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The Shift Of Values In The Tradition Of Uang Panai' Among The Makassar Tribe In Tamalatea District, Jeneponto Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the shift of values in the uang panai' tradition among the Makassar tribe in Bontotangnga Village, Tamalatea District, Jeneponto Regency, focusing on cultural meanings, forms of value transformation, and the underlying factors driving this phenomenon. Employing a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, primary data were gathered through direct observation and in-depth interviews with eleven key informants, including traditional leaders village imams, parents, married couples, individuals who experienced cancelled marriages, and local youth. The results of the study indicate that: ideally, the community of Bontotangnga Village still perceives uang panai' as a noble instrument of respect (*siri'*), honesty (*lempu'*), firmness (*getteng*), and a manifestation of the groom's moral responsibility.

Keywords: Marriage, Pride, *Uang panai*,

INTRODUCTION

The *uang panai* tradition is a crucial element of the customary marriage systems of the Bugis and Makassar peoples, steeped in symbolic, moral, and social significance. Generally, *uang panai* is defined as a sum of money given by the groom's side to the bride's side prior to the wedding, serving as a symbol of seriousness, respect, and responsibility (Rinaldi et al., 2022). The amount is typically determined by various factors, such as the prospective bride's social status, educational attainment, lineage, and family background. This tradition serves as a marker of cultural identity for the Makassar people and embodies the value of *siri'*, which places the highest regard on a woman's honor and self-worth.

Over time, and with the advent of modernization, public perception regarding *uang panai'* has undergone a significant shift. While it was once viewed as a moral symbol and a sincere expression of *siri'*, some segments of society now tend to interpret it as an indicator of social status and family prestige. This shift creates a stark contrast between the original meaning rooted in honor and the contemporary interpretation, which leans toward materialism and competitiveness.

In the marriage practices of the Bugis and Makassar communities, *uang panai'* is often conflated with the *mahar* (Islamic dowry), even though the two possess distinct meanings and functions. The *mahar* is a mandatory gift under Islamic law, given directly by the groom to the bride as a requirement for the marriage contract and becoming her exclusive property. In contrast, *uang panai'* is a customary tradition involving a payment to the bride's family; it is generally used to help cover wedding expenses and serves as a symbol of respect toward the bride's family within the social systems of the Bugis and Makassar peoples (Saleh, 2018).

Within the cultural framework of the Bugis and Makassar communities, the concept of honor holds a central position in governing social relationships and customary practices, including marriage. The value of *siri'* is understood not merely as individual shame or self-esteem, but as a moral principle that upholds the dignity of the family. This value manifests in various customary practices, one of which is the giving of *uang panai'* (customary bride price), representing respect for the woman's family. According to Andi Ima Kesuma, the value system of the Bugis people is built upon principles of honor, solidarity, and social responsibility values passed down through generations that serve as the foundation for social relationships within the community (Kesuma, 2012).

From the perspective of cultural anthropology, *uang panai'* is viewed not merely as an economic transaction but as an expression of social values and a symbol of esteem for the woman and her family. This tradition reflects a collectivist value system that emphasizes social balance and inter-family relationships. Rahman (2022) notes that *uang panai'* serves as a vehicle for cultural communication that strengthens kinship ties and reinforces the community's social structure, embodying values such as propriety (*lempu'*), honor (*siri'*), and responsibility (*getteng*) values that form the moral foundation for establishing a new family.

In general, a value system is a set of principles, beliefs, and norms that guide individuals or groups in making judgments, adopting attitudes, and acting within social life; it serves as a fundamental guide directing human behavior and social interaction. Cultural values can evolve alongside social, economic, and technological developments. In the context of the Makassar community, the value of respect originally the core of the *uang panai'* tradition has begun to

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shift toward becoming a symbol of prestige and social status (Hasbi, 2020). This shift reflects changes in the community's value structure driven by the growing influence of cultural capitalism and a consumerist lifestyle. This phenomenon aligns with Soekanto's (2012) view that social change is a natural process occurring when a society faces internal drivers (such as aspirations and needs) and external ones (such as technology, the economy, and global interaction).

