

Peircean Semiotic Analysis of Cultural Identity in the *Lepo Kirek* Traditional House, Sikka Regency

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ABSTRACT

The *Lepo Kirek* traditional house in Hewokloang, Sikka Regency, Indonesia, represents a significant expression of cultural identity that is increasingly challenged by modernization. This study aims to analyze how architectural elements of the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house represent and sustain cultural identity through Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, focusing on icon, index, and symbol. This research employs an interpretive ethnographic approach. Data were collected through participatory observation, visual analysis, and image-based interviews with four informants, including customary leaders, cultural observers, and community members. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of one month, allowing in-depth engagement with cultural practices and architectural meanings. The findings reveal that the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house operates as a dynamic semiotic system. First, the roof form of *Buwun Sikon Sakok Manu Ladon* functions as an icon representing protection and ancestral strength. Second, spatial structures such as *Ulu Higun* (sacred space) and *Pekang Gete* (communal space), along with ritual practices and material selection, serve as indices of the relational system among humans, ancestors, and nature. Third, carvings, ritual objects, and the concept of the house as a "microcosm" function as symbols constructed through collective cultural conventions. Additionally, the study identifies ongoing reinterpretation through material adaptation and the integration of religious elements without eliminating core cultural meanings. This study concludes that the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house is a living cultural text that continuously negotiates identity. The research contributes theoretically by integrating Peircean semiotics with ethnographic context in analyzing traditional architecture, and practically by providing insights for cultural preservation strategies in the context of modernization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Culture can be understood as a system of meaning constructed, communicated, and transmitted through symbols, practices, and material forms within a society [1]. Within this perspective, traditional architecture is not merely a physical structure, but a cultural medium that embodies social values, cosmological beliefs, and collective identity [2], [3]. As part of a broader cultural system, traditional houses function as spaces where meaning is continuously produced and enacted through everyday practices and symbolic expressions [4], [5].

In the Indonesian context, traditional houses serve not only as residential spaces but also as representations of identity and continuity across generations. One example is the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house in Hewokloang, Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Field observations indicate that this house functions as a cultural and spiritual center, where relationships between humans, ancestors, nature, and the divine are articulated through architectural forms, spatial organization, and ritual practices. Elements such as *Buwun Sikon Sakok Manu Ladon* (roof structure), *Ulu Higun* (sacred space), and *Pekang Gete* (communal space) reflect a complex system of meaning embedded in both material and social dimensions.

However, the sustainability of these meanings is increasingly challenged by modernization and socio-cultural change. Transformations in building materials, such as the use of zinc and concrete, as well as shifts in spatial function, indicate that traditional architecture is undergoing processes of adaptation and reinterpretation. While these changes reflect cultural resilience, they also raise critical questions regarding how cultural meanings are maintained, transformed, or potentially diminished in contemporary contexts [6]. This condition highlights the central research problem: how cultural identity embedded in traditional architecture is represented, sustained, and negotiated amid ongoing modernization.

Previous studies on traditional architecture have largely focused on structural, ecological, and aesthetic dimensions. For instance, Maknun et al. [4] and Franzia et al. [3] emphasize traditional houses as expressions of local wisdom, sustainability, and cultural identity, while other studies highlight their role in aesthetic perception and heritage representation (Liu et al. [5]; Imankulov et al. [7]). In parallel, semiotic approaches have been applied to cultural artifacts, as demonstrated in Dimache and Qiu [8], underscoring the relevance of Peircean semiotics in interpreting heritage sites.

However, these studies tend to privilege structural, visual, or symbolic aspects of meaning, with limited attention to how meaning is produced, enacted, and experienced through everyday practices. Similarly, foundational semiotic traditions, including those of Saussure and Barthes, have contributed significantly to understanding meaning as systems of signs and ideological representation [9]. However, these approaches generally emphasize static, text-like structures of meaning, often overlooking the experiential and practice-based dimensions of cultural interpretation.

