



Cultural Value Transformation in Indonesian Traditional Performing Arts: A Literature Review of Wayang, Ketoprak, and Ludruk

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Abstract

This study explores the transformation of cultural values in Indonesian traditional performing arts, particularly wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk, through a comprehensive literature review. The analysis reveals that these three forms of performing arts undergo dynamic processes of adaptation and reconstruction of cultural values in response to social change and modernity, each with distinctive characteristics shaped by its philosophical, social, and aesthetic context. Wayang kulit primarily preserves spiritual and philosophical values, while ketoprak and ludruk emphasize social critique and education through communicative dramatic approaches. The transformation of cultural values is not only manifested in thematic and technical changes but also in the negotiation of meaning, allowing both preservation and innovation. The findings highlight the strategic role of traditional performing arts as a medium of cultural dialogue and social education, as well as an agent of change that strengthens cultural identity and awareness among Indonesian society. The implications of this study underline the need for inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable cultural preservation strategies in the framework of national cultural development

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Introduction

Traditional performing arts occupy a strategic position within the Indonesian cultural structure as vehicles for transmitting values, identity, and social expression (Fetra Bonita Sari & Risda Amini, 2020; Puspitasari, 2016). Wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk represent distinctive manifestations of Javanese cultural heritage that function not only as entertainment but also as instruments of moral education, vehicles of social critique, and reflections of communal spirituality (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Fujiastuti, 2019; Integrasi, Sosial, Saputri, Ruja, & Kurniawan, 2024). These art forms embody narratives, characters, and cultural symbols that transmit fundamental values such as honesty, courage, solidarity, and justice. By delivering these values through engaging and emotionally resonant performances, traditional arts remain dynamic cultural instruments embedded in everyday life.

Nevertheless, social dynamics, political shifts, and technological developments have accelerated transformations in the cultural values embedded in these performances (Mukafi, Aqila, & Prawita, 2024). Modernization, urbanization, and the influence of global culture have shaped their form, content, and function, both aesthetically and ideologically (Suryadmaja, 2025). Established values are subject to reinterpretation or even shifts in meaning, in accordance with contemporary contexts and increasingly heterogeneous audiences. Thus, analyzing the transformation of cultural values in traditional performing arts becomes essential for understanding how these cultural legacies adapt, endure, and reconstruct themselves amidst changing times. Employing a literature-based approach, this study aims to provide a comprehensive account of such dynamics and their contribution to sustaining Indonesian cultural identity.



From this background, it becomes evident that traditional performing arts do not merely undergo shifts in presentation style but also in the cultural values they embody. These transformations unfold through complex negotiations involving socio-political developments, changes in aesthetic preferences, and external cultural influences. Wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk—three art forms rooted in the Javanese cultural environment—serve as concrete examples of how cultural values are reshaped and reinterpreted within performance spaces. Accordingly, this study formulates several key research questions to address the processes and substance of value transformation occurring within these three traditions.

The research is guided by two central questions: (1) What are the cultural value characteristics embedded in wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk as traditional performing arts? and (2) How do these values transform over time, and what factors drive the shifts in meaning within each performance tradition? Addressing these questions offers deeper insights into the role of performing arts as dynamic media that reflect and shape cultural consciousness in both historical and contemporary contexts.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to identify the cultural values represented in the narratives, characters, and structures of wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk; (2) to analyze the processes of change or transformation of these values in both historical and contemporary contexts; and (3) to evaluate the factors influencing the shifts in meaning across these traditions, both in terms of content and socio-cultural function. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide conceptual contributions to the understanding of the relationship between performing arts and cultural value transformation, while emphasizing their relevance to local cultural preservation amid modernization and globalization.