Ideally, *uang panai'* functions to strengthen kinship ties and social bonds, serving as a means to preserve Makassar cultural traditions. The values of appreciation and respect should remain at the core of the *uang panai'* practice; as explained by Rinaldi et al. (2022), *uang panai'* serves as a symbol of appreciation and respect for the woman's family. Under ideal circumstances, this tradition should not act as a barrier to marriage, but rather as a social bridge that upholds family honor and strengthens the social structure of the Makassar community.

Based on the researcher's preliminary observations, cases of couples calling off their weddings due to high *uang panai'* (customary bride price) demands have been identified in Tamalatea District, specifically in Bontotangnga Urban Village. This situation indicates a shift in values from symbolic meaning toward materialism. Initial observations reveal that between 2024 and 2026, there were at least 13 cases of couples cancelling their weddings because of these high demands. Most of these cases involved men working as farmers or day laborers with limited incomes who were unable to meet *uang panai'* requirements ranging from IDR 70 million to over IDR 100 million, depending on the woman's education level and social status. In the observed social practice, *uang panai'* is no longer understood merely as a symbol of respect for the woman's family; instead, it has transformed into an indicator of social status and family prestige. This situation points to a value shift from symbolic significance to materialism.

Values that ought to reflect respect have now become an economic and social burden, particularly for low-income communities. This aligns with findings by Haif et al. (2025), who discovered that in many rural areas of South Sulawesi, the amount of *uang panai'* no longer reflects the community's economic capacity but rather serves as a measure of a family's social status. Empirically the social changes occurring in Tamalatea District specifically in Bontotangnga Urban Villagereveal complex value dynamics. The majority of the population in this area relies on the agricultural and fisheries sectors for their livelihoods, earning limited incomes. Consequently, the high demands for *uang panai'* appear disproportionate to local economic conditions.

Another factor influencing the practice and amount of *uang panai'* in Bontotangnga Urban Village is the role of the woman's extended family particularly close relatives such as aunts, uncles, and respected elders. In common social practice, the consent of the bride's biological mother is not always final, as the views and judgments of other relatives carry significant social weight. Disagreement from a single member of the extended family often triggers moral pressure and internal family conflict or even fosters negative narratives and exaggerated stories within the kinship circle thereby intensifying demands regarding *panai'* money or delaying the marriage process. This situation demonstrates that marriage decisions do not rest solely within the individual or nuclear family sphere but are governed by potent collective social controls; here, *panai'* money serves simultaneously as a symbol of the extended family's honor and as an arena for negotiating social power within the Makassar kinship structure.

This situation reflects a structural social dilemma: the tension between upholding customary values and the community's economic realities. Social pressure manifesting as a sense of shame remains intense due to the internalization of *siri'* values; consequently, a failure to meet customary standards directly impacts an individual's social standing. Viewed through the lens of Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalist theory, this phenomenon reveals a shift in the function of the *panai'* tradition moving from a mechanism that fosters social solidarity to a source of pressure and new inequalities driven by changing economic structures and the influence of modernization on Makassar society. It also highlights the commodification of cultural values, wherein a symbol of honor transforms into a competitive material indicator; thus, *panai'* functions not merely as a cultural institution but also as an arena for negotiating increasingly complex social statuses.

Economic consequences are not the only outcome; this shift in values also affects the cultural identity of the younger generation. Nurfadilah (2025) found that young people within the Makassar community now interpret *panai'* more pragmatically, with some even viewing it as a form of "social transaction" subject to negotiation. This perspective illustrates the process of adapting traditional cultural values to the logic of the modern economy. This shift does not signify the loss of culture but rather a form of resignification a process of revitalizing the meaning of tradition within a new context that better aligns with contemporary societal needs. The phenomenon demonstrates that the younger generation has not entirely abandoned cultural values; instead, they are adapting their meaning to remain relevant to the socio-economic conditions they face. In this context, *uang panai'* is preserved as a cultural symbol, albeit with a more flexible and contextual interpretation.

