

INTERPRETING THE *SEGO WIWIT* RELIGIOUS TRADITION AND ITS POTENTIAL AS TEACHING MATERIALS FOR FOREIGN SPEAKERS

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Abstract

Sego wiwit, as an agrarian tradition of Javanese society, has so far been studied merely as a cultural description, despite its great potential as teaching material for international students. International students require contextual material rooted in local culture to explore the transformation of cultural meanings, particularly within the *sego wiwit* tradition. This study aims to examine the history, ritual processions, symbols and philosophy of *sego wiwit*, as well as its relevance to the socio-cultural life of the community and to the education of international students. Research data, collected using a qualitative descriptive approach with ethnohistorical methods, was obtained through observation, in-depth interviews and documentation, and analysed using an interactive model. The research findings indicate that '*sego wiwit*' functions as a medium of symbolic communication representing the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the community's spirituality. Cultural and religious negotiation through the reinterpretation of ritual meaning—as an expression of gratitude and social solidarity—serves not only as a cultural heritage but also holds potential as learning material for international students based on local culture and for strengthening intercultural literacy.

Keywords: *sego wiwit*; *wiwitan* tradition; symbolic communication; Javanese cultural heritage; foreign student learning

Abstrak

Sego wiwit sebagai tradisi agraris masyarakat Jawa, dalam kajiannya masih sebatas deskripsi budaya padahal terdapat potensi besar, yaitu sebagai bahan ajar bagi pemelajar asing. Pemelajar asing membutuhkan materi kontekstual berbasis budaya lokal dalam menelusuri transformasi makna budaya khususnya pada tradisi *sego wiwit*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji sejarah, prosesi ritual, simbol dan filosofi *sego wiwit*, serta relevansinya dalam kehidupan sosial budaya masyarakat dan pembelajaran kepada mahasiswa asing. Data penelitian yang menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan metode etnosejarah diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi, dan dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif. Hasil penelitian; *sego wiwit* berfungsi sebagai media komunikasi simbolik yang merepresentasikan hubungan harmonis manusia, alam, dan spiritualitas masyarakat. Negosiasi budaya dan religiusitas melalui reinterpretasi makna ritual sebagai bentuk rasa syukur dan solidaritas sosial tidak hanya sebagai warisan budaya, tetapi juga potensial sebagai materi pembelajaran mahasiswa asing berbasis budaya lokal dan penguatan literasi interkultural.

Kata Kunci: *sego wiwit*; tradisi *wiwitan*; komunikasi simbolik; warisan budaya Jawa; pembelajaran mahasiswa asing



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INTRODUCTION

Tradition, as a cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation, plays a crucial role in the continuity and identity of a community (Susilo et al., 2025). The traditions displayed typically become deeply ingrained in community life as cultural expressions (Bertran et al., 2020). Through a community's traditions and culture, its spirit and values are reflected. Traditions also serve as social institutions that influence people's perspectives and beliefs regarding magical powers in life (Agustina & Masyhuda, 2021).

In some contexts, traditions and culture within a community are viewed as symbols that connect the community's lives (Rahman et al., 2025). Symbols are media that represent something and hold interpretations of life. These symbols can reflect societal values and beliefs, potentially leading to reinterpretations or conflicts with existing myths, thus influencing cultural narratives and social dynamics (Sahoo & Rath, 2023). These symbols influence how individuals interact and give meaning to social reality through symbols, language, and signs (Sugian & Mustofa, 2023).

The relationship between symbols and myths in Indonesian society is evident in the Javanese belief in Dewi Sri, a figure symbolizing fertility and prosperity. This belief gave rise to the *wiwitan* tradition, reflecting the community's reverence for Dewi Sri as the "Goddess of Fertility" (Jatnika, 2019). As a cultural and spiritual practice among farmers, this ritual serves as an expression of gratitude to Dewi Sri, reflecting a deep connection to nature and spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, the tradition carries symbolic meanings embedded with distinct messages and philosophies (Mellyani & Kusumaningrum, 2020). *With its ancient roots, wiwitan* serves as a ceremony to seek blessings for a bountiful harvest (Sudarman & Maharani, 2024). Ultimately, it embodies vital social values in community life, such as cooperation, harmony, solidarity, and ecological balance (Salim et al., 2024), underscoring the nature of humans as social and cultural beings with a strong sense of community.

In the *wiwitan* ritual, a traditional dish called *sego wiwit* is served during the procession to symbolize the hope for fertility and a blessed harvest. This dish consists of various ingredients embedded with distinct symbolic meanings, such as *tumpeng* rice, eggs, and *ingkung* chicken. Currently, *sego wiwit* can still be found in areas that preserve the *wiwitan* tradition, such as Pandeyan Village, Grogol District, Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java. Some locals maintain the belief that mythological elements influence harvest success, necessitating this ritual before planting and harvesting rice. This phenomenon demonstrates that local traditions remain an integral part of the community's socio-cultural fabric (Pandanwangi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, studies on Indonesian language learning for foreign speakers (BIPA) have now expanded beyond linguistic aspects to include cultural dimensions as a crucial component in developing intercultural competence. Jannah et al. (2021) emphasized that culture-based teaching materials can enhance foreign students' cross-cultural skills. Susanto et al. (2024) found that integrating regional culture into BIPA instruction can increase learning motivation while strengthening Indonesian cultural diplomacy. Ultimately, traditional culture-based language learning makes a strategic contribution to building Indonesian cultural awareness among foreign learners (Andriyanto et al., 2026).

