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Exploring the Heritage Value of the Colonial Building of Cililin Radio Station as a Representation of Local Culture Identity

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ABSTRACT

Colonial buildings constitute a form of cultural heritage that embodies not only historical value but also socially constructed meanings shaped through continuous community interaction. The Cililin Radio Transmitter, a colonial-era building located in West Java, has experienced functional and interpretive transformations alongside shifts in its surrounding social and cultural context. This study aims to explore the heritage values embedded in the Cililin Radio Transmitter and examine how the building is perceived, received, and interpreted as a representation of local cultural identity. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed through field observations, interviews with local residents across different age groups, and document analysis to understand the collective narratives associated with the site. The findings reveal that the building is not perceived merely as a colonial relic, but as a dynamic "memory space" enriched with layered meanings, ranging from everyday utilitarian functions to a symbolic marker of local history and shared memory. These results indicate that heritage preservation should move beyond a focus on physical conservation toward recognizing collective memory, social reception, and lived experiences within the community. From a Visual Communication Design perspective, this study highlights the potential role of representational and narrative strategies in mediating historical values and reinforcing local cultural identity within contemporary social contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The architectural heritage of the colonial era in Indonesia serves not only as a physical legacy but also as a symbol that preserves historical, social, and cultural identity values of a society. Colonial buildings often serve as memory spaces, spaces where collective memories is stored and produced through social interactions that span generations (Smith, 2006). Contemporary research shows that the relationship between architectural heritage, sense of place, and local identity has become a major focus of study in modern architectural heritage studies, emphasizing how public perceptions of historic buildings shape narratives of regional identity and emotional attachment to space, as in the systematic study of sense of place in architectural heritage (Bo & Abdul Rani, 2025).

Heritage is essentially a social construct, namely a process of interpreting values resulting from society's interaction with inherited buildings, artifacts, or spaces (Graham et al., 2016). Thus, the value of heritage lies not only in the physical form of a building, but also in the symbolic and social meanings that society has constructed and maintained in relation to it. Recent studies emphasize that heritage is no longer viewed as a passive object, but rather as living heritage that continues to be shaped and redefined by modern cultural practices in postcolonial societies (Lin, 2025).

Colonial buildings that survive today often serve as a reference point for local identity because they convey historical narratives, memories, and the social dynamics that develop within a community. Several case studies in Indonesia demonstrate that heritage buildings can serve as symbols of historical power and a city's visual identity if the community is involved in preserving them and respecting their value (Hidayat & Hubner, 2025; Rahmadyanti, 2025; Zakiyah & Herwindo, 2023). However, the main challenges in preserving colonial buildings include a lack of public awareness, a lack of documentation, and the pressures of modernization that have weakened the community's connection to their historical memory (Lukman et al., 2019).

The idea of cultural representation strengthens the argument for the importance of rereading the meaning of these buildings. The theory put forward by Stuart Hall explains that representation is the process of producing meaning through cultural symbols and practices (Hall, 1997). In this case, colonial buildings can be understood as a medium for representing identity, allowing communities to reinterpret their history through physical forms, oral narratives, and spatial experiences. Furthermore, Assmann's theory of cultural memory asserts that physical artifacts function as memory containers that store and transmit a group's collective memories (Assmann, 2011). Heritage artifacts can be understood as dynamic objects that have a complex relationship with collective memory, identity, and the use of space in the context of contemporary society, so that the experience of heritage cannot be separated from ongoing social processes (Lukito et al., 2025)

In the increasingly widespread current of globalization, pressure on the sustainability of local cultural identities is increasing. Cultural heritage is no longer viewed merely as a symbolic legacy, but also as a vital asset that can strengthen the resilience of identity and provide economic value to the communities that care for it (Ramlan & Kusuma Dewi, 2025). If cultural artifacts such as colonial buildings are not understood and reinterpreted by the community, the collective memory that accompanies them can weaken and eventually disappear.

This conceptual framework becomes relevant when applied to the Cililin Radio Station, a colonial building in Cililin District, West Bandung Regency, that holds heritage value but has received little academic attention. Historical records indicate that the building was constructed by the Dutch East Indies government in collaboration with the German company

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Telefunken as a long-distance radio facility, crucial for the early development of international communication. After independence, the area played a significant role in local socio-political dynamics and became part of the Cililin community's memory. However, over time, the building has fallen into a state of neglect, despite its significant historical significance. This lack of research and academic documentation makes the Cililin Radio Station a heritage site vulnerable to erosion by modernization and physical damage.

