

The *Pinisi* as a Representation of the Maritime Culture of the Bulukumba Community

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ABSTRACT

The Pinisi is one of Indonesia's most significant maritime cultural heritages, representing not only traditional boatbuilding expertise but also the cultural values and identity of the Bulukumba community. Previous studies have primarily examined the Pinisi from historical, technological, social, and religious perspectives, while limited attention has been given to the construction of its symbolic meaning through cultural communication. This study aims to analyze the Pinisi as a representation of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba community by exploring the symbolic meanings embedded in its cultural practices. A qualitative approach employing document analysis was adopted. The findings reveal that the symbolic meaning of the Pinisi is constructed through four interconnected dimensions: maritime cultural identity, solidarity and cooperation, the transmission of cultural knowledge, and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. These meanings are continuously reproduced through cultural communication practices, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and collective social interactions within the Bulukumba community. The study concludes that the Pinisi extends beyond its function as a traditional sailing vessel and serves as a cultural symbol that embodies the value system, collective identity, local wisdom, and continuity of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba community.

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1. Introduction

Cultural heritage endures not merely through its physical existence but also through the meanings that are continuously produced, communicated, and transmitted by the communities that sustain it. From a cultural perspective, cultural heritage acquires significance when the symbols embedded within it are understood as expressions of collective identity, shared social experiences, and cultural practices that are continuously reproduced within community life (Sendana et al., 2025; Zakaria et al., 2021; Asba et al., 2019). Ounanian et al. (2021) explain that maritime cultural heritage encompasses not only artifacts and cultural objects but also *communities of meaning* that preserve knowledge, values, and cultural identity through social participation. Likewise, Flannery et al. (2022) argue that the sustainability of maritime cultural heritage depends on a community's capacity to maintain cultural practices, reinforce local identity, and strengthen cultural resilience in the face of social change. Sommier et al. (2021) further suggest that cultural identity is constructed through continuous communication processes within social contexts, in which cultural symbols acquire meaning through interaction, negotiation, and intergenerational transmission. One example of Indonesian maritime cultural heritage that embodies these characteristics is the *Pinisi*, a traditional sailing vessel originating from the Bontobahari community in Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi. Recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017, the *Pinisi* represents not only traditional boatbuilding expertise but also the cultural values, philosophies of life, and identity of the maritime community, all of which are transmitted through processes of cultural communication.

In the field of intercultural communication, symbols are regarded as cultural media through which communities construct, maintain, and transmit meaning via social interaction. Symbolic meaning is not fixed; rather, it is continuously shaped by collective experiences, cultural values, and ongoing communicative practices. Martin and Nakayama (2022) argue that culture influences how individuals and groups interpret reality, construct identities, and assign meaning to symbols in social life. This perspective is supported by Muhtar et al. (2026), who explain that communication is a process of meaning-making influenced by cultural values, norms, and symbolic systems, through which a community's cultural

identity is continuously constructed and maintained. Accordingly, cultural symbols should not be understood merely as visual representations but as products of dynamic meaning-making that are continuously negotiated, reproduced, and sustained within society.

The *Pinisi* is a cultural symbol of profound significance to the people of Bulukumba. For the local community, it is not merely a means of maritime transportation but also represents the relationship between humans and nature, the values of cooperation, perseverance, and religiosity, as well as a maritime cultural identity that has been transmitted across generations. Madani (2022) argues that the *Pinisi* boatbuilding tradition reflects the *local genius* of the Bontobahari community and embodies the spirit of Indonesia's maritime culture. Likewise, Ibrahim et al. (2024) demonstrate that the *Pinisi* carries important social meanings by symbolizing solidarity, togetherness, and the collective identity of coastal communities. Furthermore, Lisnayanti et al. (2024) found that the *Pinisi* tradition incorporates religious values that are preserved through rituals performed throughout the boatbuilding process.

Although studies on the *Pinisi* have expanded in recent years, most have focused on its historical background, boatbuilding techniques, cultural preservation, social values, and religiosity. Madani (2022) highlights the *local genius* and the preservation of the maritime culture of the Bontobahari community. Ibrahim et al. (2024) examine the social values embedded in the *Pinisi* tradition, whereas Lisnayanti et al. (2024) emphasize the religious values associated with its construction and use. Meanwhile, Putra (2020) explores the symbolic meanings of the *Pinisi* from the perspective of its physical form and structural characteristics. Collectively, these studies have contributed to understanding the *Pinisi* as an important element of Indonesia's maritime cultural heritage.