In the specific context of the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house, existing research has primarily examined its architectural form, historical transformation, and cultural

preservation (Gobang & Andisoru [10]). While these studies provide important descriptive and contextual insights, they have not examined the house as a dynamic semiotic system in which meaning is continuously negotiated through social interaction, ritual practice, and lived experience.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by proposing a practice-based semiotic analysis that integrates Peircean semiotics with interpretive ethnography to understand traditional architecture as a living cultural system. Although recent developments in cultural semiotics acknowledge the dynamic nature of meaning [11], there remains a significant gap in explaining how architectural elements function simultaneously as visual forms, lived practices, and symbolic systems within everyday cultural contexts. There is still limited research that examines meaning not only as representation but as something actively enacted, negotiated, and experienced.

To address this limitation, this study employs Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, which conceptualizes signs as triadic relations among sign, object, and interpretant, and classifies them into icon, index, and symbol [12]. This framework enables a more contextual and dynamic interpretation of meaning by accounting for resemblance (icon), causal or existential relations (index), and cultural conventions (symbol). Unlike purely structural approaches, Peirce's semiotics allows meaning to be understood as a relational and experiential process embedded in lived cultural practices.

Furthermore, this study adopts an interpretive ethnographic approach grounded in Geertz's concept of *thick description*, which emphasizes understanding meaning from the perspective of cultural actors within their socio-cultural context [13]. This approach enables the exploration of how architectural elements are not only designed but also lived, practiced, and interpreted within the daily life of the Hewokloang community.

Based on this framework, the objective of this study is to analyze how the architectural elements of the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house represent and construct cultural identity through the semiotic categories of icon, index, and symbol. Specifically, this study examines how meaning is produced through the interaction among visual forms, spatial practices, and cultural conventions.

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it offers a dynamic and practice-based perspective in semiotic studies by integrating Peircean semiotics with ethnographic analysis in the context of traditional architecture. In practice, it provides insights into cultural preservation by emphasizing that sustaining traditional architecture requires not only maintaining physical structures but also preserving the cultural meanings and practices embedded in them.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design within an interpretive paradigm to explore the cultural meanings embedded in the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house. The interpretive approach assumes that meaning is socially constructed through interaction, experience, and cultural practice. Therefore, traditional architecture is examined not merely as a physical object but as a system of signs embedded in everyday life and ritual activity [13].

The research was conducted in Hewokloang, Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, where the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house functions as a cultural and spiritual center. The object of analysis includes both tangible elements (architectural form, spatial organization, materials, and ornaments) and intangible aspects (ritual practices, social interaction, and symbolic meaning).

The researcher served as an interpretive instrument, actively engaging with participants through observation and interviews. While maintaining analytical distance, the researcher acknowledged that interpretation is shaped by interaction with participants, cultural context, and reflexive understanding. This position aligns with interpretive ethnography, in which meaning is co-constructed rather than objectively extracted.

Data were collected through three qualitative techniques to capture both visual and experiential dimensions of meaning. These methods are informed by Gillian Rose's visual methodology, which emphasizes analyzing visual objects within their production, composition, and social context [14].

1. **Participatory observation** was conducted to examine how spatial use, ritual practices, and social interactions actively produce cultural meaning within the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house. The researcher engaged directly with daily and ritual activities to capture how meaning is enacted, negotiated, and reproduced through embodied practices and spatial behavior.
2. **Visual analysis** was employed through systematic documentation of architectural elements, including spatial structure, materials, and ornaments. Drawing on Gillian Rose's visual methodology, the analysis focuses not only on formal visual characteristics but also on the socio-cultural context of production and interpretation. This approach enables the identification of how visual forms function as semiotic resources within cultural practice.
3. **Image-based interviews (projective interviews)** were conducted to elicit participants' interpretations of visual objects and architectural elements. By using images as elicitation tools, this method facilitates access to tacit knowledge, experiential understanding, and culturally embedded meanings that are often difficult to articulate through conventional verbal interviews.

These three methods are integrated to capture the relationship between visual form, lived practice, and cultural interpretation, enabling a comprehensive semiotic analysis of traditional architecture.

This study involved four informants, selected through purposive and snowball sampling based on their cultural knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research focus. The key informant, Mr. Laurensius Lelu, the caretaker of the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house, was supported by cultural observers, descendants, and community members; Mr. Alfonsius Sato, Mr. Abdon Aliando, and Abel Fernando.