The phenomenon of high *uang panai'* (customary marriage payment) demands is not merely an economic or financial issue; it also reveals a lack of adequate pre-marital preparation for prospective brides and grooms within Bugis and Makassar communities. Unlike other institutions in Indonesia that possess structured pre-marital readiness mechanisms such as household preparation programs for TNI (military) and Polri (police) personnel, or the mandatory (*canonical*) marriage preparation courses for Catholic couples prior to their blessing indigenous communities generally lack similar customary or local forums that specifically address the mental, economic, and psychological readiness of prospective couples in a way that integrates traditional understanding. Consequently, public attention focuses more on meeting the *uang panai'* amount than on substantive readiness for building a household. This situation underscores the need for this study to further examine how fundamental marriage values including readiness for married life are

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understood and prepared for by the community in Bontotangnga Urban Village, amidst a shift in the orientation of *uang panai'* toward an increasing emphasis on economic aspects.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding shifts in cultural values within a modern context. The *uang panai'* tradition, originally a symbol of respect, now risks causing social problems, such as delayed marriages, social tension between families, and even the emergence of debt-based practices to meet customary demands. Failure to examine this phenomenon in depth raises concerns about a potential crisis of cultural values, which could result in the loss of the tradition's noble significance. This research aims to contribute to efforts to preserve local culture in a way that adapts to changing times. Furthermore, understanding the social dynamics of the community in Tamalatea District specifically in Bontotangnga Urban Village is crucial to avoiding the oversimplified view that the *uang panai'* tradition is merely an economic burden. This tradition holds profound symbolic value and social function; therefore, its preservation requires a contextual and participatory approach. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of the shifting values associated with *uang panai'* (customary marriage payments) within the socio-economic context of Tamalatea District specifically Bontotangnga Urban Village an area characterized by a semi-rural, agrarian nature and a strong influence of customary norms and kinship structures. In contrast to urban Makassar, which is defined by city life and the rationalization of modern cultural values, this study highlights the role of the bride's extended family particularly close relatives such as aunts and uncles as a mechanism of social control capable of influencing the amount of the *uang panai'* and the marriage process itself. These findings offer a fresh perspective on the transformation of the meaning of *uang panai'* through negotiations of honor within the kinship networks of the Makassar people, and are expected to enrich the study of cultural transformation in South Sulawesi.

METHODE

This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a scholarly endeavor conducted intensively, in-depth, and in detail to understand the meaning of lived experiences whether of individuals or groups regarding a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This approach enables researchers to interact directly with research subjects through in-depth interviews, thereby comprehensively exploring their experiences, views, and interpretations of the phenomenon under study.

Qualitative research is also referred to as a naturalistic method because it is conducted under natural conditions without manipulating the social environment; it is also widely used in cultural anthropology research. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology focuses on seeking the essence of human experiences as they are consciously lived; researchers therefore attempt to set aside (bracket) personal preconceptions to grasp the meanings that emerge from the participants' perspectives. In this study, the phenomenological approach is utilized because it can reveal the subjective meanings and profound experiences of the community in Tamalatea District specifically in Bontotangnga Urban Village regarding the *uang panai'* tradition. This tradition serves as a symbol of honor, *siri'* (cultural pride/honor), and social status, yet it is currently undergoing a shift in values.

The phenomenological approach in this study is reinforced by the perspective of Suwardi Endraswara, who views culture as a system of meaning that is lived and interpreted by cultural actors. Endraswara asserts that cultural research aims to understand how the meaning of a tradition is experienced and reconstructed by a community within its social context. Consequently, the shift in values regarding the *uang panai'* tradition is understood as an interpretive process arising from the social experiences of the community in Tamalatea District (specifically Bontotangnga Urban Village) as they navigate economic and social structural changes; thus, *uang panai'* is viewed as a cultural symbol undergoing re-signification in line with the dynamics of community life (Endraswara, 2006).

As explained by Creswell and Poth (2016), the phenomenological approach focuses on understanding the "essence of human experience" regarding the social phenomena individuals undergo. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how the community in Tamalatea District specifically in Bontotangnga Village interprets the shifting meaning of *uang panai'*(customary marriage money) from a symbol of respect to a burden of economic and social status amidst the currents of modernization. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, the researcher aims to uncover the profound meanings embedded in these experiences in a natural and reflective manner.

The approach adopted in this study is expected to provide a comprehensive and meaningful depiction of how Makassar cultural values are transforming within the lives of the community in Tamalatea District (particularly Bontotangnga Village), as well as how they negotiate the tension between customary values and modern economic realities while preserving their cultural identity.

