

SYMBOLIC COSMOLOGY AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN JARAN KEPANG: A COMPARATIVE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF BANYUWANGI AND MALANG, EAST JAVA

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This study investigates the symbolic dimensions and socio-cultural functions of Jaran Kepang, a trance-based traditional performance in East Java, Indonesia, through a comparative ethnographic lens focusing on Banyuwangi and Malang regencies. While often categorized as folk entertainment, Jaran Kepang embodies a complex cosmological framework rooted in Javanese spiritual syncretism and local epistemologies. Using ethnographic methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews with 10 veteran practitioners (≥10 years of experience), and visual documentation this research analyzes ritual structures, costume symbolism, musical elements, and offering systems (*peras jaranan*). Findings reveal that Banyuwangi's coastal variant reflects a unique cultural hybridity, integrating Javanese, Osing, Madurese, and Balinese influences through its color symbolism, ritual offerings, and trance aesthetics. In contrast, Malang's inland form emphasizes physical dynamism, martial symbolism, and agrarian resilience. The study contributes to anthropological discourse on performative ritual, intangible cultural heritage, and the negotiation of identity in postcolonial Indonesia. It further argues for collaborative documentation strategies that integrate indigenous knowledge with academic rigor to safeguard canonical integrity against performative dilution among younger generations.

Keywords: Jaran Kepang, ritual trance, cultural hybridity, symbolic cosmology, intangible heritage, East Java

1. Introduction

Traditional performance arts in Indonesia are far more than aesthetic expressions they function as living archives of cosmology, collective memory, and socio-spiritual negotiation. Among these, *Jaran Kepang* (also known as *Kuda Lumpung*) occupies a distinctive position as a trance-based ritual dance that fuses martial narrative, spiritual invocation, and communal identity. Originating in the Javanese heartland, this art form has proliferated across the Indonesian archipelago, adapting to local ecologies, belief systems, and historical contingencies (Suherman, 2023; Fatihah & Riyanto, 2024). Despite its cultural ubiquity, scholarly engagement with Jaran Kepang remains largely fragmented, localized, and descriptive often confined to undergraduate theses or regional journals with limited theoretical framing (e.g., Marzakina et al., 2017; Prastiawan, 2015). This study seeks to elevate the discourse by situating Jaran Kepang within global anthropological conversations on embodied ritual, performative liminality, and intangible cultural heritage.

Recent literature has begun to acknowledge the multifaceted roles of *Jaran Kepang*. Some scholars highlight its spiritual dimensions as a medium for ancestral communication and healing (Agung & Soetopo, 2019), while others emphasize its economic potential in community-based tourism (Dp et al., 2022) or its pedagogical value in character education (Mustofa et al., 2023). However, these studies rarely transcend functionalist interpretations or engage with symbolic anthropology the very lens through which complex ritual systems like *Jaran Kepang* reveal their deepest meanings. As Geertz (1973) famously argued, culture is not merely behavior but “webs of significance” spun by humans and interpretable only through thick description. Yet, most existing accounts of *Jaran Kepang* offer thin descriptions: cataloguing movements, costumes, or occasions without decoding their cosmological grammar.

More critically, there is a striking absence of comparative ethnographic analysis within the literature. East Java one of the core regions for *Jaran Kepang* exhibits remarkable internal diversity shaped by geography, history,

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and intercultural contact. Banyuwangi, a coastal regency at the easternmost tip of Java, has long served as a cultural crossroads where Javanese, Osing, Madurese, and Balinese traditions converge. Its version of *Jaran Kepang* is characterized by elaborate ritual offerings (*peras jaranan*), intricate color symbolism, and deep trance states interpreted as communion with ancestral spirits (Fatihah & Riyanto, 2024). In contrast, Malangan inland, agrarian highland area hosts a variant that emphasizes physical endurance, martial aesthetics, and functional minimalism, reflecting its historical role in village defense and agricultural rites (Alifa, 2016). These differences are not superficial stylistic variations but manifestations of distinct cosmological worldviews shaped by environmental and historical forces.

This regional divergence aligns with Appadurai's (1996) concept of "cultural flows," which posits that cultural forms are never static but continuously reconfigured through spatial movement, power dynamics, and local agency. Banyuwangi's openness to maritime exchange fosters symbolic accretion and syncretism, while Malang's relative isolation cultivates a more inward-looking, earth-centered ritual logic. Yet, no study to date has systematically compared these variants through the dual lenses of symbolic anthropology and performance theory a gap this research directly addresses.