The relatively small number of informants is methodologically justified, as this study prioritizes depth over breadth. In interpretive ethnographic research, rich, contextual, and experience-based data are more critical than large sample sizes. The selected informants represent cultural authority, lived experience, and intergenerational perspectives, ensuring the credibility and richness of the data.

Fieldwork was conducted over one month, allowing prolonged engagement with the research setting and enabling the researcher to observe both routine activities and culturally significant practices.

Data analysis follows an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [15]. To enhance clarity, the coding process is summarized as follows:

Table 1. Coding Process

Stage	Process	Output
Open Coding	Identifying key elements (roof, space, ritual, objects)	Initial concepts
Axial Coding	Grouping relationships (space-ritual, material-meaning)	Categories
Selective Coding	Integrating into core themes (identity, cosmology, human-nature relation)	Main themes

After coding, the data were interpreted using Peirce’s semiotic framework, with elements classified into icon, index, and symbol. Rather than treating these categories as fixed, the analysis emphasizes how meaning emerges through the interaction between visual form, lived practice, and cultural convention.

To ensure research rigor, this study applies the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [12]. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of methods and sources, prolonged engagement, and member checking.

Ethical considerations were maintained by obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting local cultural values. The research was conducted with sensitivity toward the Hewokloang community and aims to contribute to the preservation of their cultural heritage.

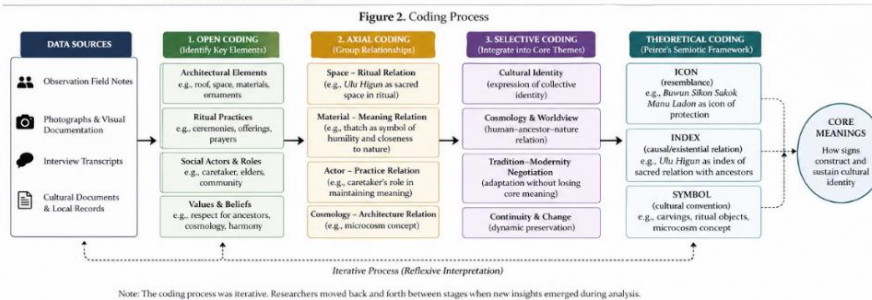
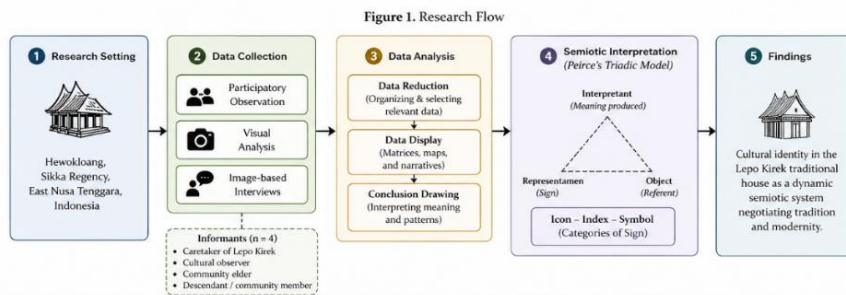


Figure 1. Integrated Research Design and Semiotic Analysis Framework

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The findings demonstrate that the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house functions as an integrated semiotic system in which architectural forms, spatial organization, and cultural practices collectively construct the cultural identity of the Hewokloang community, rather than operating as separate categories, icons, indices, and symbols interact dynamically to produce layered meanings embedded in everyday life.



Figure 2. Exterior view of the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house

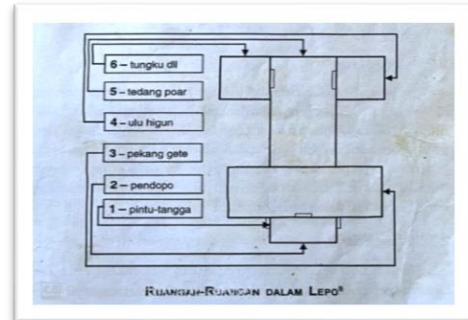


Figure 3. Spatial layout of the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house



Figure 4. *Ulu Higun* (sacred space) within the house



Figure 5. *Deot* (buffalo-shaped ritual object)