Research on the *wiwitan* and *sego wiwit* traditions has been conducted by several researchers from various scientific perspectives. Kornadi & Purwanto (2019) revealed the character values within the *wiwitan* tradition, identifying three core dimensions that can be passed on to the younger generation: 1) individual moral values, consisting of responsibility, honesty, and patience; 2) social moral values, including respect for others, cooperation, and harmony; and 3) divine moral values. Thus, the tradition supports the preservation of local cultural wisdom through these embodied values. In line with this research, Listyani et al. (2020) explain that the *wiwitan* tradition serves as a means to ward off disaster, foster farmers' gratitude despite pest attacks during the upcoming harvest, and demonstrate collective utility within the community. Furthermore, Supriyanto et al. (2023) note that *sego wiwit*, or *tumpengan*, is part of the *ubo rampe* (equipment) prepared and taken to the rice fields for the *wiwitan* ceremony before the harvest. Ultimately, *wiwitan* serves as a profound medium for expressing gratitude to God for the blessings bestowed.

Research on Javanese traditions and culinary culture in the context of teaching Indonesian to foreign speakers (BIPA) also continues to develop. Dananto et al. (2023) explain that *gudeg* has the potential to be used as teaching material to support the internationalisation of the Indonesian language. Inderasari et al. (2025) discuss the development of artistic-tradition-based textbooks in the context of Central Javanese culinary arts. Meanwhile, Sholihah et al. (2025) highlight the *Sekaten* tradition, while Maratussholihah et al. (2024) examine the use of the *Ganjuran* tradition in teaching foreign students. These studies demonstrate that local traditions and culinary culture play a significant role in strengthening cultural identity and intercultural literacy, as well as in developing learning experiences for foreign students grounded in local wisdom.

Although extensive research has been conducted on the *wiwitan* tradition, most previous studies have focused on its ritual aspects, character values, spirituality, and the socio-cultural functions of Javanese agrarian communities. Furthermore, research on teaching foreign students based on local culture has also developed through the integration of traditional arts, cultural tourism, and local wisdom into teaching materials. However, research specifically linking local agrarian traditions, such as *sego wiwit*, to cultural literacy and intercultural-communication-based learning for international students remains relatively limited. Moreover, an ethnohistorical approach has not been widely used to examine the transformation of the symbolic meaning of ritual culinary traditions in Javanese society. Most previous research has focused on cultural description and has yet to establish its relevance to learning for foreign students.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of ethnohistorical analysis, symbolic interactionism, and local-culture-based learning for foreign students in examining the *sego wiwit* tradition. This research positions *sego wiwit* not only as part of the agrarian rituals of Javanese society, but also as a medium representing the social, spiritual, and ecological values, as well as the cultural identity, that have developed historically within community life. Furthermore, this study offers a new perspective on ritual culinary traditions as an authentic learning resource for foreign students, strengthening their cultural literacy and intercultural competence. The ethnohistorical approach employed enables this research to trace the development of the tradition and the transformation of its symbolic meaning.

Based on the identified research gap, this study aims to: (1) examine the historical development and ritual practices of the *sego wiwit* tradition in Javanese agrarian society; (2) analyse the symbolic meanings embedded in *sego wiwit* using George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism; (3) explore the process of cultural and religious negotiation reflected in the reinterpretation of the tradition within contemporary Muslim communities; and (4) investigate its potential as a local-culture-based learning resource for foreign students to strengthen intercultural literacy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, drawing on ethnohistorical methods. Ethnohistory is a methodological approach that combines historical research with ethnographic methods to understand the cultural practices and social contexts of past societies by examining documents, artifacts, and other data sources (O'Hagan, 2022). Furthermore, to uncover symbolic meaning, this research also draws on Mead's symbolic interaction approach, which comprises mind, self, and society (Mead, 1934).

This research was conducted in Popongan Hamlet, Pandeyan Village, Grogol District, Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java. The research data sources consisted of three main categories: (1) cultural places and events, such as the *wiwitan* traditional procession and the use of *sego wiwit* in agricultural rituals; (2) informants with knowledge and direct involvement in the tradition, including community leaders, farmers, village elders, cultural studio managers, and village officials; and (3) written documents, including books, photographs, and previous research related to the *wiwitan* tradition and research on traditional Central Javanese culinary arts.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was conducted by directly participating in the *wiwitan* procession.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to explore the tradition's history, its symbolic meaning, changes in cultural practices, and the community's perspective on the continued existence of *sego wiwit* in the modern era. Documentation was conducted through the collection of photographs, field notes, and other supporting documents to strengthen the research data.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation techniques by comparing information obtained from various source categories. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model (Miles et al., 2014), which consists of four main stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data presentation, and (4) concluding.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The History of *Wiwitan* and *Sego wiwit*