However, understanding the *Pinisi* as a cultural symbol requires not only identifying the values it represents but also examining how these meanings are produced, interpreted, and communicated within the community. In this context, this study employs Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory as the analytical framework for examining the symbolic meanings of the *Pinisi*. Peirce's triadic model conceptualizes a sign through the relationship between the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. This framework enables the study to examine the *Pinisi* beyond its physical form by analyzing how its various symbolic elements refer to cultural objects and generate particular interpretations within the Bulukumba community. Thus, the symbolic elements of the *Pinisi* are understood as signs whose meanings emerge through processes of interpretation within a specific cultural and communicative context.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach using document analysis to examine the symbolic meanings of the *Pinisi* within the context of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba community. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study seeks to explore and interpret the meanings embedded in cultural symbols through multiple documentary sources. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), qualitative research is designed to explore and understand social phenomena by interpreting meanings derived from various forms of data. Similarly, Sankofa (2023) defines document analysis as a systematic method for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting information contained in written and visual documents.

The data sources consisted of scholarly journal articles, books, conference proceedings, official reports, and other relevant documents addressing the *Pinisi*, maritime culture, and cultural communication. The documents were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research objectives. The data were analyzed through several stages: document identification, information classification, thematic coding, interpretation of meanings, and synthesis of the findings. These procedures are consistent with the qualitative data analysis process proposed by Bingham (2023).

Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the symbolic meanings of the *Pinisi* are constructed as representations of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba community through a systematic and rigorous analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The *Pinisi* as a Representation of the Maritime Culture of the Bulukumba Community

Document analysis reveals that the *Pinisi* boat represents a maritime culture with significance extending far beyond its role as a mere means of sea transport. For the people of Bulukumba particularly the Bontobahari community the *Pinisi* serves as a symbol of cultural identity rooted in their historical experiences as seafarers and shipbuilders, and as a community whose livelihood depends on the sea. This identity has been forged through traditional knowledge, skills, value

systems, and social practices passed down through generations, thereby shaping a distinctive maritime cultural character. These findings demonstrate that the maritime culture of the Bulukumba people is manifested not only in the physical form of the vessel but also in how the community perceives the relationship between humanity, the sea, and tradition (Madani, 2022; Martin & Nakayama, 2022).

Table 1. Synthesis of Document Analysis Results regarding the Pinisi Boat from a Maritime Cultural Perspective

No	Reference	Focus of Study	Key Findings
1	Madani (2022)	Local genius	Pinisi is the maritime cultural identity of the Bontobahari people.
2	Akhmad et al. (2022)	Making process	Shipbuilding techniques are passed down traditionally.
3	Ibrahim et al. (2024)	Social values	Pinisi reflects the solidarity and togetherness of coastal communities.
4	Lisnayanti et al. (2024)	Religious values	Traditional rituals are an important part of the Pinisi tradition.
5	Waluya et al. (2024)	Social reproduction	The inheritance of knowledge is done through families and communities.

Source: Processed by the author (2026)

Based on Table 1, all of the reviewed studies identify the Pinisi as an important element of Indonesia's maritime cultural heritage, reflecting its historical, social, and cultural significance for the Bulukumba community. However, each study addresses different aspects of the Pinisi. Madani (2022) highlights the Pinisi as an expression of the local genius of the Bontobahari community and a representation of its maritime cultural identity. Ibrahim et al. (2024) examine the social values embedded in the Pinisi tradition, whereas Lisnayanti et al. (2024) focus on the religious values associated with the boatbuilding process. This synthesis indicates that previous studies have explored various dimensions of the Pinisi tradition but have paid limited attention to how its symbolic meanings are constructed, negotiated, and maintained through processes of cultural communication within the Bulukumba community. Therefore, this study examines the Pinisi as a cultural symbol whose meanings are shaped through social practices and cultural communication.

