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Symbolic expressions of Javanese culture: The Jaran Kepang dance of Temanggung as oral literature

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ABSTRACT

The cultural values of Jaran Kepang are integral to understanding the Javanese philosophy of life. Anchored by such philosophical meanings, this study aims to uncover the symbolic meanings embedded in the Jaran Kepang dance. A qualitative descriptive approach with case studies was employed as the research method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, literature analysis, and documentation. To interpret the symbols in this art form, the study utilized. Roland Barthes' myth analysis framework. The study revealed that the choreography of Jaran Kepang portrays the valor and determination of soldiers in their struggle against enemies. This fighting spirit reflects the resilience and determination of Javanese society in facing life's challenges. The accompanying music amplifies the soldiers' fierce spirit, while the costumes symbolize themes of struggle, passion, loyalty, unity, and nationalism. Together, these elements encapsulate the cultural and philosophical essence of the Javanese way of life. This study contributes to cultural preservation, semiotic analysis, and character education by examining how the performance expresses Javanese values and can be used to teach moral lessons.

KEYWORDS: Jaran Kepang Temanggung Dance, Javanese Cultural, Myths, Oral Literature, Symbolic Significance, Traditions

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Introduction

For several years, Jaran Kepang, also known as Kuda Lumping, stands as one of the most captivating traditional art forms, celebrated not only in Central Java but also throughout the Indonesian archipelago (Hardiarini & Firdhani, 2022). In particular, Jaran Kepang in Temanggung has a unique basic movement and is different from the movement of Jaran Kepang art in general. The art of Jaran Kepang is a type of dance art that uses an imitation horse made of woven bamboo and coloured in such a way that it resembles the shape of a horse. (Richter, 2012), outlines that Jaran Kepang or Kuda Lumping or Jathilan is an art that is generally staged in an arena surrounded by barriers, where dancers will dance and enter the arena unconsciously, either suddenly or gradually. Even spectators can participate in the trance scene Richter. Jaran Kepang is one of the arts in Central Java adapted from pre-Hindu arts (Wiyoso, 2011a). This art is similar to the art in Bali called Sanghyang. This dance invites animal spirits. (Radhia, 2016) outlines that Jaran Kepan is closely related to magical elements. The Jaran Kepang dance is even used as a tradition to ward off disaster or avoid calamities.

Myths not only contain fictional stories that are transmitted by word of mouth, but have meanings that can be studied semiotically (Moglen et al. 2019); Barthes 1972). Events take place in another world, or in a world that is not known as it is now and occurred in the past. There are figures who are praised, or feared (Sulastri and Apriyani 2021; Bascom 1965). Likewise, with the art of *jaran kepang*, the myth contained in the story of *Jaran Kepang* is illustrated through the movement, costume, makeup, gamelan rhythm, and colour of the braided horse used. *Jaran Kepang* in general is an art that depicts cavalry at war. Each movement demonstrated carries a distinct meaning. Stories about the war in the Mataram kingdom are also believed to be the origin of the formation of *Jaran Kepang* art in Central Java.

Idakeb represents the traditional movements of the *Jaran Kepang* dance in Temanggung, which have been collectively agreed upon by all *Jaran Kepang* artists. Idakeb movements, as outlined in the 1972 *Kuda Lumping* guidelines, consist of 45 distinct steps and are further detailed with stage arrangement rules. These movements or choreographies have been revised by the Department of Education of Temanggung Regency and officially recognised as the signature style of the *Jaran Kepang* dance in Temanggung to this day (Kabin Kebudajaan Kabupaten Temanggung, 1972).

The Javanese community is characterised by traits such as diligence, cooperation, and independence, which are symbolically represented through the movements in the *Jaran Kepang* dance. This is because the dance embodies the spirit, unity, and obedience in life's struggles, represented through the movements of the warrior dance. Furthermore, the cavalrymen are an integral part of the historical struggle of the people in Temanggung Regency. This history is documented in *Serat Centhini* Volume II, Stanza 6, dating back to the early 17th century, which states that the area of Mergowati in Temanggung served as a stable for the war horses belonging to the Surakarta Palace (Adisasmita, 1975). The war horses referred to were the mounts of the soldiers during combat, which instilled a sense of pride among the local populace, identifying themselves as cavalrymen. Inspired by their admiration for the cavalrymen, children would imitate the soldiers' movements and create toy horses. Since then, imitation horses made from woven bamboo strips (*kepang*) have been created, hence the name "*jaran kepang*" (Kemendikbud, 2023).

The narratives within this art form are referred to as myths in semiotic terms, as they contain specific symbols. This forms the focus of this study, which aims to uncover the symbolic meanings of the *Jaran Kepang* art form in a holistic manner. This study elucidates the meanings of the dance symbols, costumes, and music, enabling the community to apply the values expressed in their daily lives. These values can be taught to children through implementation in education, particularly in character development. The purpose of this research is to answer questions regarding the symbols depicted in the *Jaran Kepang* choreography. The analysis in this research uses Roland Barthes' mythology theory. Myths in Roland Barthes' study are part of semiotics.

