

Cultural Memory as a Line of Defense in Preserving Cirebon's Multicultural Identity

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Article History

Received:

19-04-2026

Revised:

14-05-2026

Accepted:

21-05-2026

Available online:

30-05-2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of material culture in preserving multicultural identity of the Cirebonese through the lens of cultural materialism, emphasizing the influence of physical infrastructure on cultural values and how material culture objects are internalized into cultural memory to sustain a shared identity. Using qualitative methods, data collection involves observation, interviews, and documentation to identify objects representing multicultural values. The findings reveal that Cirebon's culture stems from its historical ethnic diversity, influenced by its geographical location as a coastal trade hub since the 14th century. The establishment of an Islamic kingdom in the 15th century further shaped society, merging pre-existing Hindu cultural elements with Islamic traditions and those of Chinese and Arab traders. Material culture, including architecture, places of worship, and art, reflects and reinforces this multicultural heritage. These elements serve as carriers of cultural memory, preserve multicultural values, and act as a "line of defense" in maintaining cultural identity on a global scale.

Keywords: cultural memory, material culture, multicultural, cirebonese, social identity

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran budaya materi dalam melestarikan identitas multikultural masyarakat Cirebon melalui lensa materialisme budaya, dengan menekankan pada pengaruh infrastruktur fisik terhadap nilai-nilai budaya dan bagaimana benda-benda budaya materi diinternalisasikan ke dalam memori budaya untuk mempertahankan identitas bersama. Metode kualitatif dipilih untuk pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi dengan mengidentifikasi objek-objek yang merepresentasikan nilai-nilai multikultural. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa budaya Cirebon berasal dari keragaman etnis historisnya, yang dipengaruhi oleh lokasi geografisnya sebagai pusat perdagangan pesisir sejak abad ke-14. Pendirian kerajaan Islam pada abad ke-15 semakin membentuk masyarakat, menggabungkan unsur-unsur budaya Hindu yang sudah ada sebelumnya dengan tradisi Islam dan tradisi para pedagang Cina dan Arab. Budaya materi, termasuk arsitektur, tempat ibadah, dan seni, mencerminkan dan memperkuat warisan multikultural ini. Elemen-elemen ini berfungsi sebagai pembawa memori budaya, melestarikan nilai-nilai multikultural, dan bertindak sebagai "garis pertahanan" dalam mempertahankan identitas budaya pada skala global.

Kata kunci: Memori budaya, budaya materi, multikultural, cirebon, identitas sosial.

A. INTRODUCTION

a Cultural memory is a crucial component in shaping a society's identity (Drozdewski et al., 2019). The development of societal identity relies on the strength of historical values and the extent to which regional culture influences the lives of its people (H. Chen & Tao, 2017). Through collective knowledge, cultural memory contributes to cultural preservation by enabling communities to reconstruct and transmit their cultural identity across generations (Liao & Dai, 2020). Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as the collective process by which communities maintain and remember their past through symbols, rites, texts, artifacts, and cultural practices (Zhdanov, 2023).

The concept of cultural memory is studied to illustrate the presence of historical contexts and social events as frameworks that shape intergroup relations within society (Loo, 2020; Rudling, 2020; Uvaisovna et al., 2024; V. Vodenko et al., 2020). Cultural memory studies are often linked to cultural heritage, highlighting objects that foster collective memory (Aronsson & Price, 2024; M. Chen, 2024; Rahman, 2020; Zheng et al., 2023).

Over time, cultural memory has increasingly been applied to analyze the role of collective memory in multicultural societies (Guiping, 2024; King, 2016; Ulvik, 2010; Weger, 2018; Zhdanov, 2023). However, studies of cultural memory in multicultural settings often focus on socio-political events, such as migration and non-material culture, while one of the essential factors shaping multicultural societies, physical or material culture also warrants examination (Heersmink, 2023).

According to Samovar (2014), multicultural societies emerge because community members, while rooted in their original culture, are also influenced by global culture. As a result of these two cultural forces, communities engage in exchange that are not confined by spatial or historical boundaries. Consequently, a community's culture does not exist in isolation; rather, it is shaped by interactions with other communities, which influence its beliefs and practices (Ruja, 2017). This dynamic fosters open-mindedness, encouraging people to understand other cultures and providing fresh perspectives and values that promote multiculturalist principles within society (Youl Hong, 2023).

Analyzing the construction of cultural values in multicultural societies through collective memory (life experiences) is essential to understanding the present state of harmony or conflict within these communities (Ramdhani, 2018). Thus, the purpose of this research is to show how material culture, as an expression of multicultural identity, plays a part in building collective memory in plural communities. Accordingly, the study examines both the historical trajectory of multicultural identity and the ways material culture reinforces cultural memory, with Cirebon serving as the case study.

