

# Sundanese Color

## Meaning, Naming, and Using

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**Abstract**—The aim of this work is to find out how the colors are understood and used by the Sundanese. Color is an important element in human life. Colors not only complement the life, but can be used as knowledge and communication tools. The color is an element of art and design, including the design of visual communication. The art itself is one of the seven elements of culture. Colors in Sundanese culture have a unique and distinct. Sundanese culture in this case meant not only limited to the culture grow and develop in the area of West Java province. Researches about color in Sundanese culture are hard to find, so knowledge of the colors in the Sundanese culture is still limited. The approach using descriptive-analytical. Data obtained from the publications of the previous studies. Sundanese Color names who found by a researcher, generally, are not accompanied by color code so that causing the reader difficult to imagine it's colors, especially for readers with mother tongue is not Sundanese. The results showed there are three dimensions of color in Sundanese culture, i.e. meaning, naming, and use of color. Color's preference in Sundanese culture is divided into two categories: black and white and unlimited colors. The color preference of clothing for the Baduy Dalam is black and white. The color preference of clothes for Baduy panamping and dangka is colorful. The fact that research on the special topic on Sundanese colors very slightly means this topic still widely open to execute.

**Keywords**—Color, Communication, Culture, Sundanese, Visual

### I. INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, humans cannot separate themselves from the existence of color. According to F. Birren, as cited by Kauppinen, color is a part of our daily lives through issues such as clothing, food, weather, race, interior, architecture, animals and so on [1]. Colors are fundamental elements of our visual perception and environmental experience; they are the substance of how we experience the environment. We encounter and are surrounded by color whenever we open our eyes. It accompanies us in diverse visual ways and is always connected with and influenced by light in the natural or human-designed environment. Color functions as information, communication, and design material. Color is a geographical, ethnic and cultural attribute [2]. None of the cultural products are colorless. Color is an element in the artwork, Charles Batteux as cited by Carroll writes, We will define painting, sculpture and dance as the imitation of beautiful nature conveyed through colors, through relief and through attitudes,

[3] and visual communication design, According to Evans and Thomas In design, colors must be selected for their ability to enhance communication and composition. The role of color in visual communication is complex. It is undoubtedly the most researched, the most visually powerful, and since the advent of computers, the most technical of all of the elements of design. It enhances the viewer's response on a variety of levels; it heightens the viewer's perception and intensifies emotional and psychological reaction. To become proficient with color, you must spend time studying it and working with it. They have meaning and usefulness in communication [4]. Knowledge of color is an important factor for designers. Color is an element of visual communication design [5].

Depend on the target of audience, Ramage, Bean, and Johnson cited by Maulina designer are especially controlled by genre conventions. For example, academic posters use color minimally, whereas popular magazines often use color lavishly [6].

According to Bleicher, Today, more is written about imagery than color. With the widespread use of digital and other new technologies in both fine art and design, there is a resurgence in theorizing about color and its role in new media and as a vehicle for communication. For color naming, There is no uniformity or convention. The names of Hue continue to change with time to reflect today's culture and society and fashion. Colors are named by producers to increase sales of their products. During the 1960s and 1970s, the names of colors became synonymous with commercialism and consumerism. [7].

Research about color in Sundanese culture are hard to find. This shows that there is still a lack of research on the topic. Knowledge gained through research about color in Sundanese culture into such cultural wealth of Sunda.

A piece of Batik can tell the greatness of Indonesian culture that are polite, cultured, and civilized. Therefore, Batik can be seen as an object that continues to be legendary and give extrinsic and intrinsic meaning to the world of Nusantara fabric [8].

This study aims to find out how the color is understood and used by the Sundanese through observing the application of color in their daily lives based on the publication of previous researches and the results are expected to enrich insight of

academic and practitioners in the field of art and visual communication desain.

There are seven publications of research on and related to Sundanese colors have been founded, see Table I.