The *wiwitan* tradition predates the arrival of world religions in Java. At that time, people only believed in animism (Listyani et al., 2020). This tradition emerged as a manifestation of the balanced relationship between humans and nature. Nature was perceived as a sacred source of life and prosperity for agrarian communities. Therefore, humans have a duty to preserve nature and express gratitude for its abundant natural resources through the *wiwitan* tradition. The *wiwitan* tradition symbolizes asking permission from "Ibu Bumi" (Mother Earth) before planting, ensuring the quality and success of the crop. This Mother Earth is referred to as Sang Hyang Sri Sedani, was regarded as a sacred figure symbolizing fertility and agricultural prosperity. Before planting rice, farmers entrust rice seeds to Sang Hyang in hopes of a sustainable, safe, and fruitful harvest. A village leader explained that:

"Farmers perform *wiwitan* to ensure that the rice planting and harvesting process is free from pests, epidemics, or other disturbances, resulting in a bountiful harvest. In addition to planting, *wiwitan* is also performed during the harvesting process, known as *wiwitan methik*."

The *wiwitan* tradition was originally inseparable from the agrarian cosmology of Javanese society, which views nature as a sacred space where the relationship among humans, God, and supernatural powers unfolds. In this cosmology, rice is not merely understood as a food commodity but as the embodiment of life with a spiritual dimension. The figure of Dewi Sri then occupies a central position as a symbol of fertility, prosperity, and the maintenance of the agricultural cycle. This belief gave rise to various symbolically laden harvest rituals, including the presentation of food and offerings, and ritual prayers, as a means of harmonizing humans with the universe. Javanese cosmology is built on the principle of balance between the microcosm and the macrocosm, namely the relationship between humans, the environment, and transcendent powers (Surjono et al., 2023). In this context, *wiwitan* can be understood as a spiritual expression of agrarian society, aimed at maintaining cosmic harmony, ensuring a desired harvest, and reinforcing the awareness that the earth's produce is a gift that must be received with respect and humility.

The arrival of Islam in Java did not immediately erase the ritual structures that had existed within the community, but rather encouraged a gradual process of cultural negotiation. Rofiqoh et al. (2021) explain that the development of Javanese Islam exhibited a syncretic character, namely, the meeting of Islamic teachings and local traditions, which produced new forms of religiosity without eliminating previous cultural structures. Within this framework, Islamization in Java occurred primarily through an accommodative approach that respected local traditions, as evidenced in the missionary strategies of the Walisongo, particularly Sunan Kalijaga, who used cultural media to internalize Islamic values. Husniyah & Sodik (2024) show that the success of Islamic missionary work in Java rested on the Walisongo's ability to integrate Islamic teachings into symbols, art, and rituals already familiar to the Javanese people. Thus, the structure of the *wiwitan* ritual was maintained, but its orientation shifted. Prayers to mythological entities such as Dewi Sri were replaced by monotheistic prayers and supplications addressed to God. This shift demonstrates that Islamization does not occur through a break with tradition but through symbolic reinterpretation, thereby preserving ritual forms while transforming their religious meaning.

In contemporary Popongan society, this transformation is increasingly evident in the practice of *sego wiwit*. While in its early phase, this ritual served as a symbolic offering to maintain a connection with cosmic powers, *sego wiwit* is now more meaningful as an expression of gratitude to God for the harvest, a means of almsgiving, and a means of strengthening communal solidarity. This change demonstrates a shift from a sacred-magical orientation to an ethical-social orientation. Muqoddam & Maghfiroh (2019), in their study of *slametan*, assert that modern Javanese-Islamic rituals no longer focus solely on mystical elements but serve as spaces for the reproduction of values of togetherness, safety, and social harmony. Similar findings were reported by Ambarita et al. (2024) in the Waraka community, where local traditions function as interfaith social bridges that strengthen mutual understanding, tolerance, and communal cohesion despite religious diversity. In this sense, *sego wiwit* performs a comparable social function by preserving communal bonds, reinforcing collective gratitude, and creating shared spaces for cultural-religious interaction.

Over time, the *wiwitan* tradition has evolved beyond a mere agrarian ritual into a social space that strengthens communal bonds and reinforces cooperation (*gotong royong*) among villagers. The involvement of families, neighbours, and farm labourers in preparing and performing the ritual reflects the importance of social solidarity in Javanese rural life, where agricultural success depends heavily on collective cooperation. At the same time, *wiwitan* serves as a medium for intergenerational cultural transmission, through which younger generations learn traditional values, social ethics, respect for nature, and gratitude for agricultural abundance. Despite modernization, the tradition continues to adapt by reducing elements considered incompatible with Islamic teachings while emphasizing communal prayer and food sharing, demonstrating its dynamic capacity to preserve cultural identity within changing social and religious contexts.