Cirebon is a city in West Java, Indonesia with a rich multicultural community shaped by the influences of Sundanese, Javanese, Indian, Arabic, and Chinese cultures (Dienaputra et al., 2021). The contributions of these ethnic groups have given rise to a unique Cirebonese culture, visible in various physical elements, including historic architecture, houses of worship, art forms, and traditional cuisine (Rosmalia & Prasetya, 2017). The material culture of Cirebon represents the multicultural life established in the early

formation of the Cirebon community, much of which has been preserved and further developed into a distinctive local identity (Humaedi, 2013).

At present, Cirebonese identity is increasingly challenged by the commodification of culture-based tourism, spatial pressures on heritage areas, and the weakening regeneration of traditional material-cultural practices (Agustina et al., 2023; Kartika et al., 2022). These conditions risk reducing Cirebon's multicultural heritage from a living social memory into a market-oriented symbol.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach, aiming to explore the role of cultural memory (material culture) in preserving the multicultural identity of the Cirebon community. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, utilizing tools such as voice recorders, cameras, and field notes (Creswell, 2013). To obtain comprehensive data, this study involved multiple categories of informants. Several historians (6 informants) and cultural experts (2 informants), both those focusing on ancient manuscripts and those producing contemporary scholarly works on Cirebon. In addition, discussions were held with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to capture their views on how material culture contributes to collective awareness and the appreciation of cultural diversity.

Government representatives from the Dinas Kebudayaan Pariwisata Kota Cirebon (Disbudpar), West Java, Indonesia, including the head of department and staff members, were also consulted to obtain policy-oriented insights. From the community level, religious leaders engaged in social and religious activities and familiar with the development of Cirebon society were invited as key informants. Their close interaction with local residents enabled them to identify relevant characteristics and to recommend other potential informants (Spradley, 2007). In addition, meetings with historians, cultural practitioners, and community representatives enriched the data by showing how material culture continues to serve as a medium of cultural memory in Cirebon. These engagements also provided perspectives on whether the city is widely perceived as a socially and religiously harmonious region.

Alongside interviews, field observations were carried out and recorded in detailed field notes (Spradley, 1980). These observations, combined with interview data, allowed the researcher to better understand how cultural memory shapes the identity of a multicultural society and to directly examine material culture that fosters social cohesion. Documentation such as photographs, newspapers, academic articles, and online media was also used to complement data that could not be obtained directly from the informants.

Data validity was ensured through triangulation, following Creswell's (2013) recommendation to corroborate evidence from different sources and methods. In this study, information from historians, cultural experts, government representatives, religious leaders, cultural practitioners, and community members was compared with data from field observations and documentation. Member checking was also conducted with selected

key informants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations, while thick description was used to present the cultural and social context of Cirebon in detail.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cirebon and its Historical Background

Cirebon community emerged from prolonged social interactions over time. Initially, Cirebon area was divided into coastal regions, known as Cirebon Larang, and inland regions, called Cirebon Girang, both of which were thought to have relatively homogeneous populations (Dienaputra et al., 2021). Over time, however, the coastal area of Cirebon Larang began attracting migrants, as coastal areas with ports were especially favorable destinations for traders from other regions and nations (Rosidin & Syafa'ah, 2016).

The first wave of migration to Cirebon brought residents from surrounding areas, particularly those of Sundanese and Javanese descent. This aligns with the socio-political context of the time, as Cirebon was situated between the Sunda and Javanese kingdoms (Hendro, 2014). In the second wave of migration, people arrived from regions beyond the archipelago, including India, China, and Arabia. Geographically, Cirebon's position between Sundanese and Javanese cultures contributed to the development of a distinct cultural identity Cirebonese culture (Arovah, 2018).

Cirebon's cultural advancement became more prominent when it was transformed into a locus of Islamic political power through the rise of the Sultanate. The Sultanate of Cirebon was founded by Pangeran Cakrabuwana (son of the king of the Padjadjaran Kingdom) and later expanded by Syarif Hidayatullah, also known as Sunan Gunung Djati, from the 15th century onward, establishing Cirebon as a significant center of Islamic power in Java (Dienaputra et al., 2021)

Pangeran Cakrabuwana and his family developed the area formerly known as Tegal Alang-Alang into a settlement, inhabited by both his descendants and immigrants. What was once a natural environment gradually developed into a settlement and trading hub, especially known for commerce and the shrimp paste trade, while also serving as a site for Islamic dissemination that drew scholars from across the archipelago and abroad. Through these activities, Tegal Alang-Alang transformed from a natural landscape into an area interwoven with cultural functions, including residences, markets, and places of worship (Humaedi, 2013).