TABLE I. RESEARCH PUBLICATION

No.	RESEARCH		
	Year	Title	Author
1	2018	Adaptation of Sundanese Aesthetic Elements in the Form of Sundanese Batik Ornaments	Yan Yan Sunarya
2	2017	Visualization of <i>Baduy</i> Woven Fabric	Nina Maftukha, Yustiono & Ira Adriati
3	2016	Color Vocabulary in Sundanese Language	Santy Yulianti
4	2012	Sundanese Visual Culture	Reiza D Dienaputra
5	2011	Uga as a Collective Memory of the Sundanese	Nandang Rusnandar
6	2010	The Perception of Color Naming in Sundanese	Pitria Dara Rusmawati
7	1982	Local color palette in some areas of Indonesia	Yusuf Affendi Djalari Sasnitawinata

## II. METHOD

Research of the colors in Sundanese culture uses a descriptive analytical where data is obtained from published research reports. The data obtained was selected according to the research theme, described in detail, sorted, juxtaposed with color theory, analyzed, and then interpreted to obtain conclusions.

## III. RESULTS

### A. Sundanese

Sundanese culture in this case meant not only limited to the culture grow and develop in the area of West Java province.

Djatikusumah, as cited by Indrawardana states that there are three basic Sundanese concept categories, namely (1) philosophical: Sunda means white, clean, light, beautiful, great, beautiful, good and so on; (2) ethnicity: Sundanese means or refers to the Sundanese community that God created and other tribes and nations on the face of the earth. In this case it relates to Sundanese culture which is inherent in the ways and characteristics of Sundanese people; (3) Geographical: Sunda means referring to the naming of an area based on a map of the world from the past in the territory of Indonesia (the archipelago), namely as the level of the Greater Sunda Islands or the Greater Sunda region which includes a large set of islands (Sumatra, Java, Madura, Kalimantan) and The Lesser Sunda Islands or Sunda Kecil, which is a row of islands smaller in size and located to the east of Java (Bali, Lombok, Flores, Sumbawa, Sumba, Roti, etc.). Furthermore, from Sundanese cosmological view, Sundanese cosmology there is the concept of tapa (life as ascetic) namely tapa di mandala and tapa di nagara. Tapa di Mandala is the task of the Baduy Dalam that safeguards Kabuyutan's ancestral heritage by maintaining the integrity of the Sundanese ancestral heritage and mandate by

not changing it in the slightest. Meanwhile, the concept in Tapa di Nagara has an understanding of the roles and duties of Sundanese who live outside the Baduy, area but are the same in guarding Kabuyutan, the inheritance and teachings of Sundanese ancestors by following or aligning with time [9].

According to Sumardjo, Sundanese is Sundanese, which means it remains one even though it keeps changing. In *Baduy*, the Sundanese who changed apart from the previous Sundanese, so that they were known as *Baduy Dalam* and *Baduy Luar*, there was actually no separation, only differentiation, even though Sundanese was still recognized. So the Sundanese identity is not on cultural objects, but the way Sundanese work or how Sundanese think in producing cultural objects. The reader is thus reversed, that is, from the structure of cultural objects find a system of relationships in an open structure that gives meaning. Through the structure of cultural objects, a system that gives a sense of identity identity is found [10].

According to Kasmana and Maulina, The values and philosophy of Sundanese culture towards the nature reflected in their way of life, one of them is in terms of food packaging [11].

According to Wessing and Barendregt, Very briefly, *Baduy* is a closed community that practices religious worship which has been largely abandoned throughout West Java. Their village, *Kanekes*, is divided into two main parts, inhabited by what is usually called the inside and outside of the Baduy-the *Baduy Dalam* (*tangtu*, the place where indigenous ancestors are most fully preserved) and the *Baduy Luar* (*panamping*, the place where observations of this tradition more relaxed). There is also the third category of hamlets, *dangka*, where this process has gone further [12].

*Baduy* people living in *Kanekes* Village, Leuwidamar Sub-District, Lebak Regency, Banten, were considered to have socio-cultural characteristics such as the old Sundanese community, which is now a social system as it has faded in other communities. group in West Java. From various archaeological sites in the southern part of Banten, Lebak Si Bedug, Kosala, Mount Dangka and Sasaka Domas in Kanekes, shows that the megalithic culture is the cultural environment of the *Baduy* community of the past that continues to this day. Likewise, respecting *Kabuyutan's* ancestors, one of the important characteristics of the archipelago's belief system, which to the *Baduy* has almost never been hindered by outside influences [13].