The uniqueness of the *wiwitan* tradition also lies in its ability to survive amidst changing times and agricultural modernization. While many local traditions are being abandoned, the people of Dukuh Popongan continue to maintain the *wiwitan* as part of their social and spiritual lives. The involvement of young people in the ritual demonstrates that this tradition remains important and relevant to the local community. In addition to serving as a means of cultural preservation, *wiwitan* also serves as a reminder that the relationship between humans and nature must be maintained in balance. In today's increasingly individualistic modern life, traditions like *wiwitan* provide a space for togetherness, cooperation, and spiritual reflection rarely found in everyday activities. Thus, *wiwitan* is not just a simple agricultural ritual but also a representation of cultural, social, and religious values that continue to live in Javanese society today.

The *Wiwitan* Ritual and *Sego Wiwit* Procession

The *wiwitan* tradition, featuring *sego wiwit* as its main dish, continues in Popongan Hamlet, Pandeyan Village, Grogol District, Sukoharjo Regency. The *wiwitan* procession takes place before sunrise. The local community typically holds the *wiwitan* ceremony on Thursday Legi, (*one of the names of market days in the Javanese calendar*), as locals believe it is an auspicious day for the tradition. The *wiwitan* tradition is carried out regardless of the weather, even when it rains. In the past, the tradition was often carried out by respected village leaders. Today, *wiwitan* can be performed by anyone, including young people.

The equipment and materials needed for the *wiwitan* ceremony are prepared in people's homes, including *sego wiwit*. *Sego wiwit* and other preparations needed for the *wiwitan* ceremony are then taken to the rice fields, where the seeds are sown and planted. The ingredients for the *wiwitan* are placed in *takir*, food containers made from banana leaves shaped like boats. Five *takir* are made and placed at each corner of the square rice field, plus one in the centre, to resemble a five-sided formation. The *takir* are filled with eggs, candlenuts, yellow rice, flowers, *angpo* (soil), *betel*, turmeric, taro (*lompong*) with its flowers and stems still attached, and rolled or folded bran filled with sticky rice. These are then tied with bamboo leaves, *lepetan* leaves, or banana leaves, each containing money, depending on availability. Once ready, prayers are recited over the offerings.

"Prayers are offered to the farmers, hoping for a smooth operation, a bountiful harvest, and that the rice planted will be free from pests. The prayers are in Javanese and Arabic, similar to the "*sapu jagat*" prayer. The blessed *Sego wiwit* can be consumed and distributed to the farm workers who planted it. The prepared *Sego wiwit* can also be eaten or enjoyed along the edges of the rice fields or taken home."

Based on this quote, the community views the *wiwitan* tradition as a form of hope in God for sustenance and agricultural produce. This is evident in the blend of diction in the prayers. The community uses a combination of Javanese and Arabic prayers during the ritual. One of the prayers recited is the *sapu jagat* prayer, which is derived from Qur'an 2:201. The term *sapu jagat* literally means "sweeping the universe" or "embracing all aspects of life." It is popularly known among Indonesian Muslims as a comprehensive supplication because it asks for goodness in this world and in the hereafter, while also seeking protection from the punishment of Hellfire. The prayer is called *sapu jagat* because it encompasses the entirety of human needs, well-being, and salvation in a single supplication. The coexistence of Javanese and Arabic prayers within the *wiwitan* ritual suggests an ongoing process of accommodation between local cultural traditions and Islamic religious practices. This accommodation is also reflected in the distribution of *sego wiwit* to farm workers, which embodies the values of sharing, gratitude, and social solidarity that are widely recognized in both Javanese culture and Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, similar to the *wiwitan* ritual performed before rice planting, the *wiwit methik* tradition—a ritual conducted before harvesting rice—also involves offerings of *takir* and *patjomatlimopancjer*. The term *patjomatlimopancjer* derives from the Javanese philosophical concept of *sedulur papat lima pancer*, literally meaning "four companions and one centre." In Javanese cosmology, it refers to four spiritual companions believed to accompany a person from the womb until birth, while the individual self serves as the centre (*pancer*) of existence. When the rice is harvested, farmers return home carrying bundles of rice tied together and placed in the *senthong*, a traditional storage room inside a Javanese house used for keeping harvested rice. This process is performed silently without interacting with anyone along the way. The practice is known as *topo bisu* ("silent contemplation" or "ritual silence"), which aims to preserve the sacredness and solemnity of the harvest ritual. Furthermore, at street corners, intersections, bridges, rivers, and other locations, *takir* offerings containing harvested rice are placed as symbolic gifts associated with Dewi Sri.

Symbols and Philosophy of *Sego Wiwit*

In the *wiwitan* tradition, many of the utensils and ingredients used in *sego wiwit* offerings and dishes are not merely dishes or offerings, but also carry meaning and philosophy. The forms of traditional foods carry significant symbolic meaning and reflect cultural identity, serving as a medium for expressing values, rituals, and social connections (Linares & Meskin, 2021). A closer look reveals variations in the completeness of *sego wiwit* offerings in the *wiwitan* tradition across regions. Table 1 compares the completeness of offerings across regions.

