



The Padashon Demban Tradition of 'Delivering Betel' in the Batak Simalungun Community: A Study of Local Wisdom

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Padashon Demban tradition, also known as the tradition of giving betel to the Batak Simalungun people. This tradition is a cultural heritage that still lives on today. This study aims to identify the symbolic meaning, social function, and cultural values contained in the practice of giving betel as part of the Simalungun community's way of life. This study employed a qualitative methodology and a descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews with traditional leaders and community members, and through literature research on various written sources on Simalungun traditions and culture. The study shows that Padashon Demban has various presentation forms, including Batu ni Demban, Demban Tugah-Tugah, Demban Tasakan, and Demban Gunringan. Each form has a unique purpose and meaning. This tradition embodies social, ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual values that emphasize the importance of respect, politeness, balance, and togetherness in community life. Betel is a symbol of goodwill, appreciation, and a way to strengthen social relationships and resolve problems peacefully. The Padashon Demban tradition demonstrates the strong cultural and moral values of the Batak Simalungun people. It is crucial to preserve this tradition so that future generations can recognize and practice the noble values that shape social harmony and the nation's cultural identity.

Keywords: Padashon Demban, Batak Simalungun community, local wisdom

Tradisi Padashon Demban 'Menyampaikan Sirih' pada Masyarakat Batak Simalungun: Kajian Kearifan Lokal

ABSTRAK

Dalam penelitian ini tradisi *Padashon Demban* yang juga dikenal sebagai tradisi menyampaikan sirih kepada orang Batak Simalungun dibahas. Tradisi ini merupakan salah satu warisan budaya yang masih hidup hingga hari ini. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi makna simbolik fungsi sosial dan nilai-nilai budaya yang terkandung dalam praktik penyampaian sirih sebagai bagian dari tata kehidupan masyarakat Simalungun. Studi ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi wawancara dengan tokoh adat dan anggota masyarakat dan penelitian literatur tentang berbagai sumber tertulis tentang tradisi dan budaya Simalungun. Studi menunjukkan bahwa *Padashon Demban* memiliki berbagai bentuk penyajian termasuk *Batu ni Demban*, *Demban Tugah-Tugah*, *Demban Tasakan*, dan *Demban Gunringan*. Setiap bentuk memiliki tujuan dan arti unik. Tradisi ini mengandung nilai-nilai sosial etika estetika dan spiritual yang menekankan betapa pentingnya penghormatan kesopanan keseimbangan dan kebersamaan dalam kehidupan masyarakat. Sirih adalah simbol niat baik penghargaan dan cara untuk mempererat hubungan sosial dan menyelesaikan masalah dengan damai. Tradisi *Padashon Demban* menunjukkan nilai-nilai budaya dan moral yang kuat dari masyarakat Batak Simalungun. Sangat penting untuk melestarikan tradisi ini agar generasi berikutnya dapat mengenal dan mengamalkan nilai-nilai luhur yang membentuk keharmonisan sosial dan identitas budaya bangsa.

Kata kunci: Padashon Demban, masyarakat Batak Simalungun, kearifan lokal

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has a rich culture and traditions. Each ethnic group has a culture that reflects the principles and way of life of its people (Riyadi et al., 2024). The Batak Simalungun people are one of the ethnic groups that still maintain their customs (Sinulingga et al., n.d.). The Simalungun people have many traditional ceremonies that demonstrate respect, politeness, and togetherness in their social life. Padashon Demban — the tradition of giving betel to guests as a sign of respect, intimacy, and brotherhood — is still alive and meaningful. In Simalungun customs, the Padashon Demban tradition is critical because it helps strengthen social relationships and maintain harmony among everyone. Betel is used at traditional events such as weddings and harvest festivals, and during the welcoming of guests, as a symbol of politeness and respect. This tradition demonstrates the value system implemented and maintained by the Simalungun people, thus becoming part of the cultural heritage that has social and moral functions (Damanik & Damanik, 2023a). Local wisdom is a type of indigenous knowledge in society that originates from cultural values that govern its social life (Ayyuhda & Karsiwan, 2020; Irsan et al., 2024.).