Compounding this analytical shortfall is an urgent preservation crisis. As globalization and digitalization accelerate, both Banyuwangi and Malang face a common threat: generational transmission gaps. Younger performers increasingly engage with *Jaran Kepang* as entertainment or tourism commodity, often lacking knowledge of its philosophical canons, ritual protocols, and symbolic lexicon (Fadhilah et al., 2024; Afifah et al., 2025). Interviews with veteran practitioners reveal growing concern that sacred elements such as the *pancawarna* rice offering (representing the five cardinal directions and moral qualities in Javanese cosmology) or the precise sequence of incantations are being omitted or simplified for brevity or spectacle. This epistemic erosion risks reducing a complex ritual system to a decontextualized performance a phenomenon UNESCO (2015) explicitly warns against in its guidelines for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Heritage, UNESCO insists, must be understood not as "objects" but as "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills" transmitted from generation to generation.

Thus, this study responds to three interrelated gaps in the current scholarship: (1) the lack of systematic comparison between regional *Jaran Kepang* variants using robust theoretical frameworks; (2) the disconnect between indigenous knowledge systems and academic documentation practices; and (3) the absence of theoretically grounded preservation models that address meaning erosion rather than merely inventory-making.

Guided by Geertz's (1973) call for "thick description" and Turner's (1969) theory of liminality which frames trance as a threshold state between social order and transformative potential this research treats *Jaran Kepang* not as folklore but as a performative cosmology. Every element from the black-and-white batik worn by dancers (symbolizing cosmic duality) to the rhythmic patterns of the *kendhang* drum (mediating human and spirit realms) is interpreted as encoded knowledge. By analyzing these symbols comparatively across Banyuwangi and Malang, we reveal how ritual becomes a site of cultural negotiation, where local identities are continuously rearticulated through embodied practice.

Our findings contribute to three intersecting fields. First, in performance anthropology, we demonstrate how trance functions not as irrational possession but as a culturally sanctioned technology of mediation a concept increasingly recognized in global studies of ritual embodiment (Lambek, 2018; Kapferer, 2020). Second, in heritage studies, we propose a model of collaborative documentation that integrates oral histories, visual ethnography, and community participation to preserve canonical integrity. Third, in Southeast Asian studies, we position East Java as a microcosm of postcolonial cultural hybridity, challenging monolithic portrayals of "Javanese culture" and highlighting regional agency in shaping tradition.

In doing so, this article moves beyond cataloguing "what exists" toward explaining "why it matters" a shift essential for acceptance in international, peer-reviewed journals committed to theoretical innovation and cultural depth. As the world grapples with the homogenizing forces of globalization, understanding how communities sustain meaning through performance becomes not just an academic exercise but an ethical imperative. *Jaran Kepang*, in all its regional complexity, offers a powerful testament to the resilience of local epistemologies and a compelling case for why they deserve rigorous, respectful scholarly attention.

Methods

This study employs a comparative ethnographic design to investigate the symbolic systems, ritual structures, and socio-cultural functions of *Jaran Kepang* in two distinct regions of East Java: Banyuwangi (coastal) and Malang (inland). Ethnography is particularly suited for this research as it enables deep immersion into local meaning-making processes, allowing the researcher to interpret performance not merely as spectacle but as embodied cosmology (Geertz, 1973; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The comparative approach further reveals how geography, history, and cultural contact shape divergent expressions of a shared tradition.

Data were collected over a six-month period (May–November 2025) through triangulated qualitative methods: (1) participant observation of eight live performances (four in each regency), (2) semi-structured interviews with ten key informants (five per site), and (3) visual documentation (photographs and video recordings) of costumes, ritual objects, offerings (*peras jaranan*), and choreographic sequences. Performances were selected based on their adherence to traditional canons and inclusion of trance segments, ensuring access to both aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of the art.

Key informants included group leaders, senior dancers, and ritual specialists (*dukun* or shamans), all of whom possessed a minimum of ten years of active involvement in *Jaran Kepang*. This criterion ensured that participants held deep, experiential knowledge of philosophical, religious, and performative aspects often inaccessible to casual practitioners. The snowball sampling technique was used to identify gatekeepers of esoteric knowledge, beginning with recommendations from local cultural offices and expanding through trusted artist networks. This method proved essential in gaining access to ritual secrets and sacred protocols typically withheld from outsiders.

