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Cultural Identity Management: Adaptation and Negotiation of Jaranan Thik in Ponoragan Society

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Abstract

This study examines the processes of cultural identity negotiation and communicative adaptation of Jaranan Thik within the Reyog dominated cultural hierarchy of Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. Drawing upon Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory, the research explores how marginalized traditional art communities strategically manage identity through symbolic alignment, structural modification, and institutional engagement. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key performers, cultural leaders, and community figures, supported by documentation and performance observation. The findings reveal four major patterns: symbolic assimilation through the adoption of shared mythological narratives and terminology; controlled moderation of trance practices to recalibrate public perception; religious and institutional affiliation to enhance moral and structural legitimacy; and aesthetic modernization to engage younger audiences. These strategies demonstrate that Jaranan Thik does not dissolve into dominant Reyog culture but negotiates legitimacy through selective alignment while preserving core ritual identity. The study extends the application of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory to localized cultural hierarchies and traditional performing arts, highlighting communicative agency as central to cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Cultural Identity Negotiation, Co-Cultural Communication, Jaranan Thik, Reyog Ponorogo, Cultural Adaptation, Traditional Performing arts

1. Introduction

Cultural identity has long been a central concern in communication studies, particularly in plural societies where multiple cultural expressions coexist within unequal power relations. Identity is not merely a static attribute but is continuously constructed, negotiated, and contested through communication processes (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Traditional performing arts represent important communicative spaces where cultural identity, legitimacy, and social recognition are articulated. However, within localized cultural hierarchies, certain art forms become institutionalized as dominant cultural symbols, while others are positioned as marginal or subordinate.

This issue is important because cultural marginalization threatens the sustainability of local cultural diversity (Smith, 2006). When dominant cultural forms receive institutional recognition, policy support, and symbolic legitimacy, marginal traditional arts often face stigma, exclusion, or pressure to assimilate (Sasaki & Baba, 2024). Understanding how marginal communities adapt and negotiate identity is essential for explaining how cultural diversity is maintained at the local level (Järvelä, 2023). In Ponorogo, Indonesia, Reyog Ponorogo has been officially established as the dominant cultural symbol (Yurisma & Bahruddin, 2020), while Jaranan Thik, despite its historical roots and growing popularity, occupies a marginal position (Saputro, 2023). Examining this dynamic provides insight into broader issues of cultural power, recognition, and communication in plural societies.

Cultural marginalization threatens the sustainability of local cultural diversity. When dominant cultural forms receive institutional recognition, policy support, and symbolic legitimacy, marginal traditional arts often experience stigma, exclusion, or pressure to assimilate (Orbe, 1998). In Ponorogo, Indonesia, Reyog Ponorogo has been officially established as the primary cultural identity of the region (Dharojah et al., 2024), whereas Jaranan Thik despite its historical roots and growing popularity and occupies a marginal position within the Ponoragan cultural landscape (Murdianto, 2016). This marginal position creates tensions related to legitimacy, recognition, and cultural continuity, particularly when Jaranan Thik communities interact with dominant cultural actors and institutions (Saputro, 2023; Zainul Hamdi, 2008). Understanding how such marginal communities adapt and negotiate identity is crucial for explaining how cultural diversity is maintained or constrained at the local level and for addressing broader issues of cultural sustainability and social inclusion.

Previous communication studies employing Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory have largely examined contexts such as migration, education, organizational settings, and minority experiences in multicultural societies (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Orbe, 1998). These studies demonstrate how marginalized groups negotiate identity through communication strategies, including accommodation, assimilation, and resistance. However, they rarely address traditional performing art communities operating within localized cultural hierarchies.

Conflict and reconciliation constitute inherent dynamics within Indonesia's plural social landscape (Suparto, 2014). Tensions frequently emerge when cultural expressions compete for recognition within communities characterized by diverse traditions and dominant symbolic hierarchies. Such dynamics are not limited to a single art form but reflect broader patterns of negotiation between local traditions and socially endorsed cultural identities. For example, a study conducted by Eska Novita Prastiwi from the Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, titled "*Konflik Kelompok Masyarakat Terhadap Kesenian Dolalak Sekar Arum Dusun Capar Kulon, Kecamatan Leksono, Kabupaten Wonosobo*" in 2015, examines how the Dolalak performance group sought social acceptance within Wonosobo, where Lenggèr is the dominant traditional art form (Prastiwi, 2015). The research highlights the strategies employed by Dolalak practitioners to navigate intergroup tensions and negotiate legitimacy in a cultural environment structured by established artistic authority.