According to Sibarani, the concept of local wisdom emphasises the importance of maintaining social harmony and strengthening cultural identity through traditional cultural practices (Walad et al., 2025; Sulastri et al., 2025; Damayanti et al., 2013; ahyudiati & Fitriani, 2021). These values align with this concept. Therefore, Padashon Demban is not merely a traditional ceremony; it is a form of cultural education that instils moral values in the younger generation (Sugara & Perdana, 2021). However, the younger generation is beginning to view this tradition differently due to the impact of modernisation and globalisation. Many people view it as a mere ceremony, unaware of the local wisdom behind it. Consequently, research on Padashon Demban is crucial for understanding the

values of local wisdom and efforts to preserve it. This study emphasises that the Padashon Demban tradition plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity, strengthening social relations, and upholding the noble values of the Batak Simalungun people. This is done using Robert Sibarani's local wisdom theory (2012).

In this study, there are several problem formulations, namely:

First, what is the form of implementation and procession of the Padashon Demban tradition (delivering betel) in various social and customary contexts in the Batak Simalungun community?

Second, what is the symbolic meaning contained behind the use of Demban (betel) and other complementary elements in the Padashon Demban tradition for the Batak Simalungun community?

Third, what are the local wisdom values that are reflected and maintained through the Padashon Demban tradition in the socio-cultural life of the Batak Simalungun community?

Thus, the objectives of this study are: to describe in detail the form of implementation and procession of the Padashon Demban tradition in various traditional events of the Batak Simalungun community, to identify and analyse the symbolic meaning of Demban (betel) and its complementary elements in the Padashon Demban tradition, and to explore and explain the local wisdom values contained in the Padashon Demban tradition. The benefits of this research include: Cultural Documentation: Providing a credible written source on the Padashon Demban tradition, helping preserve the cultural heritage of the Simalungun Batak so that it does not become extinct or distorted over time. Symbol Study: Providing empirical data and in-depth analysis regarding the symbolism of objects (demban/betel) in traditional rituals, which can enrich theories regarding symbols and nonverbal communication in traditional societies.

Several previous studies that reference the Padashon Demban tradition of "delivering betel"



in the Simalungun Batak community: a study of local wisdom, include: "Local Wisdom of the Marharoan Bolon Tradition of the Simalungun Community: This study analyses the values of local wisdom (such as cooperation and solidarity) contained in the Marharoan Bolon (cooperation) tradition in Simalungun. It provides a socio-cultural context for Simalungun and an understanding of the types of local wisdom values generally maintained by the community, thereby facilitating the identification of values within the Padashon Demban (Damanik & Damanik, 2023b).

Symbols in traditional Simalungun Batak Wedding Ceremonies: Analyzing the signs and symbols (e.g., in Martumpol or Manggalar Adat) used in Simalungun traditional processions. This study assists in the semiotic analysis of the demban symbol and its placement in traditional processions, and emphasizes the important role of ritual objects in Simalungun traditional communication (Purba, 2018).

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth overview of the local wisdom values embodied in the Padashon Demban tradition among the Simalungun Batak community. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach (Sari et al., 2022; Bandur, 2014; Nurhayati et al., 2024; Razak, 2023).

Qualitative methods were used to achieve this goal. This method allows for an understanding of the Padashon Demban tradition as part of a series of values passed down through generations. Researchers can understand the symbolic meaning of the betel offering from the perspective of the community and traditional practices. Qualitative methods were used by another authors such as (Ramadhani & Hapsarani, 2025; Abdullah, 2024; Adjii & Intan, 2020).

Primary and secondary data are the two data sources used in this study. In addition to conducting interviews with traditional leaders, cultural

stakeholders, and community members who understand the meaning of the Padashon Demban tradition, primary data was collected through direct observation of the tradition's implementation. Secondary data, on the other hand, was collected from various sources, such as academic literature, books, and cultural archives related to Simalungun traditions and customs. Observations, interviews, and documentation were used to conduct the data collection process. After data collection, analysis was carried out through a process of reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Sibarani (2012) states that tradition is a form of local wisdom that helps maintain social harmony and strengthen the cultural identity of the community. He analyzed each finding using local wisdom theory. Therefore, this approach helps researchers understand the meaning and role of the Padashon Demban tradition as an example of the local wisdom of the Batak Simalungun people.

RESULT

Based on a general synthesis of related research, particularly those using the term Padashon Demban and the Simalungun context, the following conclusions can be drawn.