Given these conditions, a scientific study of the heritage value of this building is crucial. Exploring the historical, symbolic, and social values contained within the building can open up new insights into how local communities interpret its existence, as well as how this building can represent local cultural identity amidst changing times. This research seeks to contribute to the development of heritage preservation discourse, particularly in areas that have previously received little attention, and offers a perspective from the field of Visual Communication Design that positions buildings as artifacts representing culture.

Based on this description, this research focuses on exploring the heritage value of the Cililin Radio Station Colonial Building and how it represents local cultural identity. This approach is expected to enrich understanding of the relationship between colonial buildings and local identity and encourage preservation efforts that focus not only on the physical structure but also on the socio-cultural meanings that accompany it.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach, namely a method that aims to describe, understand, and interpret cultural phenomena based on field data (Creswell, 2014). This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is not only on the physical form of the building, but also on the heritage value, social meaning, and representation of local cultural identity attached to the Cililin Radio Station building.

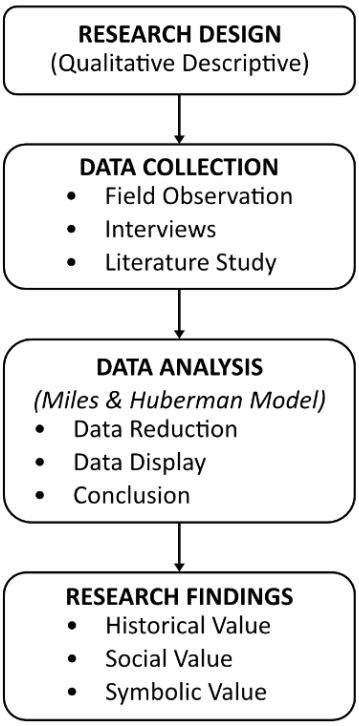

Figure 1. Graphical Stages of the Research Method.
(Source: Author's Concept, 2025)

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In the framework of qualitative research, the interpretation process becomes an important part, so that analysis is carried out interpretively, namely reading the cultural meanings that emerge through visual data, interviews, and social context (Moleong, 2019).

The research data was obtained through three main techniques: (1) field observation of the building and its environment to document visual aspects and physical conditions; (2) semi-structured interviews with local people who have knowledge or experience related to the building; and (3) literature studies of archives, journals, and documents related to the history of colonial radio in West Java. The collected data were analyzed using the Miles & Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis was carried out by grouping the findings based on heritage value categories (historical, social, and symbolic) and interpreting the community's reading of the building as part of the representation of local cultural identity (Sugiyono, 2018).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The research results were obtained through field observations, interviews with local residents, and literature review of the building's history. These three data sources were used to identify public perceptions of the function, naming, and meaning of the former Cililin Radio Station building over time.

3.1.1 Observation Data

Field observations were conducted at the Cililin Radio Station Building, located on Radio Street, Cililin Village, Cililin District, West Bandung Regency, West Java Province. This building is located on a road frequently used by residents and tourists visiting Curug Sawer, so its location is not hidden or isolated. Its presence is relatively easy to recognize because the building contrasts with the surrounding residential areas and its position on the side of the main road in the area, as shown in Figure 2(a).

The transmitter building still exhibits a sturdy structure. The walls are composed of andesite and limestone, with teak wood used for roof support on the interior, as shown in Figure 2(b). However, several original components, such as doors and windows, have been lost or replaced with new materials that differ from their original appearance.



(a) (b)

Figure 2. (a) Cililin Radio Station transmitter building (b) Interior and wooden construction of the radio transmitter building.
(Source: Author's Documentation, 2025)

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The building's maintenance appears to be less than optimal. The front yard is cluttered with various items that detract from the building's cleanliness, such as used wood and building materials. Residents also use the front yard as a drying area for clothes. Furthermore, livestock pens, such as chicken and duck pens, are attached to the transmitter's exterior wall. The interior of the building is used for storage of residents' vehicles, equipment, and materials, resulting in a change in function, as shown in Figure 3(a).

Signs of physical degradation are also visible from vandalism in the form of graffiti on the walls, moss due to rainwater seepage, and the transformer building to the left of the transmitter building which has collapsed and blended with wild plants, Figure 3(b). This condition shows that although the building is still standing and is used practically, its historical value and symbolic meaning have not been optimally managed in a structured preservation effort.



Figure 3. (a) Interior of the building used as a warehouse and vehicle garage (b) Physical degradation of the transformer building.
(Source: Author's Documentation, 2025)

Overall, the observations reveal a discrepancy between the building's existence as an officially recognized heritage artifact and its use in the context of everyday life. The Cililin Radio Station building is physically present in public space, but it has not yet fully functioned as a historical marker with collective meaning.