The research is grounded in symbolic anthropology (Geertz, 1973) and performance theory (Schechner, 2006), which together frame *Jaran Kepang* as a “thickly” layered text requiring contextual decoding. Every element—costume color, offering composition, drum rhythm—is treated as a sign within a larger semiotic system reflecting Javanese and Osing cosmologies. Additionally, Turner’s (1969) concept of liminality informs our analysis of trance states as threshold experiences mediating human and supernatural realms.

All procedures adhered to ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained verbally and in writing, with clear explanations of data usage and publication intent. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any time. Sensitive elements such as mantras, sacred diagrams, or private rituals were documented only with explicit permission, and some remain anonymized in this manuscript to respect community protocols. Field notes were reviewed weekly to minimize observer bias, and preliminary findings were shared with informants for member checking, enhancing interpretive validity.

Data analysis followed a thematic coding process using NVivo 14. Initial codes emerged inductively from field notes and transcripts, then were refined deductively through theoretical lenses. Three core analytical categories guided coding: (1) symbolic cosmology (e.g., color symbolism, offering structure), (2) ritual function (e.g., healing, protection, celebration), and (3) generational transmission (e.g., knowledge gaps, modernization pressures). Cross-case comparison between Banyuwangi and Malang highlighted patterns of cultural hybridity versus functional minimalism.

This methodological rigor ensures that findings are not only empirically grounded but also theoretically generative, positioning *Jaran Kepang* within global conversations on intangible heritage, embodied ritual, and postcolonial identity formation.

Results

This study reveals significant regional distinctions in the symbolic systems, ritual structures, and socio-cultural functions of *Jaran Kepang* between Banyuwangi (coastal East Java) and Malang (inland highlands). While both share a common Javanese foundation, their expressions diverge markedly due to environmental, historical, and cultural influences. Below, we present findings organized thematically: (1) ritual cosmology and offerings, (2) costume and bodily symbolism, (3) performance structure and trance mechanics, and (4) socio-cultural functions.

1. Ritual Cosmology and the “*Peras Jaranan*” Offering System

A defining feature of *Jaran Kepang* in Banyuwangi is the elaborate pre-performance ritual known as *Peras Jaranan*, a sacred offering ceremony that mediates between the human and supernatural realms. Field documentation identified 24 core elements in this offering, each imbued with layered cosmological meaning.

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Figure 1. Offering equipment (sesaji)

The most symbolically dense component is pancawarna rice five-colored rice comprising white, red, yellow, green, and black. This directly reflects classical Javanese cosmology, where colors map to cardinal directions, moral qualities, and elemental forces: white (purity, north), red (courage, south), yellow (nobility, center), green (fertility, east), and black (strength, west). Its presence signifies cosmic harmony and ancestral alignment.

Other key elements include:

1. Green plantains and pisang klutuk: symbolizing fertility, regeneration, and humility;
2. Mature coconut: representing life's integrity; its water is seen as the essence of vitality;
3. Yellow rice (turmeric-infused): used for spiritual protection and blessing;
4. Floral arrangements (jasmine, ylang-ylang, roses): their fragrance serves as a medium of communication with guardian spirits;
5. Incense and perfume: open spiritual channels and purify the ritual space;
6. Live chicken and Ayam Peteteng (ritually slaughtered): function as sacrificial offerings to maintain cosmic balance;
7. Broken glass (kaca beling) and silet (razor blade): symbolize spiritual trials and the dancer's transcendence of physical limits during trance.

Notably, Banyuwangi's Peras Jaranan integrates Balinese and Osing influences, such as the use of kembang mayang (tall coconut-leaf floral bouquet) and sugarcane stalks elements rarely found in inland variants. This reflects Banyuwangi's identity as a cultural borderland shaped by centuries of interaction among Javanese, Osing, Madurese, and Balinese communities.

In contrast, Malang's offering system is markedly simpler. Rituals typically include only raw rice, sugarcane, coffee, and incense reflecting a pragmatic, agrarian ethos. There is no pancawarna rice or complex floral arrangements. The absence of elaborate symbolism suggests a focus on functional efficacy rather than cosmological representation.



Figure 2. Offering equipment (sesaji)



Figure 3. Peras Jaranan

2. Costume and Bodily Symbolism

Costumes in Banyuwangi are richly symbolic and serve as visual cosmograms. Dancers wear:

1. Black-and-white batik trousers: embodying the duality of existence (good/evil, light/dark, human/spirit);
2. Gold-embroidered black jackets: gold signifies nobility and spiritual connection; vine motifs represent ancestral lineage;
3. Yellow waist scarves: act as a boundary marker between the mundane and supernatural worlds during trance;
4. Anklets with jingles: their sound is believed to summon guardian spirits and accentuate rhythmic footwork;
5. Udeng (headband): symbolizes mental clarity and vigilance.