The most significant cultural transformation in Cirebon occurred during the rule of the Cirebon Sultanate under Sunan Gunung Jati, from 1479 to 1551 (Rosidin & Syafa'ah, 2016). During this period, development interventions in Cirebon were aimed primarily at supporting the spread of Islam. These interventions included both physical and non-physical modifications, which later became defining elements of the Cirebon cultural landscape (Rosmalia & Prasetya, 2017).

Non-physical elements in Cirebon's cultural landscape include traditional rituals practiced by the Cirebonese, most of whom are associated with one of the royal palaces in Cirebon. Rituals are often performed in sacred spaces, such as Kasepuhan Palace, Kanoman

Palace, Kacirebonan Palace, and other significant palace sites. These traditional rituals, rooted in Cirebon's Islamic heritage, carry cultural significance linked to the period when Islam was being established and propagated in Cirebon and throughout Java (Humaedi, 2013; Koesoemadinata, 2013).

Rituals as non-physical cultural elements are closely related to physical elements (Aronsson & Price, 2024). The sacredness of Cirebonese rituals, such as mask dances and the sintren, is underscored by the physical elements and attributes that support these practices. These physical elements have developed into forms of material culture, embedding meanings that contribute to the collective memory of the local community (Heersmink, 2023). Furthermore, Cirebon's material culture, which emerged from the blending of ethnic groups that settled in Cirebon in the 15th century, has been shaped by both geographical and sociological factors.

a) Geographical Aspects

Cirebon's diverse geographical landscape includes coastal areas (*Cirebon Larang*), lowlands, and hilly regions (*Cirebon Girang*), shaping the socioeconomic patterns of its population. In the coastal regions, particularly in the north and east, most residents work as fishermen, reflecting a strong Javanese-Cirebon cultural influence, as seen in the widespread use of the Javanese-Cirebon language. Similarly, the lowland areas in the west and north are closely associated with Javanese-Cirebon culture.

In contrast, the hilly areas in the south and parts of eastern Cirebon, where agriculture dominates, are more connected to Sundanese-Cirebon culture. These cultural distinctions, despite being within the same administrative region, are shaped by ethnic and district boundaries. Northern Cirebon borders Indramayu and Brebes, regions with strong coastal Javanese cultural ties, while the western and southern areas border Majalengka and Kuningan, which are predominantly influenced by Sundanese culture. This geographical positioning makes Cirebon a cultural crossroads between Sunda and Java, giving rise to the unique identity of "Orang Cirebon."

Cirebon's cultural identity is characterized by linguistic hybridity, blending Sundanese and Javanese elements into a distinct dialect that sets it apart from the Sunda Priangan region, historically represented by the Padjadjaran Kingdom. Historically, while Cirebon was part of Padjadjaran's territory, its strategic location as a trade hub in Muara Jati attracted settlers from the northeastern coast, transforming it into an early urban center with cultural diversity. In contrast, the western and southern hilly regions were more connected to agrarian Sundanese communities, though these areas have recently evolved into increasingly diverse residential zones. According to a local historian,

"Initially, the center of activity in Cirebon revolved around Muara Jati Harbor. According to the manuscript *Purwaka Caruban Nagari*, the arrival of outsiders occurred in several waves, progressively leading to the development and expansion of settlements around Muara Jati. Historical accounts suggest that many Chinese migrants settled in areas that are now part of Kuningan.

Similarly, people from surrounding regions in Cirebon also gravitated toward the harbor, drawn by opportunities related to trade and other economic activities.”

Furthermore, according to historical accounts, the settlement pattern in Cirebon, characterized by a blend of indigenous populations and foreign migrants, persisted for centuries. This harmonious mingling began to change with the arrival of the Dutch East Indies administration, which implemented policies that stratified the social structure based on ethnicity. These policies significantly impacted social relations, particularly between the indigenous Sundanese-Javanese population and the Chinese community, leading to increasingly exclusive settlement patterns concentrated around trade centers.