Studies on Jaranan Thik and other traditional arts in Indonesia have primarily focused on historical origins, ritual practices, trance phenomena, or cultural conflict (Groenendael, 2012; Nugraheni, 2015; Rofiq & Erwin, 2020). Some research documents tensions between Jaranan Thik and dominant cultural forms such as Reyog Ponorogo, particularly in relation to stigma, legitimacy, and religious interpretations (Murdianto, 2016). Unlike prior studies that document the existence of conflict or cultural tension, this study differs by examining identity negotiation as an ongoing communicative process grounded explicitly in Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory. In doing so, it builds on earlier descriptive and cultural analyses by offering a theory-driven communication perspective.

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the process of cultural adaptation of Jaranan Thik within the dominant Ponoragan cultural structure through the analytical lens of Co-Cultural Communication Theory (Orbe, 1998). While co-cultural theory has been widely applied to understand minority communication strategies in organizational, educational, and multicultural contexts, its application to traditional performing art communities embedded in localized cultural hierarchies remains limited. By situating Jaranan Thik as a co-cultural group operating under the symbolic dominance of Reyog Ponorogo, this study reconceptualizes adaptation not as

passive assimilation but as a strategic communicative practice shaped by power relations, cultural legitimacy, and social positioning. This approach extends Orbe's framework beyond its conventional settings and demonstrates its relevance for analyzing cultural survival within traditional art systems.

The secondary objective is to advance the understanding of cultural identity negotiation within traditional art communities by employing Cultural Identity Theory developed by Mary Jane Collier (Collier, 2005a; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Rather than treating Jaranan Thik merely as a cultural artifact or site of conflict, this study positions it as an active arena of identity construction, where avowal, ascription, and identity salience are continuously negotiated. By integrating Cultural Identity Theory with Co-Cultural Communication Theory, this research offers a novel theoretical synthesis that illuminates how adaptation strategies and identity negotiation processes operate simultaneously within marginal cultural communities. This integrative approach moves beyond descriptive accounts of cultural tension and contributes a communication centered explanation of how traditional performing arts sustain legitimacy and continuity within dominant cultural regimes.

Theoretically, this study advances the application of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory by extending their analytical scope to the domain of traditional performing arts, which remains comparatively underexplored within communication scholarship. By situating Jaranan Thik within a localized cultural hierarchy dominated by Reyog Ponorogo, the research demonstrates how identity negotiation operates not only in migratory, intercultural, or organizational contexts, but also within intra-cultural power structures shaped by symbolic dominance. In doing so, the study contributes to a more refined conceptualization of identity as a communicatively enacted and hierarchically mediated process embedded in regional cultural systems.

Practically, the findings carry important implications for cultural policy, heritage governance, and community-based cultural sustainability. Recognizing the communicative agency of marginal cultural communities such as Jaranan Thik highlights the need for inclusive cultural frameworks that move beyond privileging officially institutionalized traditions. The study suggests that sustainable cultural preservation requires not only formal recognition but also support for locally negotiated strategies of adaptation, alignment, and affirmation. In plural societies where dominant and subordinate cultural forms coexist, communication-based negotiation emerges as a critical mechanism for maintaining cultural continuity while accommodating structural inequalities.

2. Literature Review

Adaptation in communication refers to the capacity of individuals or social groups to adjust their communicative styles, linguistic choices, and interactional strategies in response to particular social contexts, audiences, or power structures (Edwards & Noller, 1993; Giles et al., 1991). This process involves shifts in both verbal and nonverbal behaviour in order to align with situational expectations, cultural norms, or dominant communicative patterns. However, adaptation should not be understood merely as interpersonal adjustment; rather, it is a strategic practice embedded within broader social hierarchies and power relations.