### B. Color

Drew & Meyer and Roberts, state that there are two types of coloring processes, first based on light (additive color) with the main colors consisting of Red, Green and Blue. If the three colors of the main light are combined, it will produce white and the second is based on the pigment (subtractive color) with the main colors consisting of the colors Cyan, Magenta and Yellow. If all three pigments are combined it will produce Black [14-15]. The above description can be visualized as shown in Figure 1

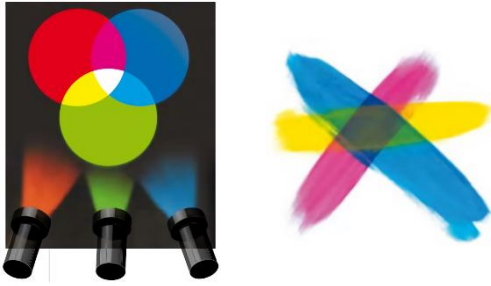


Fig. 1 Source of Color  
Source: Roberts [18]

We must also remember that in primitive times different colors were not carefully distinguished. For example, one word might be used where we have to say yellow, orange, salmon, pink, rose, red, red, dark red, maroon, brown. Of the ten color names given here, only three are descended from the past: yellow, red, and brown [16].

Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, as cited by Heer and Stone, posit eleven (11) universal basic colors (in English: blue, brown, green, orange, pink, purple, red, yellow, black, gray, and white) [17].

C. Previous Research Result

As described in table 1, the research on the color in Sundanese culture is still very limited. Each of the researchers look at the colors of the various points of view.

Sasnitawinata examined the Sundanese color arrangement of several Sundanese artifacts, namely poetry (*pantun*) and *kawih* (*celempungan/gamelan*). Sasnitawinata compile the colors found on the *kawih* into the analog color arrangement based on the Munsell Color theory, and researcher identified 25 Sundanese color names [18].

Rusmawati's study perception of color naming in the Sundanese. Location of study is located in Malatisuka Village, Gunung Tanjung Sub-District, Tasikmalaya Regency, West Java Province. The technique used in the data collection stage is the interview technique, the color card shown to the respondent, then the respondent gives the Sundanese color name of the card. The results of data collection showed that respondents in the study could distinguish 222 types of colors and their Sundanese color names (basic colors excluded) [19], see Table II.

TABLE II RUSMAWATI'S FINDINGS

No.	Colors		
	Basic	Hex*	Number of Sundanese Names in Palette
1	Black/ <i>Hideung</i>	000000	17
2	White/ <i>Bodas</i>	FFFFFF	12
3	Red/ <i>Beureum</i>	FF0000	34
4	Yellow/ <i>Koneng</i>	FFFF00	30
5	Green/ <i>Hejo</i>	008000	52
6	Blue/ <i>Paul</i>	0000FF	24

7	Brown/ <i>Kopi</i>	A52A2A	14
8	Pink/ <i>Kayas</i>	FFC0CB	9
9	Purple/ <i>Bungur</i>	800080	23
10	Grey/ <i>Hawuk</i>	808080	17

\*: Patterson [20].

Rusnandar states that in Banten, people who use color as a sign of expression from the sender to the person sent through the media of *mole* cigarettes are bound with certain thread colors [20], see Table III.

TABLE III. THREAD COLORS IN BANTEN AS EXPRESSION

No.	Color	Expression
1	Black/ <i>hideung</i>	Remembering
2	White/ <i>bodas</i>	Pure
3	Red/ <i>beureum</i>	Breakup
4	Yellow/ <i>koneng</i>	Being upset
5	Green/ <i>hejo</i>	Want to meet
6	Blue/ <i>paul</i>	Join
7	Violet/ <i>gandaria</i>	Waiting
8	Azure/ <i>bulao</i>	Miss
9	Cream/ <i>koneng enay</i>	Notify being sick
10	Grey/ <i>kulawu</i>	Inviting

Dienaputra has conducted a study of Sundanese visual culture through the study of symbol of district / city government in West Java Province. According to researcher there are ten colors used in these symbols namely black, white, yellow, golden yellow, green, blue, brown, red, orange and purple. Of the ten colors, green, white, and blue are the most widely used colors [21].

Yulianti research of color vocabulary in Sundanese language juxtaposed to Indonesian color vocabulary. Yulianti found that the color depth in Sundanese language is rich [22].

The color find in the *Baduy Dalam* woven fabric research was carried out by Maftukha, Yustiono, and Adriati, they stated that the *Baduy Dalam* only used black and white in their woven fabric, see Fig. 2. In the past *Baduy Luar* only used blue, black, white, red and green, but nowadays uses a variety of colors such as pink, yellow, golden yellow [23], see Fig. 3, 4 and 5.