In the context of traditional performance studies, previous research has highlighted the role of wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk as vehicles for transmitting local cultural values. Wayang kulit, for instance, has been widely studied as an art form deeply rooted in cosmological symbolism and moral teachings derived from Hindu, Buddhist, and Javanese Islamic philosophies (Jb., 2017; Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023). Ketoprak is often positioned as a narrative performance of historical storytelling, reflecting social norms and ethical frameworks in Javanese society (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024; Setyawan, 2019). Meanwhile, ludruk has been recognized as a medium of social critique representing the voice of the lower classes, employing populist and humorous approaches (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Integrasi et al., 2024). While each art form emerges within distinct socio-cultural contexts, they share the function of articulating values and reflecting cultural identity.

Theoretical perspectives on cultural values and cultural change are central to this analysis. Kluckhohn's cultural value theory, which identifies fundamental value orientations in society, provides an analytical lens for interpreting the value systems embedded in performances (Fuad & Wahida, 2019; Hasibua, Anwar, & Nazirwan, 2021; Kumoro et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Koentjaraningrat's (1980) theory of cultural change offers a foundation for understanding the processes of adaptation and negotiation in traditional arts as responses to shifting times (Fetra Bonita Sari & Risda Amini, 2020; Zidni, Suhupawati, Rahmawati, & Hadi, 2021). By synthesizing insights from cultural anthropology, sociology of art, and performance aesthetics, this study maps the dialectic between continuity and transformation, situating traditional performing arts as cultural representations that are perpetually in motion and negotiation.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research as the primary method for data collection and analysis. This approach was selected because the research object—representation and transformation of cultural values in traditional performing arts—cannot be separated from symbolic and contextual constructions of meaning (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020; Creswell, 2018; Ugwu, Chinyere, & Eze Val, 2023). Accordingly, textual sources, performance manuscripts, audiovisual documentation, and scholarly publications served as the main data sets analyzed to uncover the dynamics of cultural values within wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk. A literature-based method facilitated the exploration of historical trajectories, narrative structures, and ideological content embedded within these traditions (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022; Setyowati, 2022).

Data were collected from a wide range of relevant literature, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, dissertations, and digital archives that discuss cultural values and the development of Indonesian traditional performing arts. The analysis adopted a descriptive-analytical approach through content analysis, focusing on the representation of cultural values within narrative elements, characters, dialogues, and performance structures (Rasyidi, 2019). Furthermore, Kluckhohn's cultural value theory and theories of cultural change provided the analytical framework to interpret processes of transformation. The validity of interpretations was strengthened through source triangulation, by comparing multiple perspectives across diverse literature.

Results and Discussions

Cultural Values in Ketoprak

As demonstrated in the previous analysis of wayang kulit, ketoprak also plays a crucial role as a medium for the preservation and transformation of Javanese cultural values. Unlike wayang kulit, which emphasizes epic narratives and cosmological symbolism, ketoprak presents stories rooted in social life and historical realities, including folk tales and local histories (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024). Through ketoprak performances, values such as communal solidarity, adherence to social norms, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and reverence for ancestors and tradition are preserved and communicated to audiences (Fujiastuti, 2019).

Literature suggests that ketoprak functions as an effective medium of social education, transmitting moral lessons and ethical teachings that are contextually grounded in local realities (Fetra Bonita Sari & Amini, 2020; Setyawan, 2019). The representation of characters from diverse social strata reflects the pluralism and complexity of Javanese society. Core values such as loyalty, honesty, courage, and resistance to injustice and tyranny often emerge as central themes (Fuad & Wahida, 2019).

The performative dimension of ketoprak—which relies on direct dialogue and emotional interaction between performers and audiences—reinforces the internalization of these values (Suryadmaja, 2025). As such, ketoprak operates as a social space that enables critical reflection and the strengthening of community solidarity (Hasibua, Anwar, & Nazirwan, 2021).