Table 1.
Compares the Completeness of Offerings Across Regions

Research Locations (1)	Research by Supriyanto et al. (2023) (2)	Research by Listyani et al. (2020) (3)	Research by (Salim et al., 2024) (4)
<i>Sego wiwit</i> ; <i>ampo</i> ; flowers; <i>betel</i> nut; raw free-range chicken eggs; <i>ingkung</i> chicken; <i>setundun</i> bananas; <i>takir</i> ; candlenuts; yellow rice, turmeric, <i>taro</i> leaves with their flowers and stems still attached, filled with rolled or folded bran filled with sticky rice tied with bamboo leaves, <i>lepetan</i>	<i>Tumpeng</i> ; <i>ingkung</i> can be replaced with chicken eggs, <i>tempeh</i> , <i>sambal gepeng</i> , <i>urap</i> , or foreign fish; traditional snacks; <i>polo pendhem</i> ; <i>mpon-mpon</i> ; <i>sekar setaman</i> flowers, <i>telon</i> flowers, and boreh flowers; Comb and mirror; <i>betel</i> nut and cigarettes; compulsory money; A pair of brown sugar palms; One <i>tundun</i> plantain; A	<i>Sekar setaman</i> flowers, <i>telon</i> flowers; water in a pitcher covered with <i>dadap serep</i> leaves; a pair of Javanese sugar palms; <i>betel</i> nut and cigarettes; compulsory money; A mirror and comb, <i>ani-ani</i> (traditional rice cutting tool); a pair of <i>saloka</i> bracelets (made from coconut shell); a pair of plantains; <i>tumpeng</i> (rice cone), flat chili sauce, anchovies, chilies, and salt. Chicken <i>ingkung</i> (rice	<i>Tumpeng</i> rice; chicken <i>ingkung</i> ; traditional market cakes; a water jug; <i>ani-ani</i> (a tool for cutting rice); roses; <i>sarong</i> cloth for wrapping the rice; jackfruit vegetables; crackers, tofu, <i>tempeh</i> , and other snacks.

leaves, or banana leaves, and filled with whatever money is available.	pitcher filled with water covered with <i>dadap serep</i> leaves; <i>ani-ani</i> (traditional rice cutting tool)	cone) can be substituted for chicken eggs; traditional snacks: <i>jadah</i> , <i>wajik</i> , <i>munten</i> ; nutmeg <i>gumantung</i> (trees whose fruit hangs down, such as mango, banana, durian, etc.); nutmeg <i>kapendem</i> (trees whose fruit is buried underground, such as cassava, potato, taro, etc.); nutmeg <i>kasimpar</i> (trees whose fruit is above ground, such as watermelon, melon, pumpkin, cucumber, etc.)
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Description:

- (1) Popongan Hamlet, Pandeyan Village, Grogol District, Sukoharjo Regency
- (2) Sumberagung Village, Plumpang District, Tuban Regency
- (3) Gilangharjo Village, Pandak, Bantul, Yogyakarta
- (4) Wonodadi Utara Village, Gadingrejo, Pringsewu

Table 1 shows the differences and variations in the traditional *wiwitan* offerings. The differences in offerings within the *wiwitan* tradition demonstrate the diversity of cultural symbols and social functions within an agrarian society. These variations demonstrate that the *wiwitan* tradition is not uniform but develops according to the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the local community. These differences in offerings also demonstrate the process of cultural acculturation and local adaptation. Although the offerings differ in form, they all share the same purpose: to pray for safety and blessings, and to maintain harmony among humans, nature, and God. Thus, the variety of offerings within the *wiwitan* tradition reflects the richness of local culture while strengthening the identity of Indonesia's agrarian society. The completeness of the offerings certainly has a meaning for the community. The following are some symbolic interpretations of the offerings, as conveyed by the manager of the community cultural studio in Popongan Village.

"The *ampo*, made of earth, has a philosophical meaning of gratitude for the earth's bounty. Flowers that bloom and emit a fragrant fragrance are also philosophized as something that can be reaped in abundance. The betel nut tied with *lawe* thread symbolizes the marriage of a soul, which can be correlated with the interconnectedness of life."

Furthermore, there is *sego* (rice) shaped like a cone, similar to a *tumpeng* (traditional Javanese cone-shaped rice dish). This form embodies the Javanese philosophical expression *tumuju marang pangeran*, which literally means "directing oneself toward the Lord" or "orienting life toward God." The cone shape symbolizes the belief that God is the ultimate centre of human life and that all human actions should be guided by spiritual devotion and gratitude. It reminds people to acknowledge God as the source of life, sustenance, and destiny.

In addition, the offerings include free-range chicken eggs and *ingkung*, a traditional Javanese ceremonial dish consisting of a whole chicken cooked and served intact with its legs folded beneath its body. In Javanese philosophy, *ingkung* symbolizes humility, submission, and complete surrender to God. The type of *ingkung* used differs according to the ritual stage. During the planting ritual, boiled *ingkung* is used, whereas during the harvest ritual roasted *ingkung* is served. Community members interpret this difference as symbolizing the growth cycle of rice, from the initial planting stage to the completion of a successful harvest.

"This egg carries a philosophy that signifies that in living one's life, one must not go astray. The *ingkung* chicken conveys the philosophy that ultimately, humans will return to purity, like the naked, featherless *ingkung*. Then there is the *takir* is accompanied by the offering *padjomatlimopancjer*."