Despite these changes, Cirebon's strategic geographical location continued to shape its identity as a region accustomed to cultural diversity. The long history of coexisting with cultural differences, further enriched by the arrival of foreign communities, has left a lasting influence on the city. Many of these communities eventually settled around the port area, contributing to the cultural fabric of Cirebon. Evidence of their presence remains visible today through historic buildings and other physical elements that have been preserved. Several of these historical structures have been designated as cultural heritage sites by the government, serving as collective reminders of Cirebon's rich cultural history, which reflects contributions from diverse societal elements.

b) Sociological Aspects

The establishment of the sultanate system in Cirebon has had a profound and lasting impact on the culture of its people. Beyond introducing a societal structure deeply rooted in Islamic principles, Sunan Gunung Djati, the leader of the Cirebon Sultanate, demonstrated a remarkable sense of tolerance toward individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. According to a historian interviewed during this research, several ancient monasteries and temples in Cirebon were constructed with the explicit permission of Sunan Gunung Djati to accommodate the needs of Chinese migrants who had settled in the area,

“... Sunan Gunung Djati granted permission, at the request of Ong Tien's bodyguard, Ong Tien being Sunan Gunung Djati's wife to establish a place of worship for non-Muslims. Moreover, Sunan Gunung Djati provided materials, including teak wood, to support the construction of the temples or monasteries (*Klenteng or Vihara*) that remain visible in Cirebon today.”

A caretaker of one of the old monasteries in Cirebon confirmed that the establishment of the monastery, which has been guarded for many years, cannot be separated from the influence of early sultanate leaders,

“...there is no historical record of opposition to the establishment of a monastery in Cirebon, despite the fact that the majority of the population at the time had already embraced Islam and were living under the rule of an Islamic kingdom”.

In the early days of the Chinese community in Cirebon did not lead to exclusivity in settlement patterns. Instead, they integrated with the local population, choosing to build their homes in close proximity to indigenous residents. Over time, this prolonged coexistence allowed them to adapt to the local culture while simultaneously externalizing elements of their own culture, which were then embraced by the local population. This cultural exchange is evident in various aspects, such as architectural styles, arts, and culinary traditions. This process of acculturation extended beyond the general community to the sultanate itself. The architecture of Cirebon's first palace, Pakungwati, along with its historic mosques, exhibits a unique blend of cultural influences. These structures incorporate elements from the various ethnic groups residing in Cirebon, combined with Islamic cultural expressions, reflecting the religion of the Cirebon Sultanate.

A notable example of Cirebon's material culture that epitomizes its multicultural identity is the architecture of the palace complex. Visually, the complex reflects the integration of Hindu-Buddhist elements with Sundanese-Javanese, Chinese, and Arabic influences, representing the pluralistic cultural and religious landscape during the early days of its establishment. Sociologically, these conditions suggest that the sultanate leadership accommodated the diverse values of its people whether based on ethnicity or religion while maintaining the Islamic identity of the kingdom as the official religion.

Cirebon as a Multicultural Society

Cirebon emerged from prolonged interactions between various nations, driven primarily by economic interests. Geographically located in a strategic coastal area, Cirebon served as an accessible gateway for traders and merchants seeking a safe and peaceful port. As is typical of coastal communities, Cirebon's openness to the arrival of foreign cultures established it as a significant and relatively harmonious trade hub.

According to the Nagara Krethabumi manuscript (1670), which documents the history of Cirebon society, there is evidence that Cirebon was a pluralistic community even before the spread of Islam in the region. Sociologically, the multicultural nature of Cirebon society became more pronounced with the influx of foreign populations during the era of the Cirebon Sultanate. The manuscript records that in the 15th century, Cirebon was frequented by individuals from Arabia, India, and China, fostering cross-cultural interactions that significantly influenced local culture.

This historical blending of cultures is reflected in the etymology of the name "*Caruban*," derived from a word meaning "mixture," which symbolically represents the deep cultural integration process that defined the region. As explained by cultural experts, these cross-cultural exchanges not only enriched Cirebon's identity but also solidified its reputation as a melting pot of diverse traditions and beliefs.

"...The naming of Cirebon has two versions. The first comes from the words *cai* (water) and *rebon* (small shrimp). That's because since long ago Cirebon was abundant with small shrimps as ingredients for making shrimp paste, which was allegedly a tribute when it was still under Galuh (Padjadjaran) rule. But the

more plausible origin of the name is from the word caruban, which means mixture (Informant 1, 2023)”

The interactions in Cirebon during its formative period facilitated exchanges in both economic and political realms. These interactions also led to cultural acculturation and mutual tributes as a form of political diplomacy among the leaders of various kingdoms. Consequently, Cirebon's culture evolved into a society with a distinctive cultural identity, shaped by the convergence of diverse influences, including Javanese-Demak (Majapahit), Sundanese (Padjadjaran), Arab, and Chinese cultures.

One significant indication of Cirebon's multiculturalism since the early stages of its civilization is the existence of material cultural products with foreign origins. Archaeological evidence, such as architectural elements in mosques and other cultural artifacts, demonstrates the integration of diverse cultural elements. These historical traces reinforce the multicultural nature of early Cirebon society, as documented in the Nagara Krethabumi manuscript. This manuscript highlights the diversity of Cirebon's population, comprising individuals from various nations as early as the 15th and 16th centuries (Sudjana, 1987).