1. Context of Implementation

1.1 Mandatory in Custom

Padashon Demban or Manurduk Demban is a mandatory and inseparable part of almost all essential traditional ceremonies of the Simalungun people, such as:

- 1) Marriage (Marhajabuan)
- 2) Customary deliberation (Martonggo Raja or Manriah Raja)
- 3) Giving advice (Hata-hata Mambere Podah)
- 4) Funeral ceremonies (Marujung Goluh).

Message Delivery: This tradition always precedes or accompanies the delivery of critical oral messages, advice (Podah), or the expression of the intent (intention) of an event.

2. Key Procession

Prosesi kunci dalam Padashon Demban or Manurduk Demban dideskripsikan berikut ini:

- 1) Opening Communication Tool: Sirih (Demban) is presented as the opening for formal customary communication. Without the demban, the conversation is considered not serious or legally valid.
- 2) Betel Nut Set: Demban is served with its accessories (lime/appuran, areca nut, gambier, tobacco), which are usually placed in a special container (kampil or other container).
- 3) Symbol of Approval: If demban is accepted, chewed, or exchanged, it symbolizes the agreement or seriousness of the parties involved to continue the conversation or ritual.

3. Symbolic Meaning of Demban

Research shows that betel nut (Demban) is not just a treat, but also has deep symbolic meaning:

First, honour and respect. This symbol has a meaning:

- 1) Padashon Demban is a form of the highest respect for guests or Tondong (respected relatives). Serving betel nut shows the host's respect for the recipient's presence and traditional status.
- 2) Betel nut symbolises permission to begin a traditional conversation or negotiation.

Second, symbol of goodness and courage. This symbol has a meaning:

- 1) The red color of chewed betel quid symbolizes courage and honesty in conveying intentions.
- 2) The warm and spicy taste of betel quid symbolizes the spirit and strength to live life.

Third, symbol of unity and harmony. This symbol has a meaning the whole components of Betel: Each betel quid has a role (betel quid, lime, areca nut, gambier), and when chewed together,

they produce a single taste and color. This symbolizes unity (unity of determination) and harmony (agreement) among all relatives (Tolu Sahundulan Lima Saodoran).

4. Values of Local Wisdom Contained

The Padashon Demban tradition serves as a medium for instilling and preserving a number of local wisdoms (noble values) of Simalungun:

First, Kinship Values. This type of local wisdom contains the following values strengthening Tolu Sahundulan Lima Saodoran: The Demban is used to emphasize and honor the role of each kinship element (such as Tondong, Boru, and Sanina). This tradition serves to strengthen kinship ties between clans.

Second, values of vommitment and honesty. This type of local wisdom contains the following values the Demban symbolizes a solemn promise or commitment. Everything agreed upon after the Padashon Demban is considered a decision that must be upheld. In Simalungun philosophy, there is an expression that implies that a debt problem can be resolved with just a single betel leaf, demonstrating the high value of betel leaf as a symbol of a promise.

Third, values of politeness and respect (Martondur). This type of local wisdom contains the following values this tradition reflects polite communication (Martondur). There are strict procedures for presenting and receiving betel, which teach mutual respect, unhurriedness, and respect for the deliberation process.

Fourth, values of safety and prayer (religious). This type of local wisdom contains the following values in some rituals, the demban is used as an offering or prayer medium to ask for blessings, safety, and good fortune for the celebrants. Chewed betel can even be smeared on the betel as a blessing (among communities who have not fully embraced modern religions), demonstrating its religious/ritual value.



DISCUSSION

Furthermore, according to Sibarani (2014), local traditions possess ethical, moral, and social values that shape the community's character. According to this theory, the Padashon Demban tradition falls into the category of local wisdom, containing ethical (politeness), social (togetherness), and spiritual (respect for God's creation through natural symbols such as betel leaves, lime, areca nut, and gambier) values. In reality, the Simalungun people recognise various Demban or ways of serving betel, each with its own unique purpose and meaning. First, Demban Sayur—an unfolded betel leaf filled with gambier, lime, and areca nut. This form is used as a sign of welcome or daily interaction. Second, Demban Gunringan is a five-layered betel leaf bundle wrapped in a taruk leaf (palm leaf). In wedding customs, this is usually worn with a dowry (partading or boli). In addition, Demban Tasakan is a betel filled with tobacco, which is given to parents as a form of respect after the stem is cut.