3.1.2 Interview Data

Interviews with different age groups revealed varying levels of public perception of the Cililin Radio Station building. These differences were evident in historical knowledge, symbolic interpretations, and perceptions of the building's importance as part of local cultural identity.

Some adult respondents knew that the building was once a colonial radio station. However, in everyday life, residents more often refer to it informally as "Gedung Tahu" (Tofu Building) or "Gedung Seng" (Zinc Building). These terms refer to the building's former use as a tofu factory and its zinc roofing material. This reflects a shift in meaning from its historical role to a more practical function aligned with people's daily experiences.

Interviews also revealed that the building underwent various post-independence transformations, including as a tofu factory, a venue for community film screenings, a multi-purpose hall for weddings and social events, and even a storage warehouse. These transformations demonstrate how colonial buildings didn't stop with a single function but were continually reinterpreted by the community to meet social needs.

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In contrast to adults, teenage respondents demonstrated a more limited level of knowledge. They recognized the building primarily as a Dutch heritage building or a landmark for a tourist destination, with no understanding of its historical function as a radio station. Teenagers also considered the building to be less relevant to their lives and perceived its importance, although they acknowledged its presence as part of the area's history.

Overall, the interview results indicate that the Cililin Radio Station building has diverse meanings among the community. Among adults, the building serves as a repository of historical memory and local identity. Meanwhile, among the younger generation, the building tends to be perceived as a passive object without strong cultural significance. This finding indicates a generational gap in the process of passing on cultural memory and the interpretation of heritage.

3.1.3 Literature Study Data

A literature review was conducted to determine the historical record and original function of the Cililin Radio Station building. Based on archival research and academic references, the following data was found:

- **History of Cililin Radio Station during the Dutch East Indies Era**

Cililin Radio Station was a very important long-distance telecommunications facility during the Dutch East Indies era, as shown in Figure 4. The Dutch East Indies government collaborated with a German radio and television company called Telefunken, to establish a temporary transmission station on the island of Java (Dijkstra, 2006). This radio station was completed on August 1, 1918 and the initial installation was carried out by a Telefunken engineer named DC Noppen who was then immediately replaced by engineer Raymond Sircke (Dijkstra, 2006).



Figure 4. (a) Radio transformer building (left) and transmitter building (right) (b) Official residence (Dientswoning).
(Source: Malabar Radio: Herinneringen aan een boeiende tijd 1914-1945, Klaas Djikstra. – Emmaus: Groenlo, 2006)

Telefunken's choice of Cililin as the location for the radio transmitter was based on considerations of natural conditions that support the installation of tall antennas. In this case, Telefunken followed the approach previously used by Dr. De Groot, who chose the valley area in Malabar because of its topographical characteristics. Although Telefunken did not find a location with an identical valley shape, a ravine around Cililin Village was deemed to have relatively similar geographical and topographical conditions, thus being considered capable of meeting the technical requirements of long-distance radio transmission (Dijkstra, 2006).

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In 1919, a series of tests were conducted involving the ship *De Zeven Provinciën* sailing to the Netherlands via the Panama Canal. The purpose of this test was to ensure that the signals received by the receiver on the antenna located in Blaricummermeent, Netherlands, were indeed coming from the Cililin Radio Station, as shown in Figure 5. Then, on June 7, 1919, the signal from the Cililin Radio Station was successfully received for the first time (Djayaningrat et al., 1980). However, the resulting sound quality was still relatively weak. Reports at the time also stated that the transmission frequency was unstable, resulting in unclear signals (Dijkstra, 2006). This event became an important milestone in the history of the development of long-distance radio telegraphy at that time (Djayaningrat et al., 1980).



Figure 5. (a) High-frequency machine from Telefunken at the radio station (b) Shortwave machine and transmitter at the Cililin radio station.
(Source: Radio Malabar: Herinneringen aan een boeiende tijd 1914-1945, Klaas Djikstra. – Emmaus: Groenlo, 2006)

Unlike Radio Malabar's high-powered transmitter, which was designed for long-distance communications with Europe, the transmitter at Radio Cililin Station was no longer used for these services and focused more on short-distance communications and local broadcasts. During its early operation, the installation frequently experienced interference due to the humid environment, hampering transmission stability. These issues were addressed through technical adjustments and the development of supporting equipment. With the reduction in interference, Radio Cililin Station was subsequently utilized during the NIROM (Nederland Indie Radio Omeladen) era (Sudarman, 2014, in Nurahman et al., 2023) which is used for regional communications as well as distribution of Aneta press releases, which plays an important role in distributing information to local newspapers in various archipelago regions (Dijkstra, 2006).