The exploration of material culture in Cirebon can be observed in tangible forms, including architectural structures and artifacts, many of which are now preserved in the museums associated with the royal palaces (keraton) of Cirebon. The development of a multicultural society in Cirebon is categorized into two distinct eras: the Sultanate era and the Colonial era.

a) Sultanate Era

Before the Sultanate era, the Muara Jati Port area in Cirebon was already inhabited, with a fishing village mentioned in the 14th-century manuscript Purwaka Caruban Nagari. Under the leadership of Ki Gede Alang-Alang who was appointed by the ruler of Galuh, the village engaged in trade with foreign ships. Prince Walangsungsang, the ruler's son, served as Adipati Cirebon, but local authority was limited under the Hindu-Buddhist influence of the Galuh Kingdom (Hendro, 2014).

A turning point came when Prince Walangsungsang and his sister embraced Islam. Following this, he founded Keraton Pakungwati, which marked the rise of Cirebon as an Islamic kingdom separate from Galuh. With the expansion of Muara Jati Harbor, Cirebon became a hub of cultural interaction, welcoming Arab Muslims and Chinese merchants. This interaction facilitated cultural exchanges and significantly influenced the local elite, contributing to the spread of Islam and Cirebon's independence (Kusliansyah & Ramadhan, 2012). The Cirebon Sultanate was first ruled by Prince Cakrabuwana, and later by Syarif Hidayatullah, better known as Sunan Gunung Djati, who consolidated his position through his union with Nyi Mas Pakungwati.

The Sultanate's architecture reflected Hindu-Buddhist influences, seen in the iconic gate designs, blending local traditions with Islamic culture. Acculturation extended to Chinese influences, particularly through Sunan Gunung Djati's marriage to Ong Tien, a Chinese noblewoman. This union fostered cultural and religious tolerance,

symbolized by landmarks like the Dewi Welas Asih Temple, built in 1595. Inter-marriages and cultural integration further enriched Cirebon's identity, marked by a blend of Chinese, Arabic, and local traditions.

As Cirebon society evolved during the pre-colonial period, there was a notable increase in inter-marriages between different nationalities (amalgamation) and the integration of settlements. This blending of communities led to a strong infusion of Chinese and Arabic cultural elements into the lives of Cirebon's coastal population (Dienaputra et al., 2021). Consequently, Cirebon's cultural identity became characterized by its rich acculturation, creating a distinctive blend of traditions that set it apart from other regions.

b) Colonial Era

Cirebon's history is deeply intertwined with the influence of the Dutch East Indies, which shaped its infrastructure and cultural landscape. The presence of numerous colonial buildings near Muara Jati Port serves as tangible evidence of Dutch influence, highlighting their economic interests in the region. Cirebon's strategic location made it a vital trade route in the eastern part of West Java. In the 17th century, the Dutch gained control over the politics and economy of the Sultanate of Cirebon, transforming the port into the central hub of their operations. During this period, Cirebon became a key supplier of trade commodities such as rice, sugar, and wood, supporting both regional and international markets (Humaedi, 2013). By 1927, the Port of Cirebon underwent modernization with significant infrastructure advancements (Wahyu Iryana et al., 2023).

The Dutch East Indies officially established a presence in Cirebon in 1906, recognizing it de facto as part of the Cirebon Prefecture (*gemeente*). This recognition brought spatial and administrative changes that reflected the urban planning characteristics of the Dutch colonial era. The influence of international trade, combined with Dutch control, directed Cirebon's urban and political development. These interventions led to significant shifts in governance, beginning with the establishment of *Gemeente Cheribon* (1926), its reclassification as Kota Praja (1957), and its eventual designation as a Municipality (1965), a status it retains today (Kusliansyah & Ramadhan, 2012).

As a result of these influences, Cirebon underwent significant changes in architectural style, local economy, and lifestyle. The sugar and tobacco industries became major sources of economic income for the Dutch East Indies Government. The growing international demand for sugar commodities led to an expansion in the cultivation and processing of sugarcane, transforming traditional agricultural practices into commercial crop production, particularly for sugarcane and tobacco (Jayanto, 2016). A key factor that elevated Cirebon's importance in the Dutch East Indies economy was its port, which had long served as a gateway for Southeast Asian trade (Faturohman, 2016).

The development of Cirebon's old city accelerated significantly during the early 19th century under the leadership of Governor-General Daendels (1808–1811), who deliberately included Cirebon in the Anyer-Panarukan project. This initiative led to the construction of the De Groote Postweg road network (1808–1811), which established a vital transportation link. Later, the introduction of a railway system further enhanced Cirebon's connectivity by linking it with other major cities across Java. These developments solidified Cirebon's status as a transit city, fostering industrial and trade growth in the Dutch East Indies (Hendro, 2014).