Figure 1.
Sego wiwit and offerings in the wiwitan ritual

"This term is also interpreted as a depiction of human life, which five people essentially surround. In reality, no human lives alone; rather, they have *khodam* (spirit guardians/followers). It can also be interpreted as the five elements, namely earth, *banyu* (water), *geni* (fire), wind, and *howo* (air/weather) within the human body."

The symbolic meaning of the *sego wiwit* tradition lies not only in the series of ritual processes but also in each element of the food served. Javanese people generally believe that food is not merely a physical need but also carries a moral message and certain hopes. This philosophy demonstrates that Javanese people have their own way of conveying life's values through simple symbols related to daily activities

"The white rice in *sego wiwit* is interpreted as a symbol of purity and of the sincerity of the farmers' intentions at the start and end of the farming process. Eggs symbolize the hope for the birth of life and continued prosperity, while *urap* (vegetable salad) reflects the harmony and diversity of village life. The whole *ingkung* chicken is also often interpreted as a symbol of human submission to God."

"The use of natural ingredients such as banana leaves, flowers, turmeric, bran, and taro *lompong* demonstrates that all elements of the ritual are derived from the produce of the local people's own farms. "

The quotes above reflects the lifestyle of Javanese agrarian communities, who have long utilized nature sparingly without destroying it. Culturally, these symbols serve as a means of communication between people and their hopes, such as safety, blessings, and good harvests. The development of religious values within society has also influenced the interpretation of symbols in the *wiwitan* tradition. Today, some people no longer interpret these symbols mystically, but rather as reminders of the importance of gratitude, togetherness, and respect for the blessings God has given them. The *ingkung* chicken, for example, is better understood as a symbol of prayer and the hope that humans will always "*manekung*," or be sincere in their prayers to Allah Swt. Similarly, the communal meal after the ritual is often interpreted as an act of charity and sharing one's blessings with others. This shift in meaning indicates that the *wiwitan* tradition is undergoing a reinterpretation in line with modern religious understandings. While local cultural elements are still maintained, people strive to place the ritual within a framework of religious values deemed in harmony with Islamic teachings.

The findings also reveal that the *wiwitan* tradition contains strong ecological values that reflect the environmental ethics of Javanese agrarian communities. The use of natural materials such as banana leaves, flowers, rice, turmeric, and other agricultural products demonstrates a close relationship between humans and their surrounding environment. Rather than exploiting nature solely as an economic resource, the community views nature as a partner that deserves respect and care.

This ecological perspective is reflected in the symbolic meanings attached to ritual objects and in the communal prayers expressing gratitude for agricultural abundance.

The ritual encourages awareness that successful harvests depend not only on human labour but also on the balance of ecological systems. In this regard, the *wiwitan* tradition functions as a cultural mechanism for transmitting environmental values across generations. These values remain relevant in contemporary society, particularly amid growing concerns about environmental degradation, climate change, and the sustainability of agricultural practices.

The findings indicate that the meaning of the *wiwitan* tradition has undergone a gradual transformation alongside the development of Islamic values within the community. Historically, some ritual elements were associated with beliefs in Dewi Sri as a symbol of fertility and agricultural prosperity. However, contemporary interpretations increasingly place the ritual within an Islamic framework, emphasizing gratitude to Allah SWT rather than devotion to supernatural entities. This shift illustrates a process of religious acculturation in which local cultural practices are not abandoned but reinterpreted according to prevailing religious values.

The coexistence of Javanese cultural symbols and Islamic prayers demonstrates that cultural continuity and religious commitment are not necessarily contradictory. Instead, community members selectively maintain ritual forms while reconstructing their meanings in accordance with contemporary religious understandings. The *wiwitan* tradition therefore represents a dynamic cultural negotiation through which local identity is preserved while religious beliefs continue to evolve. This process contributes to the resilience of the tradition and explains why it remains relevant in contemporary Javanese Muslim society.

The *wiwitan* tradition, evident in the presentation of offerings and other ritual paraphernalia in Figure 1, demonstrates that Javanese agrarian society views agricultural activities not merely as economic activities but also as a symbolic communication between humans, nature, and spiritual forces. From a cultural communication perspective, such rituals serve as a medium for strengthening social solidarity, maintaining ecological harmony, and reproducing the collective values of agrarian societies. The agricultural ritual of *ruwat* (purification) is a form of symbolic communication that connects food authority with spiritual authority through agrarian symbols, such as harvests, offerings, and traditional processions, interpreted as a form of respect for nature and ancestors (Purwanti et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Rahman et al. (2025) emphasize that traditional rituals function not only as a cultural heritage but also as a medium of social communication that strengthens collective identity and community solidarity in facing the challenges of modern life.