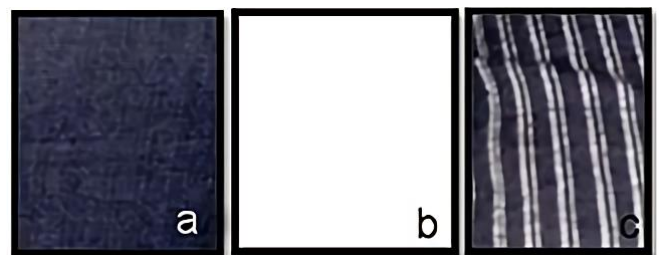


Fig. 2 *Baduy Dalam* Woven Fabric  
Source: Maftukha, Yustiono, and Adriati [13]



Fig. 3 *Baduy Luar* Woven Fabric  
Source: Maftukha, Yustiono, and Adriati [13]



Fig. 4 *Baduy Luar* Woven Fabric  
Source: Maftukha, Yustiono, and Adriati [13]



Fig. 5 *Baduy Luar* Woven Fabric  
Source: Maftukha, Yustiono, and Adriati [13]

Sunarya examined Sundanese Batik in Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis. Researcher stated that in decorating Batik Sumedang, Batik Garut, Batik Tasikmalaya, and Batik Ciamis. According to him, color selection tends to be bolder. Bright colors according to market demand are not awkward applied, although they are also known as color users who tend to be calm and unobtrusive and the researcher identified 17 Sundanese color names in Batik [24].

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Color in Sundanese culture is an important element so that the Sundanese understand, interpret, and use color as part of everyday life.

Edward Tylor, as cited by Spencer-Oatey, H., define Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society [25], see Fig. 6.

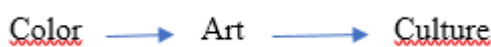


Fig. 6 Color in Culture

Sumardjo and Indrawardana agreed to be a Sundanese does not have to be domiciled in the West Java region but in the mindset.

Color research has been done by some researchers is to discover the importance of color in Sundanese culture.

The selection and use of color in Sundanese culture is related to meaning and some are related to aesthetics. Maftukha, Yustiono, and Adriati's, show that the *Baduy Dalam* only uses black and white where black is represented as the origin of the formation of the world and the white representation of light. Likewise, Dienaputra's research shows that the colors used in local government symbols represent meaning rather than aesthetics.

Garna and Maftukha stated, the consistency of the *Baduy Dalam* in maintaining the culture of the *Baduy* people of the past which continued to the present still remains unchanged. This results in line with Wessing and Barendregt as they stated that *Baduy* to have rejected all social change and to maintain the culture of their ancestor to a high degree of purity.

*Baduy Dalam* only use two colors for their clothes, white and black, while *Baduy panamping* allowed to use other colors, furthermore, no prohibition in clothes colors for *Baduy Dangka*. Adams stated that in Asian culture, white is the color of death and mourning and in Hindu traditions use black as the color of *Kali*, the goddess of time and change [26].

Rusnandar's research indicates that the colors have meaning as an expression of feeling. Table II shows the variety of colors that are used by people of Banten in expressing his feelings.

Specific research conducted by Sasnitawinata about color in Sundanese culture. Researchers found the arrangement of color acquired and then organize them into an analog color. The arrangement of the colours are composed of red to yellow, purple to blue, and blue to green. Researchers also grouped other colors.

The researchers identified 25 Sundanese color names i.e. *beureum, beurem cabe, beureum ati, kasumba, kayas, gedang asak, gading, koneng, koneng enay, hejo, hejo lukut, hejo ngagedod, hejo paul, paul, gandaria, gandola, bulao saheab, pulas haseup, bulao, bodas, hideng, borontok, coklat kopi, candra mawat and bulu hiris*.

Sasnitawinata's research also show that Sundanese culture has recognized two sources of color. The lyrics of the *Kuwung-Kuwung* song "which he studied showed that Sundanese culture knew that the source of the colors produced came from the light which is now called additive colors.