The Jaran Kepang performance from Temanggung represents a rich tapestry of Javanese culture, intertwining traditional, religious, and educational dimensions. Thus, this study aims to document and analyze these aspects, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage by highlighting the symbolic movements, costumes, and stage arrangements that embody core Javanese values. Through a semiotic lens, the research uncovers the cultural meanings embedded in these symbols, offering valuable insights into the field of semiotics. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the potential of Jaran Kepang as a medium for character education,

demonstrating how traditional art forms can be integrated into modern curricula to instill moral values and cultural awareness. Therefore, with this background, it is important to carry out this study.

Literature Review

Oral Literature

Oral literature and folklore share two core qualities: their unique reflection of a community's cultural identity and their role as tools for societal transformation. As Rudan (2023) highlights, oral literature preserves the distinctive cultural nuances of a society, offering insight into its traditions and mindset. Meanwhile, Egwemi and Salifu (2022) emphasize the performative power of oral literature, where songs, stories, and legends serve as mediums for socio-political change, contributing to national development. These dual roles, cultural preservation and societal transformation, underscore the multifaceted significance of oral traditions in shaping communal identity and progress.

Symbols

Symbols are central to human communication and cultural expression, serving as carriers of abstract ideas. Seymour (2023) defines symbols as recognizable elements in visual language, while Spradley (Hendro, 2020) categorizes them into icons, indexes, and symbols, each with varying degrees of association. This semiotic perspective aligns with Doshi's (2022) assertion that symbols, whether in language, gestures, or artistic forms, are imbued with human meaning. Saiffudin (2005) and Karlikowska-Pąsiek (2019) further explore the interplay between symbols, semiotics, and culture, noting that symbols function as signifiers that convey layered meanings influenced by cultural norms (Sigdel, 2018; Khassenov, Adilova, & Rapisheva, 2022). Consequently, symbols are dynamic and context-dependent, capable of representing diverse concepts across cultural settings (Khrystych, 2019).

Culture

Culture, as Geertz (1960) explains, is a system of meanings and symbols that humans use to define their world, express emotions, and shape judgments. It is historically transmitted through symbolic forms, serving as a toolkit for behavior and adaptation (Rapoport, 1969). Koentjaraningrat (2000) broadens this view, describing culture as the sum of ideas, actions, and creations developed for social living. Within this study, the focus is on Javanese culture, as reflected in the choreography, props, and music of the Jaran Kepang dance, which encapsulates the symbolic systems that guide behavior and preserve communal identity

Myths

In Barthes' (1972) semiotic framework, myths are messages that convey ideologies, often accepted as truths despite lacking empirical proof. Barthes' model outlines how meaning evolves across levels of interpretation: from denotative meanings to mythological significations. At this second level, myths function as structures that transmit cultural ideologies (Moglen et al., 2019). This perspective underscores the role of myths in shaping cultural narratives and symbols, positioning them as essential elements in understanding traditional performances like the Jaran Kepang.

Jaran Kepang

The Jaran Kepang dance, a traditional art form from Central Java, offers a vivid representation of Javanese cultural heritage. Originating from pre-Hindu traditions (Wiyoso, 2011b), the dance incorporates symbolic elements such as bamboo horse props and warrior movements. Rantiksa and Lestari (2017) describe the dance as an adaptation of Prince Diponegoro's legendary battles, while the Temanggung guidebook (Kabin Kebudajaan Kabupaten Temanggung, 1972) links it to the Reog Ponorogo narrative. Scholars like Ibda and Nasution (2019) and Jazilah and Indriyanto (2019) emphasize the aesthetic and narrative richness of Jaran Kepang, highlighting its storytelling and choreography. Moreover, Suprayitno and Aziz (2021) note its ritual significance in local lifecycle events. As Hestyaningsih and Sutiyono (2018) observe, the dance's stylistic diversity reflects its adaptation across regions, making it a dynamic expression of cultural identity