The *sego wiwit* tradition in Javanese society cannot be understood solely as an agrarian ritual practice, but also as a dialectic of cultural and religious practices that has developed historically. Based on research findings, the people of Popongan Hamlet still maintain the *wiwitan* ritual as a form of gratitude for agricultural produce, a request for safety, and a hope for a bountiful harvest. In practice, there are symbolic elements such as prayers, offerings, silent *topo*, and respect for Dewi Sri which show a blend of local Javanese culture and the spiritual values of the community (Mukarromah et al., 2024). The use of offerings, such as those made from plants and animals, also has its own meaning, imbued with philosophical value (Pinasti et al., 2025). Therefore, the existence of *sego wiwit* can be understood as part of the expression of Javanese religious culture, which has undergone reinterpretation of meaning in accordance with the social and religious developments of modern society.

In addition to demonstrating cultural and spiritual connections, the *sego wiwit* tradition also represents a socio-cultural function in maintaining harmony in a multicultural society. Research findings indicate that the *wiwitan* ritual is carried out collectively and involves the surrounding community regardless of social background. The activities of eating together, sharing *sego wiwit*, and collective prayer demonstrate the values of cooperation, solidarity, and togetherness in agrarian communities. Local wisdom can serve as a social medium for maintaining peace and cohesion in multicultural societies (Arsal et al., 2023). Local traditions continue to adapt to changing times without losing their philosophical value (Pandanwangi et al., 2025). Local traditions can serve as a medium for dialogue, tolerance, and harmony in modern society. In this context, *sego wiwit* not only symbolizes Javanese agrarian culture but also serves as a socio-religious space that strengthens cultural identity, maintains social harmony, and represents a form of societal moderation in interpreting the relationship between religion, culture, and social life (Hidayatullah et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the *wiwitan* and *sego wiwit* traditions have the potential to be part of cultural promotion. According to Law Number 5 concerning Cultural Advancement (2017) concerning cultural promotion, the objects of Indonesian cultural promotion include ten things, namely (1) oral traditions, (2) manuscripts, (3) customs, (4) rituals, (5) traditional knowledge, (6) traditional technology, (7) art, (8) language, (9) folk games; and (10) traditional sports. According to the law, *wiwitan* is included in the ritual and has great potential for ecotourism development. The *sego wiwit* tradition can be developed as part of a regional cultural advancement program through agrarian cultural festivals or the development of tourist villages based on Javanese traditions. Through this program, tourists can directly witness the *wiwitan* procession from beginning to end. In fact, tourists can gain experience and be directly involved in the series of processes (Dewi et al., 2023).

The *Sego Wiwit* Tradition in the Perspective of Mead's Symbolic Interactionism

George Herbert Mead argued that human beings act toward objects, events, and other people based on the meanings that emerge through social interaction. According to (Mead, 1934) “the individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group” (p. 138). In this perspective, meaning is not inherent in objects but is socially constructed and continuously negotiated through interaction. Mead further emphasized that the self develops through the dynamic relationship among mind, self, and society. Therefore, symbolic meanings attached to ritual objects can only be understood by examining how community members collectively interpret and reproduce those meanings in social life.

The *sego wiwit* tradition can be understood through the perspective of George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes that social meaning is formed through interaction among humans using symbols. Mead views humans as acting based on meanings born from social interactions, which are then reinterpreted in people's lives (Sugian & Mustofa, 2023). In the context of the *wiwitan* tradition, symbols such as *tumpeng*, *ayam ingkung*, eggs, *takir*, joint prayer, and silent *topo* are not just ritual objects but also symbolic media of communication that are collectively interpreted by the Javanese agrarian community. This meaning continues to be inherited through intergenerational social interaction to form a common cultural awareness of the relationships among humans, nature, and fellow humans, and with God.

Mead's concepts of mind, self, and society are also evident in the practice of the *wiwitan* tradition. The aspect of the mind is reflected in the community's interpretation of ritual symbols, for example, the meaning of the *ingkung* chicken as a symbol of human surrender to God, or of *tumpeng* as the orientation of life towards the Creator. The aspect of the self arises when the individual involved in the ritual identifies himself as part of an agrarian cultural community responsible for maintaining social and ecological harmony. Meanwhile, the societal aspect is evident in the community's collective involvement in the implementation of *wiwitan*, which reveals a common value system, social solidarity, and a collective consciousness built through ritual interaction.

Furthermore, according to Mead (1934), significant symbols enable individuals to develop common interpretations because they evoke similar responses among members of a social group. In the *wiwitan* tradition, ritual objects such as *tumpeng*, *ingkung*, *takir*, and communal prayers function as significant symbols because they are collectively interpreted as expressions of gratitude, spiritual devotion, and hopes for agricultural prosperity. These symbols allow people to build a collective understanding of the value of life, the relationship between humans and nature, and local spirituality. In fact, the reinterpretation of the *wiwitan* tradition within Islam shows that a process of meaning negotiation continues to develop in response to social changes. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the change in meaning is part of social dynamics because the meaning of symbols is not fixed but is continually constructed through sustained social interactions (Sutrisno & Dharmawan, 2024).

By applying Mead's symbolic interactionism, the *wiwitan* tradition can be understood as a dynamic process through which symbolic meanings are continuously constructed, shared, and transmitted across generations.