Even beyond the era of the Sultanate and the Dutch East Indies, Cirebon continues to serve as a critical transit city, connecting the populous regions of Central Java to the east and Jakarta to the west. This strategic position has driven the city's rapid infrastructure development, underscoring its ongoing importance in facilitating economic and social connectivity across Java.

Multicultural Identity in Material Culture (An Acculturation)

Material culture within an ethnic group is deeply intertwined with the meanings of activities and the cultural values that shape and sustain it. It serves as a tangible representation of identity, constructed from the social realities experienced by the group. In the case of Cirebon, its pluralistic nature has fostered a social reality built upon centuries of shared life experiences and intercultural interactions.

The governance under the kingdom at that time was attentive to these social realities, embedding cultural and symbolic meanings into the design and function of buildings and artifacts. This intentionality in material culture reflects not only the needs of daily activities but also the multicultural identity of the region. Key examples of physical or material cultural elements that embody this multicultural identity include the Paksi Naga Liman, Singa Barong, and the *Masjid Merah Panjunan* (Red Mosque).

a) Paksi Naga Liman

Paksi Naga Liman is a ceremonial chariot of the Kanoman Palace, believed to have been crafted in 1428 (Arofah, 2022). This chariot symbolizes Cirebon's multicultural identity, encapsulating the convergence of three major cultural influences that shaped the region. The Paksi (bird/Burok) represents Islamic culture, the Naga (dragon) symbolizes Chinese culture, and the Liman (elephant) reflects Hindu cultural elements.

Historical records suggest that the Paksi Naga Liman has existed since the early days of the Cirebon Kingdom. According to informants and historians, an inscription (cendra sengkala) on the neck of the chariot indicates the year 1350 Saka, or approximately 1428 AD. This date ties its origins to the Singhapura Kingdom during the reign of Ki Gedeng Tapa Jumajan Jati. Over time, the chariot underwent reconstruction to preserve its form and significance. The reconstruction, ordered by Prince Losari, was executed under the supervision of the field architect Ki Gede Kali Wulu.

Synchronically, the Paksi Naga Liman transcends its physical form to serve as a mythical figure imbued with deep symbolic and philosophical meanings. It represents

the concept of *triloka*, or "three worlds": the Upper World (Paksi), associated with spirituality and transcendence; the Lower World (Naga), symbolizing the imaginative and subconscious realms; and the Middle World (Liman), representing the material and immanent reality (Effendi, 2019). The enduring influence of the Paksi Naga Liman myth is evident in its integration into various aspects of traditional and modern Cirebonese culture. Its imagery appears in batik motifs, kris ornaments, glass paintings, and even stamp designs, demonstrating its significance in shaping the social and cultural patterns of the Cirebon community to this day. Effendi (2019) further elaborates that historically, the Paksi Naga Liman symbolizes the acculturation of three major cultures that influenced the governance of the Cirebon Kingdom: Islamic culture from Egypt, Hindu culture from India, and Confucian culture from China. This cultural synthesis is reflected in the anatomical features of the Paksi Naga Liman, each representing one of these influences.

b) Singa Barong

Second, the Singa Barong, a ceremonial chariot of the Kasepuhan Palace in Cirebon created in 1549 by Panembahan Losari, the grandson of Sunan Gunung Jati, founder of the Sultanate of Cirebon holds deep historical significance, with a replica constructed in 1996 (Masruri et al., 2023). Like the Paksi Naga Liman, the Singa Barong carries a distinctive hybrid design combining the arms of an elephant, the head of a dragon, the wings of a bird, and the body of a Buroq, that symbolizes the cultural fusion of Cirebon with Indian, Chinese, and Arabian influences (Effendi, 2023).

The chariot's design, which combines elements of mythical creatures, reflects a cosmological worldview and embodies the acculturation that characterizes the cultural and decorative arts of Cirebon (Sofiyawati, 2017). Beyond its role as an heirloom, the Singa Barong embodies profound symbolic meaning as a work of cultural artistry imbued with religio-magical values, reflecting its deep ties to spiritual and cultural traditions. (Yudoseputro, 2008).