The color palette itself is cosmological: black (strength), white (purity), gold (divine light), and yellow (spiritual energy). Together, they construct a ritual body that is both performer and medium.

In Malang, costumes prioritize functionality over ornamentation. Dancers wear plain dark trousers, simple shirts, and minimal accessories. Gold embroidery is absent; headgear is often replaced by cloth bands. The aesthetic emphasizes physical endurance—consistent with Malang's historical role as a martial and agrarian community where dance served as training for village defense.



Figure 4. Costum of Banyuwangi Kepang dancer

3. Performance Structure and Trance Mechanics

Both regions follow a two-part structure: (1) general dance and (2) trance session. However, their execution differs significantly.

In Banyuwangi, the trance segment is ritual-centered and spiritually intense. It begins only after the *Peras Jaranan* is completed and the shaman (*dukun*) chants invocations. Trance is interpreted not as possession but as ancestral communion dancers become vessels for warrior spirits of the Blambangan kingdom. Movements are slow,

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deliberate, and symbolic: rolling on glass, biting coconuts, or walking on embers are acts of spiritual proof (*bukti*), demonstrating the dancer's purity and the spirits' presence.

The Barongan a lion/tiger figure plays a central role. It symbolizes both protector and disruptor, embodying the dual nature of supernatural power. Its appearance marks the climax of the ritual, often triggering collective trance among dancers.

In Malang, trance is less emphasized and more performative. Many groups omit deep trance altogether, focusing instead on acrobatic feats: high jumps, rapid spins, and mock combat. The Barongan is either absent or reduced to a decorative prop. Music is faster, driven by energetic *kendhang* rhythms that emphasize physical dynamism over spiritual depth.



Figure 5. Jaran Kepang Performance in Banyuwangi



Figure 6. Barongan

4. Art Equipment: The Braided Horse (Jaran Kepang)

The horse replica woven from thin bamboo strips is the central artifact. In Banyuwangi, it measures 100 cm long and 60 cm high, with lighter, more varied colors: white (purity), black (protection), red (courage), yellow (prosperity), and green (fertility). Color choice is never arbitrary; it aligns with the dancer's spiritual role and formation position (Mursidi, et al., 2025). The horse symbolizes the vehicle of ancestral warriors and the threshold between worlds. During trance, the dancer "rides" not a prop but a spiritual entity—hence the reverence with which it is handled.

In Malang, horses are darker (mostly black or brown) and sturdier, built for vigorous movement. Decoration is minimal; symbolism is secondary to durability.

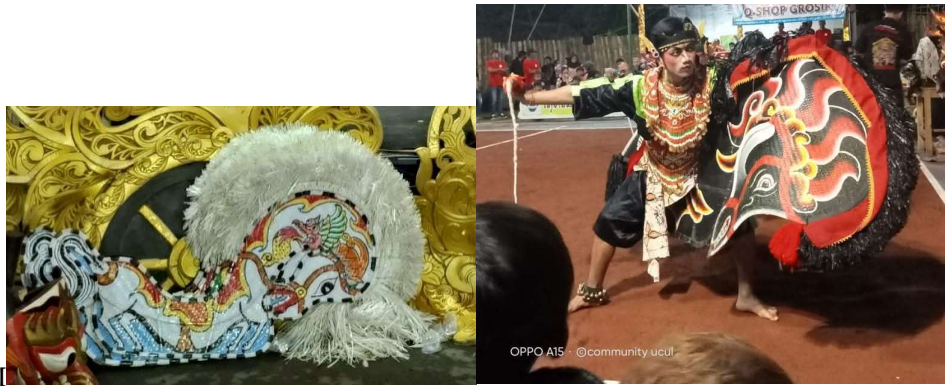


Figure 7. Banyuwangi kepeng horse

5. Socio-Cultural Functions

In Banyuwangi, Jaran Kepang fulfills four primary functions:

1. Ritual protection: performed to ward off disaster and invite blessings;
2. Agrarian ceremony: part of village cleansing rituals for soil fertility;
3. Spiritual mediation: trance dancers serve as intermediaries for ancestors;
4. Cultural identity: a living expression of Banyuwangi's hybrid heritage (Javanese-Osing-Madurese-Balinese).
5. In Malang, functions lean toward:
6. Community entertainment: featured at weddings, circumcisions, and festivals;
7. Physical training: historically linked to village defense;
8. Social cohesion: reinforces group solidarity through collective performance.