Within the framework of Co-Cultural Communication Theory, adaptation is conceptualized as a communicative strategy employed by marginalized or non-dominant groups when interacting with dominant cultural systems. Co-cultural groups make calculated decisions about how to communicate based on their desired outcomes, the perceived risks involved, and the structural constraints they face. Adaptation may take the form of accommodation—modifying communicative behavior to gain acceptance or legitimacy within dominant spaces—or selective assimilation, in which certain identity markers are minimized to reduce resistance or exclusion. At the same time, adaptation does not necessarily imply the abandonment of cultural identity; it may coexist with strategies of resistance or affirmation aimed at preserving symbolic distinctiveness.

From this perspective, communicative adaptation becomes a dynamic negotiation between relational goals and identity maintenance. Marginalized groups continuously balance the need to participate within dominant systems with the desire to sustain cultural coherence and autonomy (Giles & Ogay, 2013; Y. Y. Kim, 2001). Thus, adaptation within co-cultural contexts is not a passive process of conformity but an active, strategic, and identity oriented practice shaped by unequal power relations. This theoretical orientation provides a cohesive foundation

for understanding how cultural communities navigate marginalization while maintaining symbolic presence and cultural continuity.

Astriani, in her ethnographic study *Olahan dan Negosiasi Identitas Etnik dalam Komunikasi Antarbudaya*, examines the negotiation of ethnic identity between indigenous Muslim communities and migrant groups in Prabumulih, South Sumatra, highlighting how identity adaptation occurs within intercultural communication settings shaped by ethnic interaction and social boundaries (Astriani, 2015). Similarly, contemporary discussions on artistic adaptation appear in public discourse, including a report published by RRI that documents how Jaranan performances incorporate modern musical elements to remain relevant to contemporary audiences (Yuniartha, 2024).

Academic studies on traditional performing arts have also examined processes of adaptation within diaspora and performance contexts. Research on the adaptation and development of Ebeg Banyumasan among Javanese diaspora communities in South Sumatra demonstrates how traditional art forms evolve in response to migration and sociocultural transformation (Jantro & Kiswanto, 2023). Similarly, an analysis of the Barongan Samin Edan group in Semarang highlights how performance innovation and audience oriented strategies are employed to sustain public interest and cultural relevance (Putri & Arsih, 2019).

Although these studies contribute valuable insights into adaptation in intercultural, diasporic, and performance-based contexts, most of them focus primarily on aesthetic development, audience strategies, or intercultural coexistence. They tend to frame adaptation as artistic innovation or social adjustment rather than as a communicative strategy embedded within cultural power relations. Moreover, these works do not explicitly employ Co-Cultural Communication Theory or Cultural Identity Theory as analytical frameworks for understanding adaptation as a form of identity negotiation within dominant cultural hierarchies.

In contrast, the present study situates adaptation within a co-cultural framework, conceptualizing it as a strategic communicative practice shaped by structural inequality and symbolic dominance. By integrating adaptation with identity negotiation processes, this research advances beyond descriptive accounts of artistic development and provides a theory-driven explanation of how Jaranan Thik navigates marginality while sustaining cultural legitimacy within Ponoragan society.

In other ways, cultural identity is significantly shaped through ongoing interactions between individuals and groups, particularly through processes of cultural adjustment and communicative behaviour (Stets & Serpe, 2019). Identity does not emerge in isolation but is continuously negotiated within social relationships that involve adaptation, affirmation, and repositioning (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Within this relational framework, communication functions as a central mechanism through which identities are formed, maintained, transformed, or reinforced over time. These dynamics are equally evident in the case of Jaranan Thik, where cultural communication plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining both the identity of the art community itself and the broader cultural identity of Ponorogo.

The identity of Ponorogo is not merely an inherited cultural label but a socially constructed and communicatively reproduced reality. Through performance practices, symbolic expressions, media representation, and intergroup cultural exchanges, Jaranan Thik contributes to an ongoing process of identity negotiation and reconstruction within the region. This dynamic process is influenced by multiple factors, including language use, public discourse, cultural policy, and shifting audience expectations. Identity negotiation, therefore, is not only about maintaining distinctiveness but also about cultivating collective confidence and symbolic legitimacy within broader social systems.