This literature review has explored the interconnected dimensions of oral literature, symbols,

culture, myths, and the traditional Javanese art form of *Jaran Kepang*. Each element contributes uniquely to understanding the cultural and symbolic significance of this traditional dance. Oral literature functions as a repository of societal values and historical narratives, offering both entertainment and a platform for socio-political expression. Symbols, deeply embedded in semiotic theory, reveal layers of cultural meaning that transcend their physical forms, influenced by diverse cultural contexts. Culture itself emerges as a dynamic system of meanings and symbols, shaping and being shaped by human interactions, as seen in the choreography, props, and music of *Jaran Kepang*. Myths, as interpreted through semiotic frameworks, provide ideological underpinnings that imbue traditional art forms like *Jaran Kepang* with profound meaning. This dance, with its roots in pre-Hindu traditions and connections to historical figures and events, exemplifies the integration of mythological, cultural, and symbolic narratives. Lastly, *Jaran Kepang* stands as a living embodiment of Javanese cultural heritage, demonstrating the power of traditional art to preserve and communicate complex layers of meaning. Its continued study offers valuable insights into the ways oral literature, symbols, culture, and myths intersect to sustain and enrich the identity of a community.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study method with an anthropological lens (Baxter & Jack, 2015). The research focuses on the symbolic and semiotic aspects of the Jaran Kepang performance in Temanggung, analyzed through Roland Barthes' mythological theory, which is grounded in semiotics. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural meanings embedded in the dance's props, costumes, music, and other attributes.

Data Collection

The primary data sources for this study include cultural symbols observed in the Jaran Kepang dance, gathered through interviews, observations, and documentation. Key informants from the Rekso Budhoyo community, including performers and cultural practitioners, provided rich insights. Secondary data were obtained through literature reviews and archival research, such as the Guidelines for Jaran Kepang Temanggung published in 1972 by the Temanggung Department of Education and Culture. Field observations and documentation took place during.

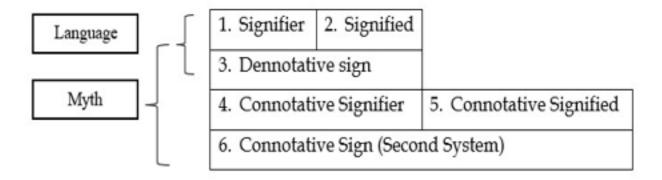
- 1. The Jaran Kepang performance at Tuk Budoyo Temanggung on 21 June 2023
- 2. The Car Free Night Festival in Borobudur on 23 July 2023
- 3. The Selamatan event in Lobang Village featuring Wahyu Turonggo Waringin on 3 February 2023.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows the 12-step case study framework proposed by Rahardjo (2017). Key steps include data verification, organization, coding, classification, and correction of interview responses. Data were systematically coded using a structured system. For instance:

{1_WW_SC}: Data number 1 from Wahyu Turonggo Waringin, informant Sucipto. {2_Lit_PJKT}: Data number 2 from literature, specifically the Jaran Kepang Temanggung Guidelines.

The coded data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' theory of myth, focusing on the denotative and connotative meanings of symbols. The findings were triangulated through confirmability measures to ensure reliability. Triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing observations, interviews, and archival materials. The analysis involved interpreting the cultural and symbolic meanings of the *Jaran Kepang* performance through Barthes' framework, as outlined in Chart 1.



Findings and Discussion

Origins of Jaran Kepang Temanggung

The origin of the Jaran Kepang dance from Temanggung, as quoted from the guidelines of the Jaran Kepang art in Temanggung, is that the Jaran Kepang from Temanggung comes from East Java as part of the reog Ponorogo dance series. However, due to the distribution of the population, this culture has spread to Central Java. In Central Java, this art form has two versions of the story: one is about King Bujanganom in his quest for the love of Princess Songgolangit, and the other version is about a cavalry soldier who assisted in the Diponegoro war in the 18th century.

After changing several properties and choreography, Jaran Kepang Temanggung underwent an extreme transformation in the early 2000s. The changes included properties such as costumes and horse designs, as well as the addition of Balinese cultural dance. This innovation is called the Jaran Kepang Badhong version, while the original version is called Idakeb. A clearer understanding of Jaran Kepang IDAKEB and Badhong can be observed through the following documentation.



Figure 2. Performance of Jaran Kepang Idakeb Temanggung (Source: YouTube channel Sanggar Rekso Budoyo)



Figure 3. Performance of Modern Creations of Jaran Kepang with Badhong (Source: YouTube Festival Jaran Kepang Temanggung)

Myth of Jaran Kepang Temanggung Property

The costume in the jaran kepang dance is very important {1_BDY_BD}. These props include costumes, gamelan (musical accompaniment), and stage design. The costume for Jaran Kepang IDAKEB consists of a vest, white shirt, ikét (headband), sampur (shoulder sash), bracelets, panjen (waist adornment), and jarik (traditional skirt). The horse used in the performance is made from woven bamboo, shaped to resemble a rideable horse. Artisans who craft the kuda lumping typically add hair, either from coconut fibres (for the classic Jaran Kepang) or horse and cow tails. According to Mas Gun, the purpose of this added hair is purely aesthetic, to make the horse look more realistic {2-RB-BG}.