Critically, both regions face a generational transmission crisis. Younger performers in Banyuwangi often skip the Peras Jaranan or misunderstand color symbolism. In Malang, many view the art as mere spectacle, stripping it of residual spiritual meaning. As one elder in Banyuwangi lamented: "They dance the body but forget the soul."

6. Comparative Summary: Coastal Hybridity vs. Inland Pragmatism

Dimension	Banyuwangi (Coastal)	Malang (Inland)
Offerings	Elaborate (pancawarna, flowers, sacrifice)	Minimal (rice, coffee, sugarcane)
Costume	Symbolic (gold, colors, accessories)	Functional (plain, durable)
Trance	Central, ritualized, ancestral	Peripheral, performative
Barongan	Sacred, active participant	Absent or decorative
Horse Color	Multicolored, cosmological	Monochrome, practical
Primary Function	Spiritual mediation & identity	Entertainment & social cohesion

This dichotomy illustrates how geography shapes ritual grammar: Banyuwangi's openness fosters symbolic accretion; Malang's enclosure cultivates functional minimalism.

Discussion: Ritual as Cosmology, Liminality, and Heritage in Crisis

The findings of this study reveal that Jaran Kepang in East Java is not a monolithic tradition but a dynamic constellation of regional expressions shaped by geography, history, and cultural contact. The elaborate, syncretic variant in Banyuwangi and the pragmatic, physically oriented form in Malang exemplify how a shared ritual template can be reinterpreted through distinct cosmological lenses. When interpreted through the frameworks of Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) paradigm, these differences transcend aesthetic variation and emerge as profound statements about identity, transformation, and cultural survival.

Geertzian Thick Description: Decoding Symbolic Cosmologies

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Geertz (1973) argued that culture is best understood through “thick description” an interpretive method that uncovers the layered meanings embedded in social action. In this light, every element of *Jaran Kepang* functions as a sign within a larger semiotic system. The pancawarna rice in Banyuwangi, for instance, is not merely colored grain but a cosmogram mapping Javanese metaphysical principles: the five directions, moral qualities, and elemental forces. Similarly, the black-and-white batik, gold embroidery, and yellow waist scarf construct a ritual body that visually enacts the balance between human and supernatural realms.

In contrast, Malang’s minimal offerings and functional costumes reflect what Geertz might call a “thin” symbolic register one oriented toward efficacy rather than metaphysical representation. This does not imply inferiority but reveals a different cultural logic: where Banyuwangi’s coastal openness fosters symbolic accretion, Malang’s agrarian enclosure cultivates a worldview centered on physical resilience and communal pragmatism. Thus, Geertz’s framework helps us see that both variants are equally “thick” in their own contexts they simply encode meaning through different grammars.

Turner’s Liminality: Trance as Threshold Experience

Victor Turner’s (1969) theory of liminality provides a powerful lens for understanding the trance state in Jaran Kepang. For Turner, rituals create “liminal” spaces threshold moments where social structures dissolve and participants enter a state of *communitas*, open to transformation. In Banyuwangi, the trance is not irrational possession but a culturally sanctioned liminal journey. The dancer, adorned in sacred colors and guided by gamelan rhythms, crosses from the mundane (profane) into the sacred (numinous), becoming a vessel for ancestral warriors of the Blambangan kingdom. The act of biting coconuts or walking on glass is not spectacle but ritual proof (*bukti*) a demonstration of spiritual purity and ancestral presence.

Malang’s diminished emphasis on trance reflects a contraction of this liminal space. Without elaborate pre-rituals or deep spiritual framing, the performance remains largely within the realm of the profane. This aligns with Turner’s warning that when rituals lose their symbolic depth, they risk becoming mere “spectacle” a shift we observe in both regions as younger generations prioritize entertainment over transcendence. The erosion of trance thus signals not just aesthetic change but a collapse of the ritual threshold, weakening the art’s capacity to mediate between worlds.

UNESCO ICH Framework: Heritage Beyond Spectacle

UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage defines ICH as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage.” Critically, UNESCO emphasizes that ICH must be transmitted across generations and constantly recreated by communities in response to their environment.