Figure 6. *Buwun Sikon Sakok Manu Ladon* roof structure

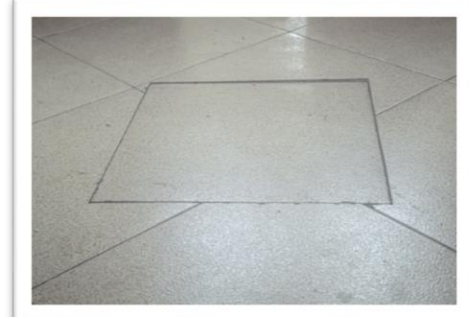


Figure 7. *Blodong*



Figure 8. *Pekang Gete* (communal space)



Figure 9. Pictures and statues of the Holy Family

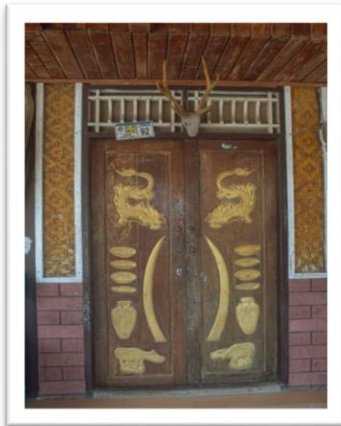


Figure 10. *Wa Gete* (The main door is made of *Lepo Kirek*)



Figure 11. Red Rubi Dragon Jar

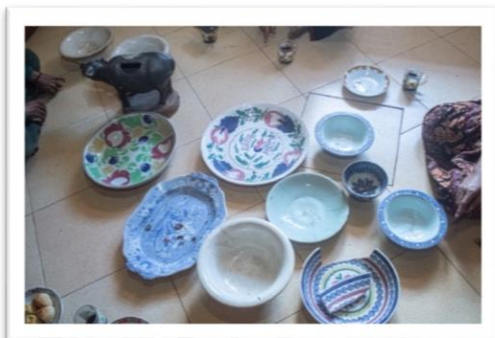


Figure 12. Goods and objects resulting from ancient exchanges with foreign traders from China, India, and Portugal



Figure 13. A sacred chest containing magical objects that is only brought out during major traditional ceremonies



Figure 14. *Bala Moan Hieng & Moan Goleng*



Figure 15. *Watu Mahang* in the *Ulu Higun* room



Figure 16. Motifs on the walls (*Gedek*)



Figure 17. *Watu Mahe/Mahang* is located in front of *Lepo Kirek*

3.1.1 Icon: Meaning Through Visual Resemblance

At the level of the icon, signs are characterized by their resemblance to the objects they represent. In the context of *Lepo Kirek*, iconic elements are prominently found in architectural forms, ornaments, and cultural objects, where meaning is conveyed through visual analogy [9].

The roof structure, *Buwun Sikon Sakok Manu Ladon* (Figure 2 & Figure 6), for instance, resembles a boat sail. This resemblance is not merely aesthetic but reflects a cultural narrative of protection, journey, and ancestral continuity. The form encodes collective memory, linking the community to its historical and cosmological orientation.

Similarly, carvings on the *Wa Gete* (main door) (Figure 10) and objects such as *Deot* (buffalo-shaped teapot) (Figure 5) demonstrate how visual similarity functions as a communicative device. These forms translate abstract values such as strength, protection, and vitality into tangible representations.

Thus, iconic elements do not only “look like” something; they mediate cultural understanding through familiar visual analogies, enabling immediate recognition of shared meanings within the community.

3.1.2 Index: Meaning Through Contextual and Causal Relations

At the indexical level, meaning emerges from the direct relationship between sign and object, often through spatial, causal, or experiential connections. In the context of *Lepo*

Kirek, indexical signs are closely related to spatial organization, ritual, and material practices. In Peircean terms, an index is characterized by a real and existential relationship between a sign and what it represents, often manifested through traces, effects, or tangible presence. Thus, meaning at the indexical level emerges not from resemblance or convention, but from experienced relationships embedded in social and ritual practices [16], [17].

The spatial distinction between Ulu Higun (sacred space) and Pekang Gete (communal space) (Figures 3 and 8) reflects a structured relationship between ritual authority and social interaction. This division organizes how individuals move, interact, and participate in cultural practices, making space an active medium of meaning rather than a passive setting.