In this regard, the negotiation of cultural identity grounded in self-confidence and cultural affirmation becomes essential for national and regional identity formation. The strengthening of traditional cultural identity through communication is increasingly urgent in contemporary societies facing rapid globalization and cultural standardization (Jiang, 2024). The case of Jaranan Thik illustrates how traditional cultural communities engage in continuous communicative efforts to preserve symbolic autonomy while contributing to the construction of a

shared regional identity. Thus, identity negotiation in this context represents both a strategy of cultural survival and a constructive force in shaping the evolving identity of Ponorogo itself.

Pigeaud characterizes the horse dance as “a performance in which individuals imitate horses or horse riders by holding woven materials made of bamboo or leather” (Pigeaud, 1938). This description highlights the mimetic and symbolic nature of the performance, where bodily movement, costume, and material culture converge to create a culturally meaningful representation of strength, mobility, and martial heritage. Beyond its aesthetic dimension, Jaranan embodies layered cultural meanings that connect local history, ritual practice, and communal identity, positioning it not merely as entertainment but as a significant expression of Javanese cultural symbolism.

Identity negotiation has become an increasingly prominent topic in communication studies, particularly within contexts marked by expanding mobility and intensified intercultural interaction. As individuals and groups traverse social and cultural boundaries, they are required to continuously adjust, redefine, and negotiate both personal and collective identities in relation to shifting social environments. A growing body of scholarship has examined identity negotiation in intercultural and minority settings. For example, cultural identity negotiation between migrant Javanese Muslims and native Balinese Hindus in Denpasar has been analyzed in terms of communicative adaptation and boundary management (Srikandi, 2021). Identity struggles emerging from the negotiation of cultural meanings in translation processes have also been explored (Sajarwa et al., 2023), alongside studies investigating identity negotiation between migrant and local ethnic groups in Bangka Selatan (Erlangga et al., 2021). Additionally, cultural identity negotiation has been conceptualized as a conflict management strategy in Batak–Chinese marriages (Yunita et al., 2022), while research on minority youth highlights the complexities of negotiating identity within multicultural societies (Qumseya, 2018).

Although these studies contribute important insights into identity negotiation in migration, interethnic relations, and multicultural settings, they largely situate negotiation within contexts of demographic mobility or minority-majority encounters shaped by ethnic or religious difference. Far less attention has been given to identity negotiation within traditional performing art communities operating under localized cultural hierarchies, where dominance is expressed not through migration but through symbolic cultural authority. It is within this overlooked context that the case of Jaranan Thik becomes analytically significant. Rather than negotiating identity across geographic displacement, Jaranan Thik negotiates its cultural position within its own regional space, confronting symbolic marginalization under the dominance of Reyog Ponorogo. This shift in focus from intercultural mobility to intra-cultural hierarchy constitutes the central gap addressed by this study and underscores its theoretical contribution to the literature on cultural identity negotiation.

3. Theoretical framework

In Mark P. Orbe’s co-cultural theory, a *co-culture* refers to a social group that exists within a larger societal structure where power is unequally distributed, positioning certain groups as dominant and others as marginalized. Within this framework, co-cultural group members adopt distinct communication orientations in response to dominant norms and institutional power. Assimilation describes efforts to minimize cultural differences and align with dominant standards in order to gain acceptance or access to resources. Accommodation reflects attempts to maintain one’s cultural identity while simultaneously seeking structural inclusion or modification of dominant practices. Separation, in contrast, involves rejecting dominant norms and reinforcing in-group solidarity and cultural distinctiveness. These orientations demonstrate that co-cultural communication is not passive adaptation but a strategic and context-dependent negotiation of identity, power, and social positioning (Orbe, 1998).