Mutaqin explains that the costume worn in Jaran Kepang IDAKEB carries meaning and conveys a message. The Jaran Kepang IDAKEB costume symbolises the attire of Mataram soldiers, reflecting the influence of Mataram Yogyakarta culture on Jaran Kepang in Temanggung. Mutaqin further adds that in Temanggung, the story of the cavalry evolved, shifting from representing Patih Bujanganom's troops to symbolising the soldiers of Diponegoro's army {3_SNM_MTQ}. The costume includes the ikét, a long cloth tied around the head from the front to the back. Its function is to absorb sweat, preventing it from dripping onto the face and interfering with the performance. According to Roland Barthes' on myth analysis, the ikét symbolises obedience. Since the head is considered the most important part of the body, analogous to a leader, wearing the ikét represents a symbolic bond of obedience to authority. For this reason, the ikét is an essential prop for Jaran Kepang performers, symbolising their loyalty to Wiroyudo, the leader of the troops.

The vest serves as a form of protection for the body from various dangers in battle, akin to armour, though it is made of thick cloth {4_SNM_MTQ}. According to Budiono, clothing in Javanese culture reflects a person's economic status, level of education, political and governmental involvement, and caste. Similarly, the red vest worn in Jaran Kepang performances in Temanggung symbolises a brave soldier, participating in governance and fighting to protect the country {5_BDY_BD}. The kelat bahu (shoulder adornment) resembles a bracelet worn around the arm. Traditionally made of bronze, over time it has evolved to be made from stainless steel, brass, plastic, or paper. The kelat bahu signifies a person's caste, often decorated with engravings of powerful animals such as dragons, peacocks, lions, and tigers {6_BDY_BD}. For Jaran Kepang soldiers, the shoulder adornment symbolises a knightly spirit, strength, and loyalty. The sampur, or shawl, is used as an accessory in dance, draped around the dancer's waist. Sudiati believes that the *sampur* enhances the character portrayed in the dance. Symbolically, the shawl represents the control of desires, reminding individuals to fulfil their roles according to their nature. When worn by female dancers, the *sampur* highlights femininity, while for male dancers, it emphasises masculinity {7_SNM_SDT}.

According to Sudiyati, the bracelet worn by Jaran Kepang dancers serves as protection for the wrists during combat. It is not worn as mere ornamentation, but symbolises strength. Traditionally made of brass, the bracelets are now often replaced with cloth or animal leather to allow for easier movement. *Jarik*, trousers, and *kendhit* (a type of waist sash) are currently used for their aesthetic function {8_SNM_SDT}, though their

original purpose was to protect the abdominal cavity. The message conveyed by the use of the *kendhit* is a reminder to protect the essential aspects of life. As is known, the abdominal cavity houses vital organs. The *kendhit* also symbolises the need to ensure sufficient sustenance, both for oneself and for the family left behind during battle. This provision supports the physical and spiritual strength of the warrior.

The *jarik* worn in the performance features the *parang kusumo* batik motif, which symbolises the struggle for prosperity. This serves to motivate the warriors to embody a knightly spirit. It is well-known that batik patterns carry their own symbolic meanings, a statement supported by research from (Kusumawati & Hartowiyono, 2017). The *cemeti* (whip) is an accessory used by Wiroyudo to direct the movements of his troops. The whip symbolises the strength of leadership. It also serves as a warning to enemies to stay away and acts as a weapon in battle. Possessing a whip signifies a significant responsibility in managing, guiding, and disciplining the troops. The final accessory is the *krincingan*, a round metal object containing another metal ball inside that creates a loud sound when moved. The *krincingan*, worn by mounted warriors, symbolises the strength of the troops and their ability to fend off enemies. It also enhances the *reog* (the stomping of the horse's feet) during the dance. This data is further corroborated by research from (Suprayitno & Aziz, 2021).

The costumes worn in Jaran Kepang Temanggung undergo a form of distortion (in linguistic terms), believed to make the intended concept more captivating and evocative. Whatever meaning embedded in the costume's properties is understood as myth. (Roland Barthes 2004 p. 186-187). Sucipto explains that the costumes reflect the social and cultural conditions of Temanggung at the time {9_WTW_SC}. Idakeb represents the tenacity of the cavalry during the Mataram era. Meanwhile, the prosperity of Temanggung's society, driven by its tobacco harvests, has distorted this art form, making it more modern and sophisticated. This also includes the incorporation of other regional art forms, such as Balinese elements, into its choreography.

In terms of stage design, Jaran Kepang performances do not require elaborate props like those used in theatrical productions. According to Muttaqin, the primary considerations are a spacious area and adequate lighting. As the popularity of Jaran Kepang has grown, stages are often equipped with barriers to provide space for the performers. This is necessary because contemporary audiences tend to interact with the performers, which can pose risks. The use of whips, for instance, can injure spectators, and the barriers also help prevent contact when performers experience "kesurupan" (trance-like states) {10_SNM_MTQ}.