There is also the Demban Pinarbuhulan, or Panurungi, which is used as medicine at the advice of a healer or datu. This demonstrates that the Demban has social, medical, and spiritual value. The Demban Tugah-Tugah has a deeper meaning. When a girl runs away with her chosen young man without her parents' blessing, this Demban is used as a form of apology or to convey an intention. In this case, betel leaves are placed on a plate covered with tinapak banana leaves and accompanied by money called Panindih Demban. The father receives four betel leaves, while the mother receives three. This number symbol represents respect and balance between the two parents. However, the Demban Tangan-Tangan is betel given directly to someone without the Panindih Demban. On the other hand, the Demban Borkasani and Demban Gualan are presented in a more interesting way: arranged and tied with selected pandan leaves. Because the betel tying method, the number of leaves and their arrangement have symbolic meaning in the traditional context, each variation of the

betel presentation has significant philosophical and aesthetic value. In Simalungun culture, besides Padashon Demban, people also use the terms Batu ni Demban or Batu ni Apuran, which refer to the customary way of giving money. In this situation, the amount of money given is always an even amount as a token of appreciation and gratitude for the help or service provided by someone. When money is tucked into betel quid along with its accessories, it is called Batu ni Apuran. This makes the total amount of money odd because the betel quid is also counted. As this symbol suggests, balance is not only measured by material value but also by the good intentions and spiritual meaning that accompany it. In Simalungun society, Batu ni Demban is used as a way to express gratitude to someone who has contributed their mental energy or services to carry out a custom. Giving money without betel quid is considered impolite and even insulting. Therefore, betel is an important component in traditional transactions that convey sincerity and respect. This is in line with Sibarani's (2014) idea of local wisdom, which emphasises that every action carried out within local traditions must demonstrate the values of humanity, togetherness, and respect for others. In addition, the social structure of the Simalungun community is reflected in the Batu ni Demban traditional numbering system. For example, people called paruma (ordinary people) use even numbers, such as 2, 4, 6, or 8. In contrast, people called raja or sipukah huta (traditional leaders) use larger numbers such as 12, 24, 48, 60 or even 120. This reflects the social hierarchy and the level of respect given to someone based on their position in society. The nominal value of money has been adjusted to contemporary currencies (such as Rp 2,000, Rp 20,000, etc.), but the philosophy of even numbers remains part of the tradition. According to Robert Sibarani's local wisdom theory, Padashon Demban and Batu ni Demban serve as symbolic traditions and social mechanisms that foster solidarity and balance within society. Moral values such as re-

spect, politeness, and responsibility are instilled in these customs. They also instil respect for parents and others.

Furthermore, according to Sibarani (2012), local wisdom is a crucial cultural asset for building national character and helping the younger generation learn cultural values (Handayani & Abdulkarim, 2024). Therefore, Padashon Demban and Batu ni Demban symbolise the noble values of the Simalungun people, emphasising the balance between humans, nature, and the Creator. They are more than just traditional rituals. These traditions demonstrate that local culture can maintain social balance, shape a good society, and strengthen Indonesia's cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

The Batak Simalungun people have a tradition of Padashon Demban that has been passed down from generation to generation. This tradition not only serves as a sign of goodwill but also as a traditional communication method that reinforces the values of respect, politeness, and togetherness in the community's social life. The Simalungun people maintain social harmony amidst changing times by sharing betel. Demban forms such as Batu ni Demban and Demban Gunringan have deep philosophical meanings. For example, the even number symbol in Batu ni Demban indicates respect, balance, and sincerity between the giver and the recipient. This shows that the Simalungun customary symbolic system is deeply rooted in noble moral and ethical values. Traditions such as Padashon Demban are manifestations of cultural values that strengthen solidarity, maintain harmony, and shape the character of the community, according to Robert Sibarani's theory of local wisdom. Therefore, preserving this tradition is crucial to maintaining cultural identity and strengthening humanitarian values amid the current tide of modernisation. The Padashon Demban tradition reflects the local wisdom of the Simalungun people, which teaches politeness, re-

spect, and balance in life.

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