This representation of maritime culture is reflected throughout the Pinisi boatbuilding process, from the selection of timber and the determination of an appropriate construction period to the assembly of the vessel and its ceremonial launching. Each stage involves not only technical expertise but also cultural values that regulate social relationships, promote respect for nature, and encourage the sustainable use of marine resources. Akhmad et al. (2022) explain that traditional Pinisi boatbuilding techniques continue to be transmitted directly from the *panrita lopi* (master boatbuilder) to younger generations. Similarly, Waluya et al. (2024) argue that the continuity of the Pinisi tradition depends largely on processes of social reproduction through the transmission of knowledge, technical skills, and cultural values within families and boatbuilding communities.

The analysis further indicates that the Pinisi represents a living form of maritime cultural heritage. Its sustainability depends not only on the continued existence of the vessel as a cultural artifact but also on the preservation of the cultural practices associated with its construction and use. Ounanian et al. (2021) explain that maritime cultural heritage encompasses traditional knowledge, social practices, collective experiences, and community participation that are continuously transmitted across generations. In the Bulukumba context, the role of the *panrita lopi*, the performance of traditional rituals, and the informal transmission of boatbuilding knowledge constitute essential mechanisms for safeguarding maritime cultural heritage while reinforcing the cultural identity of coastal communities.

UNESCO's recognition in 2017 of The Art of Boatbuilding in South Sulawesi further strengthens the position of the Pinisi Boat as a representation of Indonesian maritime culture at the international level. This recognition was given not solely because of the unique shape of the ship, but because of the art of building ships which contains local knowledge, traditional skills, shared values, as well as cultural inheritance mechanisms that are still practiced by the people of Bulukumba and the surrounding area. This shows that the main value of the Pinisi Boat lies in the cultural practices that continue to live in society, not just in the physical artifact (UNESCO, 2017).

In a cultural communication perspective, symbols gain meaning through a process of social interaction that takes place on an ongoing basis. (Martin & Nakayama, 2022) explains that cultural symbols become a medium for society to build identity, maintain cultural values, and transmit knowledge to the next generation. This view is in line with (Kuiper, 2021) explains that cultural identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated through continuous communication processes across various social contexts. Apart from that, (Wan, 2015) explains that cultural meaning is constructed through intersubjective cultural representation a process in which members of a group develop a shared understanding of cultural values, symbols, and identities through social interaction. Thus, a symbol gains legitimacy as a collective identity because its meaning is continuously constructed, shared, and maintained within the life of the community. (Skrede and Andersen, 2023) argue that cultural symbols function not merely as visual representations but also as semiotic media that connect historical memory, social values, and cultural identity through ongoing social practices. Thus, cultural symbols acquire meaning because they are produced, interpreted, and sustained within the life of a society. These findings are strengthened by (Keriyono, 2024) who states that the semiotic approach in cultural communication views symbols as a means of forming meaning that is continuously negotiated through social practice. Meanwhile, (Jameson, 2007) explains that cultural identity is constructed and negotiated through communication processes that enable individuals and groups to share values, beliefs, experiences, and cultural symbols on an ongoing basis. Thus, the Pinisi boat can be understood as a symbol of maritime culture that connects the historical experiences, local knowledge, social values, and identity of the Bulukumba community. Through this process of cultural communication, the Pinisi boat serves not only as a cultural heritage but also as a medium representing how the community interprets maritime life while simultaneously preserving the continuity of its cultural identity.

3.2 Construction of the Symbolic Meaning of the Pinisi

The results of document analysis show that the symbolic meaning of the Pinisi Boat is constructed through cultural practices that continue to be maintained and passed down in the lives of the Bulukumba people. This meaning is not only attached to the physical shape of the ship, but also to the cultural values that develop in the process of making, using, and passing on knowledge between generations. Synthesis of various documents shows that there are four main symbolic meanings that represent the maritime culture of the Bulukumba people, namely cultural identity, human relationship with nature, social solidarity, and religiosity.