This research is conducted in Tamalatea District specifically Bontotangnga Village, Jeneponto Regency a location selected purposively because the community still strongly upholds Makassar customs, particularly the *uang panai'* tradition as a symbol of honor and *siri'* (cultural pride/honor). The researcher chose this area due to its socio-economic character, which relies predominantly on the agricultural sector; this often leads to tension between customary demands and the community's economic capacity. Phenomena such as cancelled marriages resulting from high *uang panai'* costs illustrate a shift in values from a meaning of respect to a symbol of social status making Tamalatea District a relevant site for examining the dynamics of cultural value transformation.

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Figure 1. Research location

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Uang Panai Tradition

The *uang panai'* tradition is a significant cultural element among the Makassar people, including in the Tamalatea District specifically the Bontotangnga Urban Village in Jeneponto Regency. This tradition is not merely an economic transaction accompanying the marriage process; it is a symbol of respect, *siri'* (honor/dignity), and the moral responsibility of the groom's side toward the bride's family. Various studies confirm that *uang panai'* is a cultural institution that regulates harmonious inter-family relations and preserves the dignity of customs passed down through generations (Rinaldi et al., 2023).

The *uang panai'* tradition also embodies a philosophy of familial sacrifice an aspect rarely explicitly highlighted in previous studies. The groom's efforts to fulfill the *uang panai'* requirement such as selling rice fields, plantations, or livestock, incurring debt, or working harder represent not just an economic burden, but an embodiment of the values of sacrifice, responsibility, and familial love inherited across generations (Badruzzaman, 2007). Such sacrifices underscore the groom's sincerity and involve the solidarity of the extended family, who share the burden to ensure the marriage takes place; thus, *uang panai'* is fundamentally a reflection of family solidarity and cooperation, rather than merely a material metric. This philosophical understanding is crucial for balancing the contemporary tendency to view *uang panai'* solely as a financial burden, overlooking the underlying values of sacrifice and togetherness.

Radcliffe-Brown's theory of structural functionalism posits that cultural elements function to maintain social order. The *uang panai'* tradition serves as an integrative mechanism that strengthens kinship ties and averts potential conflict. Among the communities in Tamalatea District, the amount of *uang panai'* is adjusted according to the family's social status and economic capacity, thereby striking a balance between customary demands and social realities (Kasmawati, 2025). In Bontotangnga Village, this practice appears flexible and adaptive; some families accept non-monetary contributions such as agricultural produce, communal labor, or collective assistance from the extended family as part of the *panai'* process, without diminishing the aspect of honor.

The community of Tamalatea District, particularly in Bontotangnga Village, possesses an agrarian social structure dominated by farming and fishing occupations. Although the economic status of some residents falls within the lower-middle range, the commitment to the *panai'* money tradition remains steadfast. This indicates that the community does not view *panai'* money merely as a financial burden, but rather as a meaningful practice that affirms cultural identity and the continuity of *siri'* values.

Findings by Nurhadi (2017) illustrate that the Makassar people treat this tradition as a social structure that binds interpersonal relationships. In Bontotangnga Village, social cohesion is evident through the extended family's involvement in gathering the *panai'* funds. This process fosters horizontal solidarity manifested in the cooperation among siblings, relatives, and neighbors which reinforces the significance of *panai'* as a collective ritual rather than an individual one. Thus, within the community of Tamalatea District, *panai'* money is understood not merely as a material offering, but as a social institution that maintains social structural stability and strengthens internal community solidarity aligning with Radcliffe-Brown's concept of sociocultural function.

The interpretation and shifting of values generally refer to how a society understands the meaning of a tradition and how that meaning evolves over time. Initially, a cultural value serves as a moral guideline and a social symbol governing societal behavior. However, changes in social and economic conditions, as well as lifestyles, can trigger a shift in meaning; values that were once symbolic and collective begin to be perceived in more practical, material, or individualistic terms. This shift does not signify the loss of cultural values but rather reflects the process by which society adapts to maintain traditions, ensuring their continued relevance amidst ever-changing life realities.