Based on these historical records, Cililin Radio Station not only served as a technical communications facility but also represented the early phase of technological modernization in remote areas of West Java. The existence of this radio station demonstrates how neighborhoods like Cililin became part of the global communications network during the colonial era. This positioning places Cililin Radio Station as a heritage artifact with historical and symbolic value, where technology, spatial planning, and local society are interconnected. Thus, the building's heritage value lies not only in its technological function but also in its role in shaping the collective memory of the local community.

- **Post-Independence Transformation of the Cililin Radio Station Building**

The establishment of the Cililin Radio Station left a mark on the region's struggle for independence. After Indonesia's proclamation of independence in October 1945, members of the Defenders of the Homeland (PETA) military who had worked at the radio station

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returned to Cililin. They took over the radio station's transmitter area and building, becoming the headquarters of the People's Security Agency (BKR). This group led local resistance against Japanese forces and the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) (Sudarman, 2014, in Nurahman et al., 2023).

On January 1, 1950, sovereignty was transferred from the Netherlands to Indonesia nationwide, and the momentous ceremony took place at the Cililin radio transmitter building. From the time of the transfer of sovereignty until 1972, the building served as the headquarters for eight military battalions, the last of which was Battalion 327 (Sudarman, 2014, in Nurahman et al., 2023). In the post-independence period, Cililin radio station also played an important role by facilitating the establishment of SMA Negeri 1 Cililin in 1970. Although the building used by the school was a building that was formerly the official residence and employees of Cililin Radio Station at that time (Sudarman, 2014, in Nurahman et al., 2023).

The post-independence transformation of the Cililin Radio Station's function demonstrates the building's adaptation of meaning within the local socio-political context. The transition from a colonial facility to a headquarters for the struggle and an educational institution reflects how society and the state reappropriated colonial space as a symbol of sovereignty and a new identity. This process reinforces the building's position as a repository of collective memory, inseparable from the historical experiences of the Cililin community. This demonstrates the building's dynamic heritage value, continually shaped by the community's social practices over time.

Based on the results of this literature study, it is clear that Cililin Radio Station experienced a shift in function and meaning from the colonial period to post-independence. These changes reflect the process of reinterpreting the building by the local community through historical events and social activities that took place within it. Thus, Cililin Radio Station can indicate that the building's heritage value is shaped by collective memory and local historical experiences, not solely by its colonial background.

3.2 Discussion

This discussion focuses on interpreting the findings of field observations, interviews, and literature studies to understand how the meaning of the former Cililin Radio Station building is shaped, perceived, and shifted in the collective memory of the surrounding community. Based on the research results, the following discussion can be included:

3.2.1 The Colonial Building of Cililin Radio Station as a Heritage Object

The Cililin Radio Station building demonstrates characteristics as a heritage object not only through its historical value but also through the continuity of meaning formed within the local social context. Observations indicate that the building still maintains its basic structure. The presence of a cultural heritage sign reinforces the building's formal status as a recognized heritage site, despite its physical condition indicating degradation and functional change.

In the theory put forward by Smith, the value of a building does not only depend on the level of its physical authenticity, but also on the social processes that shape its meaning (Smith, 2006). Field findings indicate that this building underwent a functional shift from colonial infrastructure to a utilitarian space for residents. This transformation did not automatically eliminate its heritage value, but rather demonstrated how colonial heritage was reinterpreted and adapted to suit the needs of the community.

Thus, Cililin Radio Station can be understood as a living heritage, where its historical and symbolic value continues to be produced through social interactions, repurposed buildings, and the collective memory of the surrounding community. This position provides a crucial

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foundation for understanding how this colonial building is not merely an artifact of the past but a medium for the formation of cultural meaning at the local level.

3.2.2 Reception and Collective Memory of Local Communities

Interviews revealed that public perception of Cililin Radio Station varied, influenced by age, experience, and familiarity with the building's history. Adults and older adults generally had a more specific historical understanding, such as the knowledge that the building was a former colonial radio station. Meanwhile, younger generations tended to recognize the building as a general Dutch heritage without a deeper understanding of its function and historical significance. These differences in perception suggest that memories of the building are not uniform, but rather socially constructed and unevenly transmitted across generations.