According to Sucipto, the PJKT outlines several movement patterns that performers in Jaran Kepang Temanggung must follow. These patterns are tailored to suit the specific type of performance being presented {11_WTW_SC}. The PJKT describes four distinct types of performances, namely *sendratari*, *pawai* or parade, unit and mass. Although the movement patterns of the kuda lumping have undergone changes, they do not alter the symbolism and meaning inherent in each movement. This is further supported by research conducted by (Sari & Suwandi, 2022). Movement patterns for these performances are illustrated as follows.

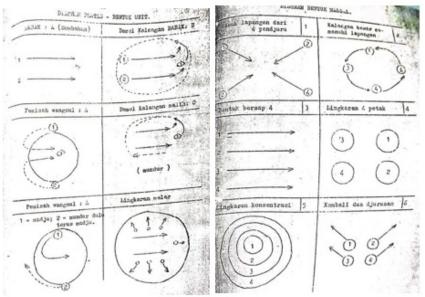


Figure 4. Movement Patterns of Unit Shapes and Origins (Source: personal documentation photograph from Guidelines of Jaran Kepang Temanggung, 1972)

Myths in the Choreography of Jaran Kepang Temanggung

According to Mas Gun, every Javanese dance must contain three main elements: Wiraga, Wirama, and Wirasa. Wiraga refers to the dance movements, Wirama relates to the musical rhythm and the synchronisation of movement, while Wirasa conveys the essence or narrative of the dance performed {12- RB_BG}. These three elements ensure that each dance carries symbolism and depicts patterns of life in the story presented (Hera, Cahyono, Malarsih, & Sugiarto, 2024). This also applies to the Jaran Kepang dance of Temanggung. The Jaran Kepang performance includes 45 basic *Idakeb* movements (Wiraga) as follows:

No.	Variety of movement	No.	Variety of movement	No.	Variety of movement
1.	Sikap pokok (basic stance)	16.	Lendjitan	31.	Ngantuk
2.	Cekehan	17.	Legehan	32.	Ngulet
3.	Bokongan	18.	Lampah djangga	33.	Ojogan
4.	Takur-takur	19.	Lampah mletik	34.	Kesodan
5.	Pincangan	20.	Lampah balik	35.	Kiprah
6.	Pengkalan	21.	Lampah satrian	36.	Tolehan djanggo
7.	Teposan	22.	Kirig-kirig	37.	Djangga lenggutan
8.	Gebesan	23.	Sirig-sirig	38.	Ngesyek
9.	Menak Djinggan	24.	Gedjul	39.	Nutul
10.	Bapangan	25.	Mekakan	40.	Tumpang pale
11.	Lejepan	26.	Drap	41.	Ngelis
12.	Lemesan	27.	Congklang	42.	Gebras
13.	Timpangan	28.	Malang kadak	43.	Njontrot
14.	Untu lawang/Untulan	29.	Srimpetan	44.	Kecakan (masal)
15.	Sembiran/Untulan alus	30.	Ngombe	45.	Pejah (masal)

Table 1. Variety of Movements in Jaran Kepang Temanggung

A detailed description of the movements can be found in the following figures.



Figure 6. Opening Scene (jengkeng and malang kadak) Source: Youtube Chanel JK Idakeb Temanggung

The opening movement is called *Jengkeng*, which represents a preparatory stance or readiness posture. This movement symbolises the warriors preparing for battle. The sequence of the opening tribute or Act A includes the following movements: *Jengkeng*, *Tolehan*, *Lenggutan*, *Ngebyek*, *Sembah Tolehan*, *Sembah Lenggutan*, *Nutul/Ngebis*, *Tumpang Tali*, *Ngadeg Lenggut-Lenggut*, *Malang Kadak*, *Srimpetan*, *Kirig Mundur*, and *Menak Djinggan*. In the context of the story of Panji Sri Kelono Sewandono, the first act of the Jaran Kepang dance represents the preparation of Patih Bujang Anom in his quest to find Dyah Ayu Songgolangit. The preparations involve combat training, horse herding, preparing the warriors' physical condition, and paying homage to Panji Sri Kelono Sewandono.

According to Budiono, the choreography of Jaran Kepang in Temanggung aligns with the Mataraman customs, even though the origin of the dance is from East Java. This cultural fusion between Central and East Java has resulted in new creations in the Jaran Kepang of Temanggung. Historically, the Mataram Kingdom (the Yogyakarta Sultanate) had extensive territory, including the Temanggung area. Consequently, the influence of that power permeated local traditions and arts, including Jaran Kepang {13_BDY_BD}. The movements of riding a horse (*Nitih Kuda*), paying homage (*Sesembahan*), and retreating (*Kirig Mundur*) are aligned with the philosophical movements of Mataraman. In Mataram tradition, the leader is a figure of great respect and admiration, whose commands must be carried out by subordinates.

The tradition of paying homage can still be found in the customs of the Yogyakarta Palace today. The political governance is clearly depicted in the movements of Jaran Kepang in Temanggung. This aligns with Roland Barthes' (Roland Barthes, 2004) explanation that myth is a historical reality.