Elements such as Blodong (Figure 7) and sacred stones (Watu Mahe/Mahang, Figures 15 & 17) serve as material traces of ritual activity. Their presence indicates ongoing communication with ancestors, embedding spiritual relations into physical space. Likewise, the selection of specific materials (e.g., local wood types of Ai Beru & Ai Bei) reflects ecological knowledge and ritual prescriptions, linking the built environment to nature.

Importantly, changes in materials, such as the use of zinc and concrete, also function indexically. They signal historical transformation and modernization, showing that the house records temporal change as part of its meaning system.

These findings indicate that indexical elements anchor cultural meaning in lived practice, making architecture a site of interaction among humans, ancestors, and the environment.

3.1.3 Symbol: Meaning Through Cultural Convention

At the symbolic level, meaning is constructed through shared cultural agreements and belief systems. Symbols in the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house are expressed through ornaments, rituals, naming systems, and cultural norms. These symbolic elements are not grounded in resemblance or direct causality, but are constructed through shared cultural conventions and collective agreements/interpretation, emphasizing the social nature of meaning-making in Peircean semiotics [8], [9].

Ornamental motifs such as diamonds, dragons, and floral patterns (Figure 16) embody values of unity, protection, and harmony. The name *Lepo Kirek* symbolizes the house as a “living entity,” reinforcing the idea that it is not an object but part of a cultural life system.

Objects such as the Rubi (water jar) (Figure 11) symbolize life and purification, while Deot represents masculinity and strength beyond its physical form. The integration of Catholic elements in Ulu Higun (Figure 9) further illustrates symbolic negotiation, in which local beliefs and external religious influences coexist without eroding core meanings.

Thus, symbolic elements function as mechanisms of cultural continuity, ensuring that shared values are maintained and transmitted across generations despite changing contexts.

3.1.4 Integrated Semiotic System

The findings reveal that icons, indices, and symbols in the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house do not operate as isolated categories but as an interconnected and layered system of

signification. Meaning emerges not from a single semiotic function, but from the simultaneous interaction between visual resemblance, lived relations, and cultural conventions.

This interdependence becomes evident when examining key architectural elements. The roof structure, for instance, is not limited to its iconic resemblance to a boat form. At the same time, it functions indexically by responding to environmental conditions, such as wind direction, and by adapting to climate change, while symbolically encoding cultural narratives related to protection, journey, and ancestral continuity. In this sense, a single form becomes a site of multiple meanings, where interpretation depends on context, practice, and cultural knowledge.

Importantly, these layers of meaning are not static but activated through use and experience. The meaning of space, objects, and architectural elements is fully realized only through ritual practices, social interaction, and embodied participation. For example, a spatial division may visually indicate hierarchy, but its deeper meaning emerges when it structures ritual movement, authority, and access. This demonstrates that meaning in *Lepo Kirek* is not merely embedded in form but performed and reproduced through practice.

This dynamic interaction also suggests that semiotic categories are fluid rather than fixed. An element may shift in its dominant meaning depending on context. In ritual settings, indexical and symbolic meanings may become more prominent, while in everyday perception, iconic aspects may be more immediately recognized. Such fluidity reflects the context-dependent nature of cultural interpretation, where meaning is continuously negotiated rather than predetermined.

Furthermore, integrating these semiotic dimensions highlights the house as a mediating structure between different realms of existence. Architectural elements connect the physical environment (nature), the social world (community), and the spiritual domain (ancestors and belief systems). This positions the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house as a microcosmic representation of cultural reality, where multiple layers of meaning converge and interact.

From a broader perspective, this integrated system demonstrates that traditional architecture should be understood not simply as a symbolic object but as a living semiotic **process**. Meaning is not contained within the structure itself but emerges through the ongoing interaction between material forms, human practices, and cultural interpretation.

Therefore, the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house embodies a dynamic, relational model of meaning, in which cultural identity is continuously constructed, negotiated, and sustained over time. This perspective challenges static interpretations of architecture and emphasizes the importance of analyzing cultural artifacts as active systems of meaning-making rather than passive representations.

