of local culture to remain relevant and attractive to the younger generation in an increasingly complex global context.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that the Acehnese wedding stage has undergone a significant transformation from its traditional function as the centerpiece of wedding decorations to a multifunctional cultural symbol that reflects the cultural resilience of the Acehnese people. The research findings reveal three main functions in this evolution: strengthening cultural identity through various life cycle rituals, representing socio-political values in state events, and educational functions in the context of museums and tourism. This transformation is driven by the internal dynamics of cultural awareness, the external pressures of globalization, and the support of government policies that collectively create an adaptive space for the preservation of cultural heritage. The theoretical implications of this research enrich the discourse of cultural anthropology by offering a perspective that the diversification of traditional cultural functions is, in fact, a strategic mechanism for ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage in the contemporary era. Practically, the findings provide a framework for policymakers to formulate an adaptive cultural preservation strategy, which focuses not only on preserving physical forms but also on developing a context of meaning relevant to the needs of modern society. However, this research has methodological limitations, specifically in its descriptive qualitative approach, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Based on these findings, it is recommended that future research develop a mixed-methods approach that combines in-depth qualitative analysis with quantitative data to map the distribution and variation of the transformation of wedding stage functions across various regions of Aceh. In addition, it is necessary to develop an integrative model that facilitates collaboration between indigenous communities, educational

institutions, and the tourism sector in designing culture-based preservation programs that can adapt to changing times without losing the essence of local wisdom.

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