The second scene is known as Beksan I. This section consists of two sequences of movements: (1) Bokongan Temu Gelang, Timpangan Temu Gelang, Pincangan Temu Gelang, Takur-Takur Temu Gelang, Pengkalan Temu Gelang, Liyepan Temu Gelang, and Mager Timun Temu Gelang. Between these sequences, the appearance of the Barongan character, symbolising Singolodro and also Penthul, is usually included. The second sequence of movements (2) consists of Teposan Temu Gelang, Timpangan Temu Gelang, Bapangan Temu Gelang, Untu Walang Temu Gelang, Lampah Mletik Temu Gelang, Lampah Balik Temu Gelang, and Lampah Satrian Temu Gelang. In the context of drama, Beksan 1 and Beksan 2 represent the act of confrontation or conflict. This section depicts a group of horsemen resting before encountering Singolodro. Wiroyudo, upon meeting Singolodro, engages in a fight using his whip. This part of the performance often includes local legends or other stories. In the modern version of Jaran Kepang Temanggung, elements such as Legong and Barong dances are incorporated. The inclusion of Legong dancers and Barong is a new creation aimed at attracting an audience and is unrelated to the original narrative of Jaran Kepang.



Figure 7. Main 'Scene (Source: Youtube Chanel JK Idakeb Temanggung in Tuk Budoyo)

The Final Scene, known as Beksan 3, consists of three segments and comprises seven movements: ngantuk/ngulet (drowsiness/stretching), ngombe (drinking), sembiran (greeting), ngumpul sirah (gathering heads), gejulan (swaying), drap temu galang (graceful encounter), congklangan (playful interaction), and temu galang Page **9**

(encounter). This final act serves as a resolution or anticlimax, depicting the triumph of Wiroyudo over Singolodro and his subsequent journey to rescue Dyah Ayu Songgolangit. The movements convey a message about the attainment of victory following struggle. In every life journey, there are always obstacles that must be confronted to achieve one's aspirations. Each movement in this final act embodies the joy of the cavalry forces.

Symbols of Javanese Culture in Jaran Kepang Temanggung

Symbols possess meanings that must be communicated to society, including those found in the Jaran Kepang dance. Budiono explains that the movements in Jaran Kepang embody a sense of obedience, particularly in the *kiprah* (footwork) and *kiprah dodok* (dancing posture) {14_BDY_BD}. According to Muttaqin, the movements in the Jaran Kepang of Temanggung Idakeb reflect values derived from *wayang* (shadow puppet theatre), which are deeply embedded in Javanese culture. The *wayang* elements are evident in the dancers' costumes, which typically include *jarik* (traditional fabric wrap), *sampur* (shoulder cloth), *kendhit* (headscarf), and shorts. These costumes fundamentally symbolize the knights or warriors of Java, inspired by heroic figures from *wayang* narratives {15_SNM_MTQ}.

The sesembahan is the introductory section of the dance, consisting of 13 movements, which include: jengkeng, tolehan, lenggutan, ngebyek, sembah tolehan, sembah lenggutan, nutul/ngebis, tumpang tali, ngedeg lenggut-lenggut, malang kadak, srimpetan terus nitih kuda, kirig mundur, and menak jinggan. In Roland Barthes' analysis of myths, jengkeng is defined in its denotative sense as a walking motion with slightly bent knees. This movement is a mandatory gesture in Jaran Kepang dance. Connotatively, it serves as a means of self-introduction to the leader. The myth of jengkengan is rooted in Javanese culture, where introducing oneself is customary before proceeding with any activities. This movement also symbolizes a welcoming gesture towards guests. Following this is tolehan, which depicts a horse turning its head left and right. In mythological analysis, this movement signifies mutual greetings among the dancers. In Javanese culture, the etiquette during events typically begins with introductions, followed by offering respect to leaders or dignitaries, and subsequently greeting peers or relatives. This data is corroborated by an interview with Mr. Budiono, a cultural scholar [16_BDY_BD]. The visualization of the movements sembah tolehan and sembah lenggutan can be observed in the following images.



Figure 8. Sembah tolehan and sembah lenggutan Source: Youtube.com

The *sembahan* in the Jaran Kepang dance is elaborated as follows: the denotative meaning of *sembahan* derives from the Javanese word *sembah*, which signifies worship, respect, surrender, and devotion. The act of *sembah* is performed by placing both hands together in front of the chest or higher. However, in Javanese tradition, when bowing to a king or high official, one clasps their hands together and raises them above their Page **10**

head. This gesture is incorporated into the choreography of Jaran Kepang to honour the leader of the troops (*Wiroyudo*), acknowledge invited guests, and show respect to the audience at large {17-RB_BG}. Connotatively, *sembahan* narrates the journey of the cavalry soldiers in their quest to obtain Dyah Ayu Songgolangit. The *sembahan* action woven into the opening of the Jaran Kepang dance signifies appreciation or reverence for Patih Bujanganom, the leader of the troops, to commence military training. This preparation for war aims to equip the troops with readiness to confront their enemies.