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Endraswara (2021) explains that the philosophy of science within the humanities views knowledge not as something neutral or value-free, but as the product of human interpretation regarding the social and cultural realities experienced. From this perspective, scientific truth is grasped through an interpretive process rooted in the research subject's experiences, consciousness, and social context. Science serves to understand the meanings underlying the social actions, symbols, and traditions present in society. Consequently, changes or shifts in cultural values are not viewed as deviations, but rather as dynamics of social knowledge emerging from the interplay between tradition, lived experience, and evolving social conditions.

According to Kluckhohn (1951), cultural values are fundamental orientations that guide human behavior. In the context of the Tamalatea District community, *uang panai'* (customary marriage money) embodies the values of *siri'* (honor), *lempu'* (honesty), and *getteng* (steadfastness). Originally, *uang panai'* functioned as an instrumental value a means to achieve terminal values such as family honor and social recognition. However, economic dynamics and modernization have begun to alter this meaning. Haif et al. (2025) indicate that the emergence of new, more materialistic interpretations has led to the amount of *uang panai'* being frequently linked to a woman's social status, education, and family prestige. This shift is clearly evident in Tamalatea District particularly in Bontotangnga Urban Village where the younger generation largely perceives *panai'* money as an onerous financial burden, contrasting with the older generation, who view it as a symbol of morality and responsibility.

Homans' Social Exchange Theory (1958) helps explain this dynamic. According to Homans, social action operates within a framework of rewards and costs. In the *panai'* tradition, the groom's side offers the *panai'* money as a "symbolic reward" to secure "social recognition" specifically, acceptance by the bride's family and social legitimacy. However, when the value of the *panai'* rises far beyond the groom's family's economic means driven by inflation and escalating social standards an exchange imbalance arises. This has led to practices such as the provision of agricultural produce (e.g., rice or livestock) and the groom's family's involvement in financing and supplying the logistical needs of the wedding celebration, including catering, event equipment, and other forms of logistical support. These practices are understood as an effort to establish a more proportional form of exchange that aligns with the economic capacities of both parties.

The Significance of *Uang Panai'* as a Form of Respect and *Siri'*

The *uang panai'* tradition holds a significant place in the marriage system of the Makassar people in Bontotangnga Urban Village, Jeneponto Regency. Historically, *uang panai'* has been interpreted as a symbol of respect, an expression of the value of *siri'*, and a manifestation of the groom's moral responsibility toward the family of the woman he intends to marry. However, with the advent of modernization, shifts in economic structures, and a growing materialistic orientation within society, the interpretation of this tradition has undergone a significant transformation shifting from a value rooted in respect to an indicator of social status, family prestige, and economic calculation.

The value of *siri'*, which forms the basis for interpreting *uang panai'* in this study, refers to the concept of self-esteem and honor within Bugis and Makassar cultures; Rahmatiar et al. (2021) categorize this concept into four types. First is *siri' ripakasiri'*, which relates to personal self-esteem and the honor and dignity of the family; any violation of this is viewed as a grave disgrace. Second is *siri' mappakasiri'-siri'*, which relates to work ethic and responsibility, motivating individuals to uphold their own and their family's good name through diligence and integrity in their actions. Third is *siri' tappela' siri'*, which relates to the moral commitment to honor promises or agreements; consequently, breaking a promise is seen as an act that brings shame upon oneself. Fourth is *siri' mate siri'*, a state in which a person has lost all sense of shame and is no longer sensitive to the distinction between right and wrong. In the context of *uang panai'*, these four dimensions are interconnected: *uang panai'* embodies *siri' ripakasiri'* (honor that can be shamed) as it concerns the honor of the woman's family, while simultaneously serving as an arena for *siri' mappakasiri'-siri'* (honor involving the risk of causing shame) and *siri' tappela' siri'* (honor involving the risk of losing face) for the man, who is expected to demonstrate sincerity and honor the mutually agreed-upon terms.

Based on fieldwork observations and interviews, all informants ranging from customary leaders, local religious officials (*imam kelurahan*), and the women's parents to married individuals, those whose planned marriages fell through, and the younger generation—consistently interpret *uang panai'* as an institution of respect rooted in the value of *siri'*, even as they acknowledge a shifting orientation toward economic considerations and social status in practice.