The transformation of cultural values in ketoprak is evident in the adaptation of narratives and performance styles to contemporary contexts. In response to modernization and rapid social change, ketoprak has incorporated modern elements in language, music, and thematic content. These adaptations enrich its appeal, ensuring relevance to younger generations while retaining its traditional roots (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Kumoro et al., 2021). This process illustrates dynamic cultural negotiation, balancing the preservation of traditional values with contemporary communicative needs (Setyowati, 2022).

In parallel with wayang kulit, ketoprak also serves as a medium of social critique. Through humor, satire, and straightforward dialogue, it conveys messages addressing issues such as corruption, inequality, and shifting moral values (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024). This function reinforces the position of ketoprak as an art form that not only preserves tradition but also responds to social change critically and constructively (Zidni et al., 2021).

Equally important is the performative aspect of ketoprak, which invites active audience participation. Its inclusive theatrical approach fosters a lively cultural dialogue in which audiences are not merely passive recipients but active participants who experience and interpret cultural messages (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020). This feature strengthens the role of ketoprak as an adaptive and communicative medium of cultural learning (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022).

Furthermore, ketoprak contributes significantly to the formation and reinforcement of local cultural identity. As a performance tradition deeply rooted in community life, it sustains continuity while opening pathways for

innovation and renewal (Mukafi, Aqila, & Prawita, 2024). Its persistence within local communities highlights its role in reinforcing social cohesion and grassroots nationalism (Saputri, Ruja, & Kurniawan, 2024).

In sum, the cultural values embedded in ketoprak reflect the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, continuity and change. Through its adaptive capacity and ongoing innovation, ketoprak serves as a living mirror of Javanese cultural dynamics. This study underscores the significance of ketoprak as a strategic medium for preserving and developing local cultural values in the face of globalization and rapid social transformation (Fetra Bonita Sari & Amini, 2020; Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024).

Cultural Values in Ludruk

Continuing the discussion on ketoprak, ludruk—a traditional performing art of East Java—demonstrates distinctive cultural values that are both unique and complementary (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019). Beyond its function as popular entertainment, ludruk serves as a critical and reflective medium of social expression, particularly representing the experiences and struggles of the lower classes (Saputri, Ruja, & Kurniawan, 2024). Within this context, ludruk embodies values of social solidarity, honesty, courage, and resistance to injustice and inequality, which are often overlooked in broader social structures (Puspitasari, 2016; Suryadmaja, 2025). Literature identifies ludruk as the voice of marginalized communities, defending dignity and cultural identity amid rapid socio-economic change (Fetra Bonita Sari & Amini, 2020).

Narratively and characteristically, ludruk portrays figures drawn from everyday life, using direct, colloquial, and humorous styles in contrast to the epic and symbolic narratives of wayang kulit and ketoprak (Fuad & Wahida, 2019). This accessible approach enables ludruk to reach broader and more diverse audiences, delivering moral and social messages more directly and effectively (Masroer, 2017). Humor and satire function as mechanisms of relief while serving as sharp tools for critiquing social and political issues such as corruption, injustice, and poverty (Setyawan, 2019).

The transformation of cultural values in ludruk is evident in the adaptation of narratives and performance styles to contemporary contexts and public demands (Saputri et al., 2024). For example, ludruk has begun incorporating contemporary themes such as class struggle, human rights, and democracy, creatively reshaped without abandoning its traditional roots (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024). These adaptations exemplify cultural negotiation processes that sustain ludruk's relevance and function as a responsive medium of social communication (Hasibua, Anwar, & Nazirwan, 2021).

As a cultural pedagogy, ludruk plays a vital role in fostering critical awareness and social education, especially among working-class audiences (Fujiastuti, 2019). Through interactive dialogues and the use of accessible everyday language, ludruk conveys ethical values, solidarity, and social concern in ways that resonate emotionally and engage audiences directly (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022). This educational function strengthens its role in sustaining tradition while aligning with modern social contexts (Creswell, 2018).