In addition to *sembahan*, Javanese culture is vividly represented in the movement known as *kiprah*. *Kiprah* is characterized by a waving motion with one hand, while the other rests on the waist. Connotatively, this movement symbolizes openness, acceptance, and friendliness towards guests or colleagues. In Javanese culture, being open and hospitable is an essential trait. This emphasis on cordiality reflects the values of harmony, mutual assistance, cooperation, and social awareness, which are integral to the character education of the community.

Overall, the kuda lumping or jaran kepang dance illustrates movements reminiscent of horses. However, it is infused with cultural symbols that encompass the movements, costumes, and stage arrangements. These movements include sembahan, kiprah, meger timun (a specific horse-related movement), and temu gelang (a meeting of bracelets). Moreover, other aspects of Javanese culture are evident in the arrangement of the performers. The positioning of the dancers adheres to the stage layout, ensuring that they do not turn their backs to esteemed guests or officials. This practice exemplifies the respect afforded to leaders within Javanese culture {18_WTW_SC}.

According to the PJKT 1972 documentation, Jaran Kepang Temanggung offers several benefits, including traditional, religious, and educational advantages. The traditional benefits serve as a means to preserve cultural heritage and local wisdom {19-Lit_PJKT}. This is evident in Jaran Kepang, which incorporates cultural elements such as honoring ancestral spirits by providing offerings, including incense, flower arrangements, young coconut salad (rujak kelapa muda), and various traditional snacks. This offering ceremony is accompanied by a brief ritual aimed at seeking permission from the spirits to hold the event, which is also practiced in other traditional ceremonies.

In addition to the offering rituals, Jaran Kepang includes traditional elements such as the act of kesurupan (possession). Kesurupan is a scene in which Jaran Kepang performers are believed to be possessed by spirits. This phenomenon is thought to occur due to the lively and repetitive nature of the music, combined with dynamic movements that create a state of emptiness in the subconscious, resulting in random movements {20-RB_BG}. These movements occur unconsciously for the performers, and the community believes that such incidents are caused by spirits entering an individual's body. The kesurupan scene also attracts a distinct interest among fans of Jaran Kepang.

Regarding its religious aspect, Jaran Kepang does not fall within any specific religious domain, as it is primarily an artistic and cultural expression. However, it is associated with efforts by shamans to heal performers who experience possession. Islamic prayers are whispered into the ears of the possessed performer to help them regain consciousness. Jaran Kepang is considered a neutral art form, supported by government initiatives that allow Jaran Kepang groups to freely perform or establish places of worship, including mosques, churches, temples, and other places of worship {21-Lit_PJKT}.

Discussion

Based on the research findings, Jaran Kepang Temanggung is an art form adapted from East Java. However, several pieces of evidence suggest that Jaran Kepang Temanggung originates from the Mergowati region in Temanggung (Slamet, 2020). Historically, Mergowati was known as a horse stable, and this area is mentioned in the Serat Centini from 1814 as a horse-breeding region. Despite numerous other pieces of evidence, the exact origins of the Jaran Kepang Temanggung art form remain uncertain. This assertion is further supported by research findings (Rokhim, 2019) concerning innovations within the Jaran Kepang art form in Temanggung.

Jaran Kepang Temanggung has a long-standing history, evidenced by regional archives documenting a mass performance of Jaran Kepang Temanggung during the second anniversary of Kowilhan II/Jawa Madura at Kridosono Stadium in Yogyakarta on 1 March 1972. This performance featured 500 participants. Following this event, Jaran Kepang Temanggung also performed at the opening of Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) in Jakarta in 1975. Since then, Jaran Kepang Temanggung has continued to develop and evolve (Jazilah & Page **11**

Indrivanto, 2019). Jaran Kepang Temanggung is an art form that blends the cultures of Central and East Java, symbolizing the values inherent in Javanese culture. These values include social values, educational values, and moral values (Setyorini, 2012).

The analysis of myths in Jaran Kepang Temanggung (JKT) can be divided into two categories: the myth of costumes, and the myth of movement. The myth of costumes pertains to the meanings expressed through the costumes and makeup worn by JKT performers. The makeup, which is a key supporting property, emphasizes the characters in the dance. The fierce and bold makeup symbolizes the tenacity and spirit of the warriors. The faces are often painted to resemble those of animals (horses), which are regarded as noble creatures. It is hoped that the warriors embody characteristics such as perseverance, resilience, helpfulness, and physical strength. This underscores the relevance of makeup as it aligns with specific symbols (Proskuriakova, 2022).