The use of the lion motif on the Singa Barong warrants further study to determine whether it draws from Hindu-Buddhist decorative arts or represents the lion imagery familiar within the Chinese community (Masruri et al., 2023). According to Sofiyawati (2017), historical developments in the 16th century suggest that Chinese decorative arts began to significantly influence material culture in Cirebon during this period. Stylistically, the lion on the Singa Barong chariot differs markedly from the lion motifs typically associated with Hindu-Buddhist decorative arts. This distinction supports the perception that the lion motif on the Singa Barong reflects Chinese artistic influences. Further reinforcing this view is the chariot's use of necklace-like adornments, resembling those commonly seen on Chinese lion sculptures.

c) Panjunan Red Mosque

The Panjunan Red Mosque exemplifies a fusion of three major cultural influences: Hindu-Buddhist (Mataram Kingdom), Islamic, and Chinese (Hendro, 2014). This multicultural heritage is reflected in the mosque's architectural elements, including red

brick construction and ornamental ceramic plates adorning its walls, which together give the mosque its distinctive name.

Founded in 1480 by Syarif Abdurrahman, also known as Pangeran Panjunan, a sheikh from Baghdad, the mosque was established as a center for Islamic proselytization. Syarif Abdurrahman, a key figure in the spread of Islam in Cirebon, was entrusted by Prince Cakrabuwana, the founder of the Sultanate of Cirebon, to aid in religious and cultural integration (Hermana, 2012). The Panjunan Red Mosque also holds historical significance as a site of authorization for the Wali Songo—the nine saints who played a pivotal role in the spread of Islam throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

Visually, the mosque reflects pre-Islamic Hindu-Javanese heritage, particularly evident in its gate design. This architectural style, featuring red brick construction, is commonly seen in other historic sites in Central Java, such as Demak and Kudus. The use of red brick not only ties the mosque to its Hindu-Javanese roots but also serves as an enduring symbol of Cirebon's architectural identity. Additionally, the mosque's roof design demonstrates a blend of Hindu-Javanese and Chinese architectural elements, bearing similarities to the Sang Cipta Rasa Mosque located in the Kasepuhan Palace (Kartika et al., 2020). The Panjunan Red Mosque stands as a symbol of multicultural identity intentionally embedded in its design since its construction. Its architecture serves as a testament to Cirebon's rich history of cultural integration and reflects the multicultural character of its community from its early development.

Building on the framework that material culture serves both functional and symbolic roles within human activity systems, the Panjunan Red Mosque exemplifies the intersection of function and cultural value. As an architectural work, the mosque was constructed during the early days of the Sultanate of Cirebon and has always served as a place of worship. Its role in facilitating worship activities, such as prayer, reflects its functional integration into the community's activity system. Simultaneously, the architectural design of the Panjunan Red Mosque embodies local knowledge and cultural identity, symbolizing the values and characteristics of the Cirebon community during its formative period.

From Material Culture to Cultural Memory

Material culture plays a significant role in the construction, preservation, and transformation of cultural memory, bridging historical legacies and modern experiences within diverse social settings. The significance of material culture extends beyond local contexts, as it shapes collective identities and fosters intercultural understanding globally. Studies such as those by Heersmink (2023) and Zhdanov (2023) highlight the importance of material culture in fostering conversations about cultural diversity, particularly in multicultural environments. This resonates with the case of Cirebon, where material artifacts like the Panjunan Red Mosque serve as carriers of collective memory and symbols of cultural amalgamation. However, the themes present in the Cirebon study also align with global research, emphasizing the broader relevance of material culture in preserving

multicultural identities. At the same time, these objects may function as platforms for fostering mutual understanding and tolerance among diverse cultural groups (Ruja, 2017).

Harris's theory emphasizes that changes in cultural infrastructure, including shifts in technology, production, and the material objects of culture can profoundly influence the structure and ideologies of a society (Lett, 2007). In multicultural settings, shifts in the material culture such as the adoption of new technologies, changes in architectural design, or evolving food production methods can lead to changes in social structures and cultural values, creating spaces for new, more inclusive identities and make it a collective memory. For instance, research in China (H. Chen & Tao, 2017; M. Chen, 2024), Malaysia (Loo, 2020), Canada (Guiping, 2024; Rudling, 2020), and Norway (Ulvik, 2010) demonstrates how the adoption of shared material culture facilitated integration so that it becomes a collective memory. Similarly, in Southeast Asia, evolving food production and architectural practices reflect the continuous negotiation of cultural identity within diverse communities, as seen in the acculturation processes in Cirebon, Indonesia.

Moreover, the concept of cultural mnemotechnics, as posited by Assmann (Zhdanov, 2021), provides a theoretical lens to examine the role of material culture in transmitting collective memory. This is evident not only in the Panjunan Red Mosque but also in artifacts like Paksi Naga Liman and Singa Barong, which, despite their diminished functional use, remain integral to Cirebon's cultural ceremonies. These features not only highlight the cultural acculturation among Javanese, Chinese, and Islamic influences but also provide insight into the social and cultural dynamics of the period. In this context, the Panjunan Red Mosque functions as a medium for preserving and transmitting cultural memory, representing the multiculturalism inherent in the identity (Goyal et al., 2020; Zhdanov, 2023). Comparable examples can be found in other contexts which preserve traditional religious and cultural practices while serving as repositories of collective memory. The enduring relevance of these structures demonstrates the universal importance of material culture in anchoring societal values and fostering cultural continuity (Jones, 2007).