Here is the complete lyrics of *kawih Kuwung-Kuwung*:

*Kuwung-kuwung nu melengkung  
Cahyana lir emas pinanggih  
Katingalna warna-warna  
Cahya gilang gumilang  
Henteu bosen nu ningali  
Lenglang taya aling-aling  
Lenglang taya aling-aling  
Warna paul anu lucu  
Hejona pun kitu deui  
Beureum koneng cahyana lir*

*Emas anyar di sanglih  
Lamun dicipta kurasa  
Matak katarik birahi  
Cahaya sabumi alam  
Ting gurilap cahyana  
Numutkeun ku saur sepuh  
Wangsitna seuweu siwi  
Baheula dumugi ka kiwari  
Yen aya sasakalana*

The additive colors in the *kawih* lyrics are gold, blue, green, red, and yellow.

Sasnitawinata identified subtractive colors or colors derived from pigments from *pantun Sinyur*.

*The rhymes read as follows:  
Lawon sepre gandaria  
Nu kayas kantun sakodi  
Teh malire nu satia  
Beut luas ngantunkeun abdi*

The subtractive colors contained in the *pantun Sinyur* are Purple/*gandaria* and Pink/*kayas*.

In addition to the color expressions found in *kawih* and *pantun*, the researchers also observed the colors of other Sundanese cultural artifacts i.e. woven fabric (Maftukha, Yustiono, and Adriati) and Batik (Sunarya) who report that coloring process uses pigments or subtractive colors.

Rusmawati identify 232 Sundanese color names, but are not compiled into any color palette.

From seven publications of research, only one report states Sundanese color names with color code (hex). The color code facilitate the reader to know the color found by researcher, especially for reader with mother tongue is not Sundanese. To facilitate researcher in determining color codes found on artifact, depending on the size of research, researcher can use application of detector of color which can be downloaded freely, such as Color Grab (color detection).

The names of Sundanese color names associated with green occupations are the first rank (see Rusmawati's finding) followed by red, yellow, and blue as reflected in the findings of Dienaputra.

Sunarya identifying colours used in batik coloring, that is light, dark, and soft. Sunarya collected 17 Sundanese color names used in Batik as follows: *gumading, beureum euceuy, beureum obroy, koneng umyang, hejo daun, bodas nyacas, bodas ngeplak, gandaria, gandola, hejo ngedod, hejo paul, kayas, koneng enay, orange, paul, wungu, and nila; nilakencana*.

Yulianti examines the vocabulary of color names in the Sundanese language, researchers identify 63 Sunda color names juxtaposed on Indonesia vocabulary.

A summary of the color names of Sundanese culture that the researchers identified are:

- a. Sasnitawinata identified 25 color names,
- b. Rusmawati identified 232 color names including basic colors,
- c. Yulianti identified 63 color names.

- d. Sunarya identified 17 color names, and

Research results from the Sasnitawinata, Rusmawati, Yulianti, and Sunarya showed the names of color in Sundanese culture. The results of the study showed that the names of the colors in the Sundanese language has its own characteristics.

Rusnandar's research shows that colors are used in communication, namely the use of colored threads on *mole* tobacco cigarettes to convey messages from people who smoke cigarettes to the intended person. This phenomenon is rare in visual communication science where color is always associated with human ability to see through the sense of sight, namely the eye.

From an artistic perspective, Sunarya's research shows that the colors on the Batik fabric of Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis are used as an aesthetic element in which color selection follows market tastes.

From researcher perspective, publications can be distinguished into four categories i.e. (1) linguistic, Rusmawati's and Yulianti's reports, (2) textile, Maftukha's and Sunarya's reports, (3) culture Dienaputra's and Rusnandar's reports, (4) special topic on color, Sasnitawinata's report.

The period time of publication, from first up to latest, is about 35 years, it is means research on special topic on color is very limited and widely open to executed.

Based on the results of data analysis obtained from the publication of research reports, the colors in Sundanese culture have meaning, naming follows a certain pattern, used as a means of communication and aesthetics, and dominantly using subtractive colors.

## V. CONCLUSION

Colors in Sundanese culture, both for the people of *Baduy Dalam*, *Baduy Panamping*, and *Dangka*, regardless of whether they are domiciled in West Java Province, or not, have several dimensions. In addition to the aesthetic, in Sundanese culture there are also other color dimensions such as dimensions of color naming, dimensions of meaning, and dimensions of color usage as communication tools. These dimensions describe the attributes found in Sundanese culture. This can be seen in the preference of color selection in dressing, the color preference in Sundanese culture can be categorized into two groups, namely black and white preference for *Baduy Dalam* people and unlimited colors for people outside the *Baduy Dalam*.

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