Additionally, ludruk demonstrates unique aesthetic and performative dimensions, where actors combine drama, music, and dance into a dynamic expression of cultural creativity (Mukafi, Aqila, & Prawita, 2024). Its collective nature—marked by active interaction between performers and audiences—reinforces its role as a cultural space for communal dialogue and social reconciliation (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). This exemplifies the capacity of traditional performing arts to function as adaptive cultural arenas (Zidni et al., 2021).

In terms of cultural preservation, ludruk holds a strategic role as a guardian of tradition capable of accommodating change without losing its identity (Kumoro et al., 2021). Amid modernization and globalization, ludruk remains a symbol of East Javanese cultural resilience, reinforcing social and cultural identity (Integrasi, Saputri, Ruja, & Kurniawan, 2024). Its continued presence in local art forums and community practices reaffirms its position as an inclusive and participatory form of cultural heritage preservation (Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023).

In conclusion, the cultural values embedded in ludruk reflect the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, social expression and aesthetics, continuity and transformation. This study emphasizes the importance of ludruk as an art form that not only preserves local cultural values but also functions as a critical

and adaptive space for social dialogue, ensuring its continued relevance within contemporary Indonesian cultural contexts (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Suryadmaja, 2025).

Comparison and Dynamics of Transformation

The transformation of cultural values in Indonesian traditional performing arts, particularly wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk, is a complex phenomenon that reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity (Suryadmaja, 2025). These art forms are not static cultural legacies but living spaces in which values are continuously negotiated in response to rapid social, political, and economic changes. Such transformation is essential to ensure that cultural values remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary society, especially younger generations (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019).

Wayang kulit is deeply rooted in Javanese philosophy, with cultural values shaped by a cosmological framework and the acculturation of Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic teachings (Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023; Jb., 2017). Its spiritual and ethical values serve as moral guidance as well as a philosophical foundation for the relationship between humans, nature, and the divine. Transformations within wayang kulit largely occur in modes of presentation and thematic adaptation, while its core values remain preserved (Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023).

By contrast, ketoprak employs a more direct narrative approach, often addressing contemporary socio-political issues through folk tales and local histories (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024). Its educative and critical functions are evident, with thematic adaptations that respond to pressing social phenomena such as corruption and shifting moral standards (Fujiastuti, 2019). The transformation of values in ketoprak demonstrates responsiveness to contemporary issues through a communicative and dramatized approach (Setyawan, 2019). Meanwhile, East Javanese ludruk emphasizes humor and satire as powerful tools for conveying social messages effectively to working-class audiences (Saputri et al., 2024). It serves as a dynamic medium of expression and social critique, incorporating modern issues such as class struggle and democracy while retaining authenticity through traditional language and performance styles (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Saputri et al., 2024).

Comparatively, these three art forms manifest different yet complementary mechanisms of cultural value transformation. While wayang kulit prioritizes the preservation of philosophical and spiritual values, ketoprak and ludruk respond more directly to contemporary social issues through communicative and interactive approaches (Fetra Bonita Sari & Amini, 2020). These distinctions highlight the diversity of social and aesthetic functions that enable them to engage audiences across different societal strata (Suryadmaja, 2025).

The dynamics of transformation affirm that traditional culture is not a static entity but a product that is continually reproduced and reinterpreted in response to the needs of the times. This process entails simultaneous dialogue among cultural practitioners, communities, and socio-political contexts (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020; Creswell, 2018). The sustainability of cultural values thus depends on the capacity for adaptation and innovation without severing ties to traditional roots (Hasibua, Anwar, & Nazirwan, 2021).

Equally significant is the performative dimension of these arts. Direct and participatory interactions between performers and audiences allow cultural values to be transmitted in dynamic and living ways, distinct from passive modes of communication (Fuad & Wahida, 2019). Traditional performances foster collective reflection and internalization of values, thereby strengthening social cohesion and cultural identity (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022).