3.1.5 Summary of Key Findings

The results can be summarized as follows:

1. **Iconic dimension** enables immediate recognition of cultural meaning through visual resemblance.
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2. **Indexical dimension** grounds meaning in spatial organization, material use, and ritual practice.
3. **Symbolic dimension** sustains meaning through shared cultural conventions and beliefs.
4. These three dimensions operate **interdependently**, forming a dynamic system of cultural representation.
5. The *Lepo Kirek* traditional house functions as a **living semiotic system** that negotiates continuity and change.

These findings are further supported by the classification presented in Table 2, which systematizes the relationship between architectural elements and their semiotic functions.

Table 2. Icon-Index-Symbol Analysis in the *Lepo Kirek* Traditional House

Aspect	Function in <i>Lepo Kirek</i> Culture	Customary Forms, Values , and Treatment
Icon	Shows the similarity of form to visual or physical reality.	The roof structure, <i>Buwun Sikon Sakok Manu Ladon</i> , <i>Wa Gete</i> (main door), <i>Deot</i> (a buffalo-shaped teapot), red dragon jars, and flower-patterned, <i>Bala Moan Goleng</i> and <i>Bala Moan Hieng</i> (ivory), <i>Watu Pela'Pedar</i> , <i>Tupat</i> , and <i>Lepa</i>
Index	Indicates a causal relationship, historical trace, or spiritual existence.	<i>Ulu Higun</i> , <i>Pekang Gete</i> , <i>Blodong</i> a ceramic hole located in <i>Ulu Higun</i> serves as an index of the ritual practice of <i>Lodo Huer</i> (reverence for ancestral spirits), the process of selecting and ritually cutting wood such as <i>Ai Bei</i> , <i>Ai Weru</i> , and <i>Ai Nangka</i> , <i>Watu Pela'Pedar</i> and <i>Watu Mahe</i> are used in traditional ceremonies, ritual offerings, <i>Blodong</i> , changing materials, Maghrib prohibition.
Symbol	Demonstrates agreement with the cultural and spiritual meanings.	The name <i>Lepo Kirek</i> , <i>Rubi</i> jar, customary prohibition, Catholic syncretism, The <i>Naga Ular</i> in <i>Wa Gete</i> , <i>Deot</i> (buffalo pot)

3.2. Discussion

This study shows that the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house is not merely a representation of cultural identity, but an active system of meaning production. Meaning is not fixed within architectural forms, but emerges through the interaction between visual structure, lived practice, and cultural convention [18], [19].

This is significant because most semiotic analyses, particularly those influenced by structural traditions, tend to treat meaning as stable and text-like. In contrast, this study shows that meaning in architectural contexts is processual and practice-based, emerging through repeated use, ritual engagement, and social interaction. This shifts semiotic analysis from a representational model toward a relational and experiential framework, where meaning is enacted rather than merely interpreted.

This finding both aligns with and challenges previous studies. On one hand, it supports research that views architecture as a symbolic system reflecting identity and cultural values [5], [8], [20]. On the other hand, it contrasts with studies that prioritize form, aesthetics, or structural symbolism without sufficiently addressing how meaning is lived and negotiated in practice [4], [7]. By foregrounding practice, this study fills an important gap in cultural semiotics, demonstrating that architectural meaning cannot be fully understood without considering everyday interaction and ritual context.

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances semiotic analysis by demonstrating that icon, index, and symbol do not function as fixed analytical categories but rather as interdependent, context-dependent modes of meaning. A single architectural element may simultaneously carry multiple semiotic functions, depending on how it is used, experienced, and interpreted.

The findings also resonate with Geertz's interpretive anthropology, which conceptualizes culture as a system of meaning expressed through practice [13]. However, this study goes further by demonstrating that architecture does not merely reflect cultural meaning but actively structures and regulates social behavior. Spatial arrangements such as the distinction between sacred and communal areas shape patterns of interaction, authority, and participation. Thus, architecture functions not only as a symbolic representation but also as a performative medium of culture.

From a communication perspective, the results reinforce and extend the concept of ritual communication [21], [22]. Cultural meaning is not transmitted as information but reproduced through participation in shared practices. The *Lepo Kirek* traditional house operates as a communicative environment where meaning is maintained through repetition, embodiment, and collective experience. This challenges transmission-based models of communication and supports a practice-oriented understanding of cultural communication.