The meaning conveyed through the costumes reflects the patriotic attitudes of the soldiers (Sumanto, 2022). Despite their fierce appearance, the attire indicates neatness, discipline, agility, and cohesion. The costumes comprise a ikét, vest, white shirt, kendhit, trousers, sash, shoulder straps, ankle bells, and bracelets. The costumes in IKT Idakeb significantly differ from those in the modern badbong version, yet both carry similar meanings. In addition to their symbolic significance, the costumes and innovations in badhong also possess mystical values, as evidenced by findings from (Sakanthi & Lestari, 2019) regarding Jaran Kepang Temanggungan, Moreover, the myth surrounding the gamelan conveys themes of spirit, resilience, and unity, demonstrated through harmonious and lively melodies (Anggraini, Cahyono, & Alamat, 2018). Lastly, the myth of movement in the dance depicts preparations for war, the battle itself, and the celebration of victory afterward (Lestari, Irvanti, & Barus, 2021). These movements have been adapted to align with the Mataram culture, particularly in the acts of sesembahan and kirig mundur.

The overarching myth conveyed through the Jaran Kepang Temanggung (JKT) dance encompasses themes of struggle, perseverance, cooperation, and unity (Setyorini, 2012). These values are dynamically integrated into the lives of the Temanggung community residing on the slopes of Mount Sumbing, where the majority of people are engaged in tobacco farming—an occupation that requires significant effort to achieve success. In 2018, JKT was recognized as part of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The Jaran Kepang Temanggung was represented by the performing arts group from Margowati Village in Kedu District. This recognition underscores that IKT holds a unique position compared to other art forms. It has been established as an icon of Temanggung, second only to tobacco, and has inspired the design of the batik uniforms worn by government officials in Temanggung Regency.

Study's implications

This study offers valuable contributions to academia by providing a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the Jaran Kepang performance from Temanggung. It not only highlights the traditional, religious, and educational aspects of the performance but also enriches the academic discourse on cultural preservation, semiotics, education, and religious syncretism. Firstly, the study contributes to cultural preservation and understanding by examining how Jaran Kepang serves as a vibrant reflection of Javanese cultural values. The performance encapsulates essential Javanese principles, such as discipline, respect, communal cooperation, and neatness. These cultural values are expressed through symbolic movements, costumes, and stage arrangements. By documenting these aspects, the study helps preserve the intangible cultural heritage of the Javanese people, offering a clear framework for future researchers and practitioners who seek to understand and protect traditional arts. This documentation becomes particularly important in an era where globalization threatens the continuity of local traditions, and such studies ensure that future generations can access and appreciate their cultural roots.

Second, the semiotic and symbolic analysis provided in the study is another key academic contribution. The symbolic movements, stage setups, and costumes in Jaran Kepang are not merely aesthetic choices; they carry deep meanings related to the cultural and moral fabric of Javanese society. For example, movements like kiprah, sembah, and jengkengan symbolize obedience and respect, while the orderly presentation of costumes highlights the cultural emphasis on neatness and discipline. These symbols are not just decorative; they function as signifiers that communicate complex cultural ideas. This approach adds depth to the field of semiotics, as it illustrates how performance art can act as a visual language that conveys layered meanings. The study thus contributes to the broader academic conversation about how signs and symbols function within cultural practices and performances.

Third, in terms of educational applications, the study offers a unique perspective on how traditional art forms like Jaran Kepang can be used as tools for character education. The performance emphasizes values such as obedience, respect, and discipline, which are communicated through both the movements and the structure of the performance. This aspect of the study opens up new possibilities for integrating traditional cultural elements into modern educational systems, particularly in the teaching of moral values. It suggests that art forms like Jaran Kepang can be valuable pedagogical tools, helping students internalize important cultural and ethical principles. This contribution is particularly relevant in discussions about how education systems can incorporate local cultural practices to foster a more holistic and culturally aware curriculum.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that Jaran Kepang performance from Temanggung serves as a profound reflection of Javanese culture, encompassing traditional, religious, and educational dimensions. The traditional aspects are vividly expressed through symbolic movements, stage arrangements, and costumes, which embody core Javanese values such as adherence to rules, devotion, obedience, communal cooperation, and neatness. Movements like kiprah, sembah, and jengkengan symbolize discipline and respect, while the neat and orderly presentation of costumes underscores the cultural emphasis on cleanliness and meticulousness. The religious dimension is evident in the syncretism of cultural practices, particularly through the use of offerings (sesajen) and the chanting of mantras, which honour the spiritual elements believed to be present in the performance. Scenes of possession, concluded with prayers and whispered mantras, further highlight the integration of spiritual and cultural symbols in Javanese society. Educationally, Jaran Kepang conveys essential character values, such as obedience and respect, through symbolic movements and stage arrangements that emphasize politeness and discipline. The literary elements within the performance provide moral lessons, encouraging the younger generation to incorporate these values into their daily lives.

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