Tabel 2. Konstruksi Makna Simbolik Perahu Pinisi

Symbolic Meaning	Description	Reference
Maritime cultural identity	The <i>Pinisi</i> has become a symbol of the cultural identity of the Bulukumba community as a society of seafarers and traditional boatbuilders.	Madani (2022); Akhmad et al. (2022); Ounanian et al. (2021)
Harmony between humans and nature	The choice of wood, the timing of construction, and the launching of the ship reflect respect for nature as a source of life.	Wahyuni & Sadik (2023); Yusuf et al. (2023); Lisnayanti et al. (2024)
Solidarity and mutual cooperation	The process of building the <i>Pinisi</i> involves collaboration between family, community and <i>panrita lopi</i> thereby strengthening the community's social relations.	Ibrahim et al. (2024); Waluya et al. (2024)
Religiosity	sTraditional rituals and prayers are an important part of the process of building the <i>Pinisi</i> as a form of gratitude and hope for safe shipping.	Lisnayanti et al. (2024); Hasniar & Parera (2020); Wahyuni & Sadik (2023)

Source: Processed by the author based on the results of document analysis (2026)

Based on Table 2, the results of document analysis show that the symbolic meaning of the *Pinisi* is constructed through four main dimensions, namely maritime cultural identity, solidarity and cooperation, inheritance of cultural knowledge, and harmonious relationships between humans and nature. These four dimensions are interrelated and shape the Bulukumba community's understanding of the *Pinisi* as a living cultural symbol. Thus, the meaning of the *Pinisi* is not only attached to the physical shape of the ship, but also to the cultural values that are practiced, communicated and passed down from generation to generation in people's lives.

The synthesis results show that maritime cultural identity is the most dominant dimension because almost all documents place the Pinisi Boat as a representation of the identity of the Bulukumba community, especially the Bontobahari community which has a long history as sailors and traditional ship builders. This identity is then strengthened through the practice of solidarity and cooperation in the ship building process, which involves panrita lopi, boatmen, ship owners, and the surrounding community. On the other hand, the sustainability of the Pinisi Boat tradition is very dependent on the process of passing on cultural knowledge which takes place between generations, so that technical skills and cultural values are maintained. This entire process takes place within the framework of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, which is reflected in the wise use of natural resources and respect for the environment as part of the maritime life of the Bulukumba community.

These findings show that the construction of the symbolic meaning of the Pinisi Boat is not formed by one element alone, but is the result of interactions between cultural values, social practices and intergenerational communication that continue to occur in people's lives. Therefore, the following discussion describes each dimension of symbolic meaning to explain how the Pinisi Boat is constructed as a representation of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba people.

a. Symbol of Cultural Identity

The Pinisi boat is interpreted as the collective identity of the Bulukumba people. This identity is not only manifested through the shape of the ship, but also through the knowledge, skills and cultural values passed down between generations. In a cultural communication perspective, identity is formed through an interaction process that allows a society to maintain the symbols that characterize it. Therefore, the existence of Pinisi shows how maritime culture continues to be maintained as part of the local identity of the Bulukumba people.

b. Symbol of Solidarity and Cooperation

Document analysis shows that the process of making the Pinisi Boat involved collective work which shows the strong value of community solidarity. Each stage of ship building requires coordination between the panrita lopi, the boatman, the ship owner, and the surrounding community. These conditions show that Pinisi is not only the result of individual skills, but is the result of social collaboration built on trust and mutual cooperation. Ahmad et al. (2022) explained that the process of making Pinisi is an activity that combines technical knowledge with community cooperation at every stage of the process. These findings are confirmed by Sukardi and Busri (2024) who state that although the Pinisi construction process has adapted to technological developments, communal values such as mutual cooperation, respect for nature, and collective work are still maintained at every stage of ship construction. In addition, Yusuf et al. (2023) explained that various rituals in the process of making Pinisi involve family and community participation as a form of strengthening social ties as well as preserving cultural values. Demmalino et al. (2019) also shows that the professionalism of panrita lopi cannot be separated from the cultural values and religiosity that shape social relations between actors in the ship building process. Thus, the Pinisi Boat making tradition not only produces a ship, but also reproduces the values of solidarity, togetherness and cultural identity of the Bulukumba people.