Ritual symbols such as *tumpang*, *ingkung*, *takir*, and communal prayers function as significant symbols that evoke common interpretations among community members. Through repeated social interaction involving farmers, families, traditional leaders, and younger generations, these meanings are maintained and reproduced, allowing the tradition to remain relevant despite the pressures of modernization. Thus, *wiwitan* survives not merely as an agrarian ritual but as a medium through which collective identity, social solidarity, and cultural values are continuously reinforced.

Sego Wiwit as Teaching Material for Foreign Speakers

The findings of this study suggest that the *Sego wiwit* tradition has considerable potential as cultural content in Indonesian language learning for foreign speakers (BIPA learners). Beyond its culinary aspects, *Sego wiwit* embodies philosophical, spiritual, social, and ecological values that represent Javanese cultural identity. These cultural dimensions can be incorporated into reading materials, cultural discussion activities, and intercultural learning modules that help foreign students understand not only the Indonesian language but also the socio-cultural contexts in which the language is used.

Indonesia's rich cultural heritage holds significant potential for development as teaching material for foreign speakers or students, including the *sego wiwit* tradition, a key component of Javanese agrarian culture. These cultural elements attract students to enjoy learning the Indonesian language and culture (Junaidi et al., 2023). Effective learning for foreign students requires a comprehensive curriculum that focuses not only on language skills but also on strengthening understanding of local culture (Idawati et al., 2025). Local culture, such as traditional arts, culinary specialties, and local wisdom, can serve as a bridge to enrich the learning experience and increase the appeal of teaching for foreign students (Susanto et al., 2024).

In this context, the *Sego wiwit* tradition can be integrated into Indonesian language teaching for foreign speakers through various learning activities. Descriptive texts may be used to introduce the cultural background of Javanese agrarian communities, while procedural texts can explain the stages of the *wiwitan* ritual. In speaking activities, students may compare harvest traditions in their own countries with those found in Indonesia. The use of local vocabulary in culture-based texts plays a crucial role as a source of linguistic knowledge for learners (Isnaini et al., 2021). Furthermore, cultural discussion tasks can encourage reflection on themes such as gratitude, environmental sustainability, and community cooperation. Through these activities, students not only acquire linguistic competence but also develop intercultural awareness and a deeper understanding of Indonesian society.

Furthermore, these reading materials help students understand Indonesian perspectives on the relationships among humans, nature, and spirituality (Nagauleng et al., 2024). Research findings indicate that symbolic elements in *sego wiwit*, such as *tumpang* (rice cone), ayam *ingkung* (fried chicken), eggs, and *takir* (a type of rice cake), have philosophical meanings that can serve as a medium for contextual cultural introduction. Thus, the *sego wiwit* tradition has the potential to serve as an authentic learning resource that supports the development of cultural literacy and intercultural understanding among foreign students.

Furthermore, the use of the *sego wiwit* tradition in foreign speakers learning can also support Indonesian cultural diplomacy through language education. Local culture-based language learning can build Indonesian cultural awareness for foreign students while strengthening the position of the Indonesian language in a global context (Andriyanto et al., 2026). This study found that the *wiwitan* tradition is not only associated with agricultural rituals but also embodies values of togetherness, gratitude, respect for nature, and social harmony, which are characteristic of Indonesian society. These values can be integrated into classroom speaking, reading, and cultural discussions for foreign students.

Learning for foreign speakers should be directed at developing cross-cultural competencies so that students not only understand language structure but also the socio-cultural context of the language-speaking community (Widianto & Pusse, 2025). Furthermore, the use of contextual cultural materials has been shown to increase foreign students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning Indonesian (Ermanto et al., 2025).

Therefore, the *sego wiwit* tradition can be developed into a local culture-based teaching material that not only introduces the richness of Indonesian traditions to international students but also enhances learning for international students as a means of cultural diplomacy, fostering cross-cultural tolerance, and promoting Indonesian identity internationally.

CONCLUSION

The *sego wiwit* tradition is an integral part of the *wiwitan* ritual of Javanese agrarian communities. It serves not only as a ceremonial tradition but also as a symbolic representation of the relationship between humans, nature, and local spirituality. Research shows that this tradition encompasses various cultural, social, religious, and ecological values, reflected through the ritual procession, the use of offerings, and the philosophy underlying each element of the *sego wiwit* dish. The *wiwitan* tradition demonstrates that Javanese people regard agricultural activities not merely as economic activities, but as part of a cultural and spiritual system passed down through generations. Despite modernisation, this tradition persists through the reinterpretation of its meaning, adapting to the social context of modern society without entirely losing its cultural identity. Research findings also indicate that the *sego wiwit* tradition represents a form of symbolic communication and cultural moderation, demonstrating the negotiation between local cultural values and the religiosity of contemporary Javanese society.

These research findings also have strategic implications for local governments, particularly in the areas of cultural preservation, the development of local-wisdom-based education, and the promotion of cultural tourism. These may include: (1) documenting and digitising local ritual traditions as intangible cultural heritage; (2) integrating local traditions into formal and non-formal educational curricula, including BIPA teaching materials; and (3) supporting community-based cultural festivals and intercultural programmes that promote social cohesion, cultural literacy, and sustainable cultural preservation.

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