The interconnection between material culture and identity is further explored in studies on diaspora communities, where material objects often become symbols of cultural preservation and negotiation. For instance, Kuo (2018) discuss how diasporic communities use traditional forms to maintain ties to their cultural heritage while adapting to new environments. This aligns with findings from Cirebon, where material artifacts both preserve the community's multicultural identity and foster a sense of belonging within a broader societal framework. The values embedded in the building physical design transcend their immediate historical context, becoming part of a broader value system for the community (Zhdanov, 2023). This value system remains enduring as long as the physical structure continues to function within its intended activity system and retains its symbolic and cultural integrity (Harris, 2001).

Cultural memory's function as a "line of defense" against cultural homogenization is increasingly relevant in the context of globalization. As noted by (Hall, 1997), global

interconnectedness often risks eroding local identities, making the preservation of material culture crucial for sustaining unique traditions and values. This also relates to how cultural memory serves as a medium for fostering an inclusive perspective in a multicultural society (Ruja, 2017). In parallel, Cirebon's material culture not only embodies historical multicultural interactions but also serves as a strategy for safeguarding its identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Cultural memory, therefore, arises from the internalization of activity systems and value systems as expressed through material culture (Heersmink, 2023). It persists because these material artifacts remain present and meaningful in contemporary society. Furthermore, the values represented by these artifacts continue to be communicated and understood within the community, reinforcing their significance as symbols of identity (Liao & Dai, 2020). The preservation and transmission of these values through cultural memory play a crucial role in safeguarding the identity of the Cirebon community.

Overall, material culture is not just a set of physical objects but a vital element in understanding the social structure and cultural memory of a society. Marvin Harris's material culture theory helps us to see the intimate relationship between material culture, activity systems, and value systems in shaping societal life (Harris, 2001). In multicultural contexts, material culture plays a pivotal role in constructing collective identities, celebrating diversity, and preserving cultural memory, which are all integral to the historical and lived experiences of a community.

From Material Culture to Cultural Memory

Material culture plays a significant role in the construction, preservation, and transformation of cultural memory, bridging historical legacies and modern experiences within diverse social settings. The significance of material culture extends beyond local contexts, as it shapes collective identities and fosters intercultural understanding globally. Studies such as those by Heersmink (2023) and Zhdanov (2023) highlight the importance of material culture in fostering conversations about cultural diversity, particularly in multicultural environments. This resonates with the case of Cirebon, where material artifacts like the Panjunan Red Mosque serve as carriers of collective memory and symbols of cultural amalgamation. However, the themes present in the Cirebon study also align with global research, emphasizing the broader relevance of material culture in preserving multicultural identities. At the same time, these objects may function as platforms for fostering mutual understanding and tolerance among diverse cultural groups (Ruja, 2017).

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D. CONCLUSION

Multicultural identity in Cirebon is cultivated through a collective consciousness, which is deeply reinforced by elements of material culture. These elements including historic architecture, places of worship, and art, reflect the influence of various cultures that have shaped the region. These material aspects function as carriers of cultural memory, fostering an inclusive worldview that emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural differences and preserving multicultural values within the community. This dynamic continues to thrive today, as cultural mnemotechnics (techniques for preserving cultural memory) demonstrate how material culture can unconsciously shape the consciousness and perspectives of individuals and groups, as long as the physical forms of these cultural artifacts remain intact. In this sense, material culture not only reflects the material life of society but also serves as a vital tool for maintaining and strengthening social ties and cultural identities. In a world that is increasingly globalized and diverse, cultural memory acts as a "line of defense" in preserving multicultural identity, ensuring that the unique values and traditions of the community are sustained for future generations.

In conclusion, material culture serves as a vital medium for safeguarding cultural memory while fostering intercultural awareness and understanding across the globe. The insights derived from the case of Cirebon align with international research, underscoring the universal significance of material artifacts in cultivating multicultural identities and connecting historical legacies with contemporary realities. As globalization increasingly poses challenges to local traditions, the scholarly examination of cultural memory remains indispensable for comprehending and sustaining the intricate cultural mosaics that characterize multicultural societies.

E. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia for the research project conducted during 2023-2024. This funding was instrumental in enabling the completion of this study.

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