c. Symbol of Inheritance of Cultural Knowledge

The research results also show that the meaning of the Pinisi Boat is maintained through an informal process of passing on knowledge. Knowledge about shipbuilding techniques, cultural values and maritime ethics is transmitted through direct practice between panrita lopi and the younger generation. This pattern shows that cultural communication is the main medium in maintaining the continuity of traditions. Ahmad et al. (2026) call this process a form of maritime ethnopedagogy, namely the passing on of traditional knowledge through informal educational practices within shipbuilding communities. These findings are in line with (Bell & Blue, 2022) which explains that the sustainability of maritime cultural heritage is very dependent on community involvement in transmitting knowledge and skills to the next generation. (Alivizatou, 2021) also emphasized that preserving intangible cultural heritage does not only focus on protecting cultural artifacts, but also on continuing the learning process, community participation and the inheritance of traditional knowledge. In addition, (Kuiper, 2021) explains that cultural identity is formed and maintained through a communication process that allows cultural values, symbols and experiences to be passed down between generations in people's lives. This view is reinforced by (Barianaki et al., 2024) who stated that local knowledge and cultural values are important elements in maintaining the sustainability of maritime cultural heritage and strengthening community relations with the coastal environment. Thus, the process of inheriting knowledge in the Pinisi Boat tradition not only maintains technical shipbuilding skills, but also maintains the continuity of the Bulukumba community's maritime cultural identity through ongoing cultural communication.

d. Symbol of Human Relationship with Nature

Another meaning found is the harmonious relationship between humans and the marine environment. Various documents show that the selection of wood, determining the time for building the ship, and launching the *Pinisi* Boat were carried out taking into account values that respect nature. This shows that the maritime culture of the Bulukumba people views the sea not only as an economic space, but also as a part of life that must be maintained in balance. This perspective shows that *Pinisi* is a symbol of the reciprocal relationship between humans, culture and the environment.

To facilitate understanding of the relationship between dimensions of the symbolic meaning of the *Pinisi* Boat, the results of the document analysis synthesis are visualized in the conceptual model in Figure 1. This model shows that the symbolic meaning of the *Pinisi* Boat is built through four interrelated dimensions and forms a representation of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba community.



Figure 1. Construction of the Symbolic Meanings of the *Pinisi* in the Maritime Culture of the Bulukumba Community

Figure 1. Interdimensional relationship of the symbolic meaning of the *Pinisi* Boat

Figure 1 shows that the four dimensions of the symbolic meaning of the *Pinisi* do not stand alone, but form a unit that supports each other. Cultural identity is the main representation of the Bulukumba people as a maritime community, which is strengthened through solidarity and cooperation in the ship building process. These values are then passed on through intergenerational communication so that the continuity of traditions is maintained. This entire process takes place in a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, which is the basis of the maritime cultural life of the Bulukumba community. Based on this model, the following discussion describes each dimension in more depth.

3.3 Synthesis of Results

Based on the document analysis, the *Pinisi* boat is understood not only as a form of maritime cultural heritage but also as a cultural symbol constructed through ongoing processes of cultural communication within the Bulukumba community. This construction of meaning is reflected in four interrelated dimensions: maritime cultural identity, solidarity and cooperation, the transmission of cultural knowledge, and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Together, these dimensions shape the community's collective understanding of the *Pinisi* as a representation of cultural values that have been preserved and transmitted across generations.

The findings indicate that the symbolic meaning of the *Pinisi* does not reside solely in its physical form but is continuously constructed through social interaction, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and cultural practices maintained by the Bulukumba community. Through these processes of cultural communication, the *Pinisi* serves as a medium for expressing maritime identity, strengthening social cohesion, preserving traditional knowledge, and reflecting the community's harmonious relationship with the natural environment.

Overall, the *Pinisi* extends beyond its practical function as a traditional sailing vessel. It represents a maritime cultural symbol that embodies the value system, collective identity, and local wisdom of the Bulukumba community while demonstrating the continuity of maritime culture sustained through ongoing cultural communication across generations.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that the Pinisi Boat is a symbol of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba people whose meaning is constructed through the process of cultural communication. Based on the results of document analysis, this meaning is reflected in four main dimensions, namely maritime cultural identity, solidarity and cooperation, inheritance of cultural knowledge, and harmonious relationships between humans and nature. These four dimensions are interrelated in forming the community's collective understanding of the Pinisi Boat as a living cultural heritage.

These findings confirm that the Pinisi Boat not only has historical and technological value, but also represents the value system, identity and sustainability of the maritime culture of the Bulukumba people. Therefore, the preservation of the Pinisi Boat needs to be directed not only at the physical aspects of the ship, but also at the sustainability of the knowledge, cultural values and communication practices that accompany it.

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