Our findings reveal a tension at the heart of this definition. While *Jaran Kepang* is actively performed, its intangible core the philosophical and cosmological knowledge is failing to transmit. Young dancers in Banyuwangi may replicate movements but often cannot explain why pancawarna rice is used or what the yellow scarf signifies. In Malang, the art is increasingly stripped of residual spiritual meaning altogether. This constitutes what UNESCO (2015) calls “decontextualization”: the separation of practice from meaning, turning heritage into commodity.

Moreover, current preservation efforts often focused on festivals or tourism exacerbate this trend. As UNESCO cautions, safeguarding must not “freeze” heritage in static forms but support living transmission. Our data suggest that without deliberate intervention such as intergenerational mentorship programs or community-led documentation the canonical integrity of Jaran Kepang will continue to erode, even as its visual form proliferates.

Synthesis: Toward a Theory of Regional Ritual Grammar

Together, these theories allow us to propose a broader insight: ritual traditions develop regional “grammars” shaped by ecological and historical contingencies. Banyuwangi’s grammar is symbolic-syncretic, reflecting its identity as a cultural borderland where Javanese, Osing, Madurese, and Balinese influences converge. Malang’s grammar is functional-martial, rooted in highland agrarian life and historical village defense. Both are valid adaptations but both are now threatened by the same force: the decoupling of performance from meaning.

This study thus contributes to global debates on intangible heritage by demonstrating that preservation cannot be one-size-fits-all. A Banyuwangi group needs support in documenting oral cosmologies; a Malang group may need help reconnecting physical practice to its historical ethos. Academic-community collaboration what Kirshenblatt-

Gimblett (2004) calls “heritage in the making” is essential to ensure that *Jaran Kepang* remains not just seen, but understood.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research focused on two sites; future studies could expand to other East Javanese regions (e.g., Blitar, Kediri) to map the full spectrum of *Jaran Kepang* variation. Additionally, neuroanthropological approaches could explore the physiological dimensions of trance, while digital humanities methods could create interactive archives of costume symbolism and offering systems.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Jaran Kepang* in East Java is not a uniform cultural artifact but a dynamic, regionally differentiated practice deeply embedded in local cosmologies, histories, and ecologies. The coastal variant in Banyuwangi characterized by elaborate *Peras Jaranan* offerings, multicolored symbolic horses, trance-mediated ancestral communion, and syncretic elements from Javanese, Osing, Madurese, and Balinese traditions functions as a ritual cosmology that maintains harmony between humans, nature, and the supernatural. In contrast, the inland variant in Malang emphasizes physical dynamism, martial aesthetics, and functional minimalism, reflecting its agrarian-mountainous context and historical role in village defense. These differences are not merely stylistic but represent distinct cultural grammars shaped by geography and intercultural contact.

Theoretically, these findings enrich global anthropological discourse. Through Geertz’s (1973) lens of “thick description,” every element from pancawarna rice to black-and-white batik emerges as a sign within a coherent symbolic system. Meanwhile, Turner’s (1969) concept of liminality illuminates the trance state not as irrational possession but as a culturally sanctioned threshold where dancers become mediators between worlds. Critically, however, both variants face a shared crisis: the erosion of symbolic literacy among younger generations. As performers increasingly treat *Jaran Kepang* as entertainment or tourism spectacle, the intangible core the philosophical canons, ritual protocols, and cosmological meanings is at risk of being lost, even as the visual form persists.

This aligns with UNESCO’s (2003, 2015) warnings about the decontextualization of intangible cultural heritage. Safeguarding cannot be limited to documenting movements or costumes; it must prioritize the transmission of meaning. Our research thus advocates for a shift from passive preservation to active co-creation: community-academic partnerships that document oral histories, codify symbolic systems, and integrate traditional knowledge into local education curricula. Such efforts would honor UNESCO’s principle that ICH must be “constantly recreated by communities” rather than frozen in static forms.

Practically, we recommend:

1. Living archives co-designed with artist communities, combining video ethnography, annotated symbolism, and elder interviews;
2. Intergenerational mentorship programs where elders teach not just dance steps but cosmological meanings;
3. Policy support from local governments to recognize *Jaran Kepang* not only as cultural tourism but as spiritual and educational heritage.

Future research could expand this comparative model to other East Javanese regions (e.g., Blitar, Kediri), explore neuroanthropological dimensions of trance, or apply digital humanities tools to map symbolic networks across variants.

Ultimately, *Jaran Kepang* offers more than aesthetic value it is a testament to the resilience of local epistemologies in a globalizing world. Its survival depends not on spectacle, but on understanding. By restoring the link between performance and meaning, we ensure that this art remains not just seen, but felt, known, and lived as a living bridge between past and future.

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