While Co-Cultural Communication Theory illuminates how marginalized groups strategically respond to dominant power structures through assimilation, accommodation, or separation, it does not fully explicate the internal processes through which cultural meanings are co-constructed and sustained in interaction. To deepen the analysis of how identity is communicatively enacted, Cultural Identity Theory provides a complementary framework. Cultural Identity Theory shifts the focus from strategic orientation toward the dynamic processes of avowal, ascription, and identity salience, emphasizing that identity is not merely a response to power asymmetry but an ongoing co-construction shaped through relational interaction. By integrating these perspectives, identity

negotiation can be understood not only as a strategic positioning within unequal structures but also as a communicative process through which cultural meanings are affirmed, contested, and redefined in specific social contexts.

Beyond processes of adaptation, minority identities also undergo continuous negotiation within communicative contexts that shape behavioural responses aimed at sustaining cultural distinctiveness. Identity negotiation does not occur in isolation but emerges through dynamic interactions between adaptation and the reaffirmation of cultural values, norms, and symbolic practices. In this regard, Cultural Identity Theory (CIT), developed by Mary Jane Collier (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988), provides a critical framework for understanding how cultural identity is neither fixed nor essentialized, but actively constructed and reconstructed through communication, particularly within intercultural or unequal power contexts.

This dynamic interplay reflects what Collier later conceptualizes as negotiated facework, in which cultural identity is strategically projected and managed through communicative choices that are sensitive to power relations and social hierarchies. Identity, therefore, is not merely expressed but carefully performed within relational and structural constraints (Collier, 2015). Supporting this perspective, research in ethnic conflict contexts demonstrates that minority groups often engage in identity negotiation through culturally grounded codes—such as indigenous languages, ritual practices, or symbolic markers—to preserve symbolic autonomy even under conditions of political dominance (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). These findings reinforce the view that identity negotiation is simultaneously relational and protective: it seeks connection without relinquishing distinctiveness. Such a framework is particularly relevant for understanding how marginalized cultural communities balance adaptation and cultural affirmation within hierarchical cultural systems.

4. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach using an intrinsic case study design to explore processes of cultural identity adaptation and negotiation within the Jaranan Thik community in Ponorogo, Indonesia. The intrinsic case study approach was selected because Jaranan Thik represents a unique and context-specific cultural phenomenon that requires in-depth understanding rather than broad generalization. This design allows the researcher to examine communication practices, symbolic interactions, and identity negotiations as they occur naturally within the sociocultural setting of Ponoragan society.

The research is grounded in Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory, which guide the analytical focus on how marginal cultural groups communicate, adapt, and negotiate identity within dominant cultural structures. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to capture the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of cultural actors involved in Jaranan Thik performances and community interactions.

The research was conducted in several locations within Ponorogo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, particularly in areas where Jaranan Thik communities are active and regularly perform. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants possessed direct experience and substantial knowledge relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria emphasized active involvement in Jaranan Thik activities and familiarity with the interaction between Jaranan Thik and dominant cultural forms, particularly Reyog Ponorogo.

The key informants included Nur Salam, leader of Brandal Loka Jaya (Jl. Abimanyu 43, Ponorogo); Ali, leader of the Nogo Pertolo group in Dukuh Kebatan 1, Campurejo Village, Sambit District, Ponorogo; Yuli Rohmawati, leader of Putro Purbo Legowo; Mbah Tarom and Sabar from Turonggo Wengker or Pustoko Pamedhar Jati; Mbah Slamet, senior cultural elder of Nogo Baru Klinthing in Slahung; and Imam, leader of Prawiro Gathi Taruno in Sampung. These individuals were selected due to their leadership roles and long-standing engagement in Jaranan Thik performance traditions.

The main informants consisted of Purbo Sasongko, a practicing artist, and Ridho Kurnianto, an academic and cultural observer, both of whom provided analytical and reflective perspectives on cultural identity negotiation. Additionally, Sugeng Wibowo, a community leader from desa Bajang, Mlarak District, served as a supporting

informant to offer broader social insights into community perceptions and intergroup cultural dynamics. This multi-level informant structure enabled the study to capture diverse viewpoints on adaptation processes, identity negotiation, and intergroup communication within the local cultural hierarchy of Ponorogo.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with carefully selected informants who were considered knowledgeable and experienced in the fields of Jaranan Thik performance and Ponorogo cultural traditions. Informants were purposively chosen based on their expertise, leadership roles, long-term involvement in traditional arts, and recognized authority within local cultural networks. This selection ensured that participants possessed a comprehensive understanding of the historical development, performance practices, and cultural positioning of Jaranan Thik within the broader Ponoragan cultural hierarchy. The in-depth interview approach allowed the researcher to explore participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and communicative strategies related to adaptation and cultural identity negotiation. Open-ended questioning facilitated rich narrative accounts, enabling deeper insight into how cultural meanings, symbolic practices, and power relations are articulated and negotiated within everyday cultural interactions.