Within the framework of cultural memory by Jan Assman (2011), buildings function as a medium for storing collective memory whose meaning depends on the processes of recollection, narratives, and accompanying social practices. Cililin Radio Station can be understood as a memory space that holds traces of colonial history, but the sustainability of its symbolic value is determined by the extent to which these memories continue to be kept alive in societal discourse. Although some younger generations experience a shift in meaning, interview findings indicate an awareness of the potential loss if this building is lost or demolished. In line with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the meaning of buildings is not fixed, but is continuously produced and negotiated through social practices and societal discourse. This condition shows that the meaning of the building is continuously produced and negotiated, making Cililin Radio Station a meeting place between past memories, local experiences, and current perceptions that dynamically shape local cultural identity

3.2.3 Colonial Buildings as a Representation of Local Cultural Identitiy

The research results show that the local cultural identity represented through the Cililin Radio Station Building does not directly stem from its colonial background, but rather is formed through a process of postcolonial social meaning-making. Although the community recognizes the building as a Dutch legacy, local identity is linked through daily experiences and the repeated use of space. The building's conversion to a tofu factory, multipurpose room, warehouse, and its role as a spatial marker through the naming of Jalan Radio, reflect the functional and affective relationship between the community and the building used in daily life. In this context, space is not passive, but rather is shaped and shaped by the perceptions, habits, and experiences of its users. This aligns with environmental psychology studies that emphasize that the meaning of space is formed through subjective human interactions with their environment, including aspects of comfort, utility, and emotional experience (Nurinsan et al., 2024). This also emphasizes that local identity is not based solely on colonial architectural values, but rather on the integration of buildings into the social practices of local communities.

In line with Stuart Hall's (1997) thinking and the concept of heritage as a social construct, the representation of cultural identity in this building is fluid and constantly negotiated. Names such as "Gedung Tahu" (Tofu Building) or "Gedung Seng" (Zinc Building) reflect a process of localization of meaning, where colonial narratives are shed and replaced by more relevant local experiences. The differences in views between generations of adult respondents who associate the building with history, and those of the younger generation who interpret it functionally, demonstrate that local cultural identity is formed dynamically and in layers, rather than as a single, static narrative.

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3.2.4 Implications of Finding for Preservation Strategies and Visual Communication Design Perspectives

In the context of preservation, the findings of this study indicate that an approach that prioritizes only the physical aspects of buildings risks neglecting the meanings that have developed in the social life of the community. Preservation cannot be interpreted simply as an effort to restore the historical condition or function of a building to its original form, but rather requires consideration of how the building is interpreted, used, and negotiated by the local community in the context of everyday life. This aligns with Smith's view, which emphasizes that heritage is a continuous process of negotiation between the past and the present, produced through social practices and the construction of cultural representations.

An adaptive preservation approach is also demonstrated in Wirahma Sakti's study of the Colonial Building of the Bandung City History Museum, where the building's function was changed without eliminating its historical value. The study emphasizes that preservation can be achieved through revitalization strategies and contextual representation, so that the colonial building remains relevant as an educational public space and historical marker (Sakti, 2025). This finding strengthens the argument that heritage preservation is situational and dependent on a process of reinterpretation that involves community needs and the representational strategies used.

Viewed from a Visual Communication Design perspective, the preservation of Cililin Radio Station can be understood as an effort to manage cultural narratives and representations. The role of Visual Communication Design is crucial in bridging the building's historical value with public reception through visual communication strategies that are able to contextually articulate collective memory, local history, and cultural identity. With this approach, the building is not only preserved as a physical artifact, but also reactivated as a medium for education, historical reflection, and strengthening local identity through visual representations that are relevant to the experiences and sensibilities of today's generation.

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that the community no longer views the Cililin Radio Station Building solely as a colonial relic, but rather as a space integrated into the residents' daily lives. The use of local terms such as "Tofu Building" or "Zinc Building," as well as the differences in meaning between the adult and younger generations, indicate a shift in meaning from a formal historical function to a more local and utilitarian one. This situation demonstrates that the building remains present in the community's social life, but its historical memory is not transmitted evenly between generations. This finding confirms that heritage value is not fixed and is not solely determined by the physical authenticity or initial function of the building, but is formed through social processes, collective memory, and ongoing use within the community.

In line with the views of Smith (2006) and Assmann (2011), this finding confirms that heritage is a construction of meaning that is continuously negotiated between the past and the present. Based on these findings, this study recommends that the preservation of the Cililin Radio Station Building is not sufficient through a physical conservation approach alone, but needs to be accompanied by efforts to manage historical narratives and cultural representations so that the building's historical value remains relevant, especially for the younger generation. In this context, Visual Communication Design has strategic implications as a medium capable of translating historical values into a form of visual communication that is contextual and easily accepted by the community. This approach has the potential to

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reactivate the building as a learning space and strengthen local cultural identity that is in line with current social dynamics.

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