These findings suggest that cultural meaning is not simply represented but actively produced through participation and embodied practice. As such, traditional architecture should be understood as a performative and relational system, rather than a static cultural object.

Another important contribution lies in integrating local knowledge systems with formal theoretical frameworks. As indicated in prior [11], [23], cultural symbols often operate implicitly and are not always fully articulated by community members. This study confirms that many meanings within the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house are tacit, embodied, and transmitted through participation rather than explicit explanation. Consequently, semiotic analysis must account not only for visible symbols but also for implicit cultural knowledge embedded in practice.

This finding also supports the concept of ethnomodernity, where tradition and modernity coexist through processes of reinterpretation and adaptation. In the context of the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house, the integration of modern materials and religious elements demonstrates that cultural identity is not static but continuously negotiated.

While integration and reinterpretation demonstrate cultural resilience, they may simultaneously lead to gradual shifts in meaning that are less visible but structurally significant. As highlighted in previous studies on cultural transformation and heritage [24], [25], reinterpretation can result in a weakening of symbolic depth when cultural practices are no longer fully understood or consistently performed.

Importantly, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of cultural change. Rather than framing modernization as a simple threat, the findings reveal a process of selective adaptation, in which new materials and external influences are incorporated without fully displacing core cultural meanings. This supports the concept of ethnomodernity, where tradition and modernity coexist through negotiation [6].

However, this adaptive process also raises critical concerns. The integration of modern materials and religious elements, while demonstrating cultural flexibility, may lead to gradual shifts in meaning that are not immediately visible. Over time, this can result in *cultural dilution*, particularly when symbolic practices are no longer fully understood or actively performed by younger generations. In this context, preservation is not only about maintaining physical structures but also about sustaining interpretive knowledge and cultural engagement.

This tension reveals a critical implication: cultural resilience cannot be sustained solely through adaptation. While adaptive processes may ensure the physical continuity of cultural forms, they do not inherently guarantee the preservation of meaning. Without ongoing transmission and reinterpretation of cultural significance, adaptation risks producing a fragmented symbolic coherence where material elements persist, yet their cultural depth and contextual relevance gradually diminish. These findings challenge overly optimistic perspectives on cultural sustainability that assume continuity will naturally persist despite structural and social transformations.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. It is based on a single case within the Hewokloang community, which constrains the generalizability of its findings. The relatively small number of informants may not fully reflect the community's diversity of perspectives. In addition, the qualitative approach employed prioritizes interpretive depth but may overlook measurable socio-economic variables that also influence cultural transformation. The restricted timeframe of the research further limits the ability to capture long-term dynamics of cultural change.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to cultural semiotics and communication studies. It proposes a practice-based model of meaning, emphasizing that cultural identity is not static but continuously negotiated through the dynamic interplay between material forms, social practices, and belief systems. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of developing preservation strategies that extend beyond the conservation of physical structures, advocating instead for active cultural participation and sustained intergenerational transmission of meaning as essential components of cultural continuity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the *Lepo Kirek* traditional house functions as a *practice-based semiotic system* in which cultural identity is continuously produced through the interaction among architectural forms, ritual practices, and belief systems. Rather than treating architecture as a passive representation, the findings show that meaning is actively enacted through spatial use, embodied practices, and culturally structured interactions.

Theoretically, this study contributes by extending Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework into a practice-oriented context, demonstrating that the categories of icon, index, and symbol do not operate as fixed analytical units but as interdependent and shifting modes of meaning. Specifically, a single architectural element may simultaneously function across multiple semiotic dimensions depending on context, use, and cultural interpretation. This

challenges conventional semiotic approaches that treat meaning as stable and text-like, and instead positions meaning as relational, performative, and context-dependent.

Practically, the findings suggest that cultural preservation strategies must move beyond material conservation toward sustaining the practices, rituals, and interpretive knowledge that activate meaning within cultural structures. Without such engagement, physical continuity alone risks producing symbolic fragmentation, where cultural forms persist but their meanings gradually weaken.

This study is limited to a single case and a qualitative scope. Future research should expand comparative analysis across different cultural settings and integrate socio-economic perspectives to understand better how structural change influences the continuity of cultural meaning over time.

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