Informant Paletteri Dg Rumpa (68), a local religious official with extensive experience in the community's customary marriage practices, explains that *uang panai'* is fundamentally a form of respect, though he is not blind to the changes that have occurred:

> Historically, *uang panai'* was never merely about the money itself. It was a token of respect from the man to the woman he wished to marry and to her family. In the past, the amount was modest and tailored to one's means; what mattered most was the underlying sentiment of appreciation. Today, however, the sums have skyrocketed reaching tens or even hundreds of millions of rupiah and, more concerningly, the practice has shifted from its customary values toward economic considerations. While it used to be primarily about respect, economic factors have now become dominant." (Analysis of interview results, June 5, 2026).

The statement by informant Paletteri Dg Rumpa reveals that *uang panai'* was originally understood as a symbol of esteem transcending its nominal value and an acknowledgment of the dignity of the woman and her family in the eyes

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of the suitor. However, he acknowledges a gap between this ideal meaning and the reality he observes daily, where economic considerations now seem to dominate over the respect that once formed the core of this tradition. A similar view was expressed by informant Saripuddin Dg Patto (47), a teacher and recognized customary leader in Bontotangnga Urban Village. Drawing on his deep understanding of the tradition's history and values, he explained:

> Historically, *uang panai'* formerly known as *doik balanja* emerged as a gesture of respect toward the woman's family and as assistance in covering wedding expenses; from the outset, it was never intended as a commercial transaction, but rather as a symbol of appreciation. Today, however, most people view it primarily through an economic and material lens. While older generations saw *uang panai'* as a symbol of respect for the woman's family, the current generation tends to link it to economic value and social status; in some cases, it is even treated as a metric for evaluating a woman based on her beauty, education, or social standing." (Analysis of interview results, June 8, 2026).

Informant Saripuddin Dg Patto's use of the term *doik balanja* (or uang belanja literally "shopping money" or wedding expense funds highlights that while *uang panai'* originally served a practical function helping the woman's family finance the wedding its symbolic role as a sign of the prospective groom's sincerity and sense of responsibility was far more fundamental than its material value. He also draws attention to the emerging tendency to evaluate women based on attributes such as beauty, education, and social status a phenomenon he regards as a distortion of values, far removed from the original spirit of the *uang panai'* tradition, which was intended to honor and dignify women.

Informant Maulana Askari (57), a local religious leader who frequently deals firsthand with the dynamics of uang panai' (customary marriage payments) negotiations, provides insights that reinforce these findings:

> In the past, *uang panai'* was primarily viewed as a gesture of respect and a form of assistance to the bride's family for hosting the wedding celebration, while also demonstrating the suitor's seriousness and readiness to assume responsibility. However, over time, *uang panai'* has become increasingly linked to social status, leading to significantly higher amounts being set. Cultural values such as *siri'* (honor), *lempu'* (honesty), and *getteng* (steadfastness)which once formed the foundation of the *uang panai'* tradition—have begun to shift; people now tend to view *uang panai'* largely in terms of its monetary amount and economic value." (Analysis based on interview, June 18, 2026).

Maulana Askari's observations are significant as he identifies specific cultural values that are eroding namely *siri'* (honor), lempu' (honesty), and *getteng* (steadfastness) which constitute the core of the Makassar people's social ethics. He also highlights the emergence of a phenomenon of social status competition, where families compare the amounts of *uang panai'* paid by others; this signals a shift in the function of *uang panai'* from a gesture of respect to an arena for social competition.

CONCLUSION

The community of Bontotangnga Village essentially continues to regard *uang panai'* as a vital component of the traditional marriage system among the Makassar people. *Uang panai'* is understood not merely as a sum of money given by the groom's side to the bride's side, but also as a symbol of respect, sincerity, responsibility, and appreciation for the bride's family. These values demonstrate that *uang panai'* retains a strong cultural function as a means of upholding family honor and preserving local cultural identity within the conduct of traditional weddings.

This study identifies a shift in the values associated with the practice of *uang panai'* within the community. This shift is evident in the changing orientation of some community members regarding how the *uang panai'* amount is determined. While in the past, *uang panai'* was primarily focused on showing respect and appreciation for the bride's family, the determination of the amount is now also influenced by considerations such as social status, education level, occupation, family economic conditions, and social prestige. Consequently, *uang panai'* no longer functions solely as a cultural symbol but also serves as a representation.

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