The challenges of cultural transformation under modernity lie in the pervasive influence of global culture and shifting lifestyles. Traditional arts risk losing relevance if unable to adapt (Kumoro et al., 2021). Yet, wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk demonstrate effective cultural negotiation by adopting modern elements without compromising their fundamental identity (Zidni et al., 2021).

Adaptation involves not only technical aspects—such as technology and updated themes—but also the reconstruction of cultural meanings to resonate within new social contexts. For instance, the value of courage, once associated with physical heroism, has been reinterpreted as moral and social courage in confronting modern challenges (Setyowati, 2022).

More broadly, these dynamics underscore the strategic role of culture as a vehicle for fostering critical awareness and shaping social identity. Performances imbued with moral, social, and political messages encourage communities to actively participate in the (re)construction of cultural values (Masroer, 2017; Ugwu & Eze, 2023).

Thus, traditional performing arts such as wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk serve as effective intergenerational cultural dialogues, vital to sustaining cultural heritage amidst rapid social transformations (Puspitasari, 2016). Such dialogue ensures that cultural values are transmitted in relevant and adaptive ways, becoming sources of inspiration for the future (Mukafi, Aqila, & Prawita, 2024).

This analysis also highlights the importance of collaboration among artists, policymakers, academics, and communities in supporting healthy and sustainable cultural transformation. Responsive and inclusive cultural policies can reinforce the position of traditional performing arts in the broader framework of national cultural development (Fetra Bonita Sari & Amini, 2020).

It is important to note that cultural transformation does not equate to cultural loss; rather, it entails the maintenance and enrichment of identity through social dynamism. Critical and creative agency among cultural practitioners is essential to ensure that traditions remain living, dynamic, and generative spaces of creativity (Setyowati, 2022).

In conclusion, wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk are not merely aesthetic and entertainment media but strategic spaces for the preservation, renewal, and transmission of cultural values. Their transformative dynamics reflect the vitality of Indonesian culture, which evolves to meet the challenges of modernity without losing its essence (Suryadmaja, 2025). Accordingly, research on cultural value transformation must continue to adopt holistic, multidisciplinary approaches in order to generate practical solutions for the sustainable management and preservation of cultural heritage. Such approaches are essential to support inclusive, adaptive, and progressive cultural development in navigating the complexities of the modern world (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020; Creswell, 2018).

Conclusion

This study affirms that the transformation of cultural values in Indonesian traditional performing arts—particularly wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk—is a dynamic and complex process. Wayang kulit sustains the philosophical and spiritual values that underpin Javanese moral and cosmological foundations, while ketoprak and ludruk demonstrate greater responsiveness to contemporary social and political issues through communicative and interactive dramatization. The transformation of values within these forms involves thematic and technical adaptations that do not diminish traditional cultural essence but instead reconstruct meanings to remain relevant and functional in modern contexts. This demonstrates that cultural values are not static entities but continuously reproduced and renegotiated in alignment with societal and cultural developments.

Furthermore, the role of traditional performing arts as mediums of social education and cultural dialogue is essential for cultivating critical consciousness and strengthening cultural identity within Indonesian society. The direct interaction between performers and audiences in wayang kulit, ketoprak, and ludruk generates vibrant collective spaces where cultural values are transmitted, questioned, and redefined in participatory ways. Thus, these traditions not only preserve cultural heritage but also serve as adaptive and progressive agents of social change. The sustainability of cultural values within these performances depends heavily on the ability of cultural practitioners and communities to innovate while honoring tradition.

Finally, the findings of this study carry important implications for the development of cultural policy and strategies for sustainable preservation. Strengthened collaboration among government institutions, artists, academics, and wider communities is vital to ensuring the continued relevance and resilience of traditional performing arts in the era of globalization. Understanding the dynamics of cultural value transformation provides a strategic foundation for safeguarding tradition while enabling innovation, thereby allowing traditional performing arts to contribute actively to the construction of a broad-minded, democratic, and socially responsive national culture.

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