5. Result

5.1. Historical of Jaranan Thik Ponorogo

Ponorogo is widely recognized for its iconic traditional performance, Reyog Ponorogo, which has become the dominant cultural symbol of the region. Historical records indicate that horse dance performances were already present in Ponorogo in the early twentieth century, although they functioned as an integral component of Reyog rather than as an independent art form. In his 1938 documentation, Pigeaud described the structure of *Réjog Panaraga* (Dutch spelling) as consisting of three principal elements: “*De reog van Panaraga bestaat altijd uit drie hoofdbestanddelen: een barongan (singabarong), een kedhokan (demonische maskerfiguur), en een aantal paarddansers (djaranan)*” (Pigeaud, 1938). This statement indicates that Reyog Ponorogo consistently comprises three main components: the barongan or singabarong as the central figure, the kedhokan or masked character as the counterpart, and a group of horse dancers (djaranan) who support and complement the performance.

This structural composition demonstrates that Jaranan historically functioned as an integral yet subordinate element within the Reyog performance framework. Although not positioned as the central figure, the presence of the horse dancers was essential to the overall narrative and aesthetic structure of Reyog. The historical embedding of Jaranan within Reyog thus reflects an early hierarchical cultural arrangement in which Jaranan operated under the symbolic dominance of the Singabarong figure. This historical relationship provides important context for understanding contemporary dynamics of cultural positioning, adaptation, and identity negotiation between Jaranan Thik and Reyog Ponorogo within Ponoragan society.

In *Jaranan: The Horse Dance and Trance in East Java*, Clara van Groenendael traces the mythological origins of Jaranan to the legend of Dèwi Sanggalangit, the princess of Kediri. According to this narrative, the princess announced a competition declaring that whoever could present a new and extraordinary performance in Kediri would be granted her hand in marriage (Groenendael, 2012). Responding to this challenge, the King of Bantarangin identified in historical accounts as Toh Bagus and in Ponorogo folklore as Klanasewandono together with his minister Pujangganong, assembled a Jaranan troupe consisting of horse dancers, gamelan musicians, and a barongan figure. Their rivals were the King of Lodoyo, Singabarong, and his minister Singakumbang, both endowed with the supernatural ability to transform into fierce animals such as lions and wild boars.

Van Groenendael notes: “*Hence in this legend, popular in Kediri and environs, the horse dance is connected with the complications surrounding the marriage of the princess of Kediri, Dèwi Sanggalangit... When the king of Ponorogo, King Toh Bagus, hears this announcement... They form a jaranan kèpang group comprising four horses, a mask for Pujangganom, and a group of musicians*” (Groenendael, 2012). This myth situates Jaranan not merely as a performative spectacle but as a cultural expression rooted in royal competition, symbolic power, and heroic narrative. The legend also illustrates how horse dance performances were historically intertwined with

themes of authority, legitimacy, and rivalry elements that continue to shape the symbolic relationship between Jaranan and Reyog within the broader cultural imagination of Ponorogo.

The origins of Jaranan can be understood through two broad historical layers: oral tradition and documented historical adaptation. Oral narratives frequently associate Jaranan with prehistoric ritual practices, suggesting that the dance predates the arrival of major religious and political systems in Java (Mauricio, 2002). In interviews with artists in Malang, Jaranan was linked to early communal hunting rituals in which communities imitated the movements of wild animals, such as boars, tigers, also horses prior to embarking on hunts. These mimetic performances were believed to invoke the spirits of animals, with trance states interpreted as manifestations of spiritual possession or ancestral power.

From a historical perspective, Mauricio argues that Jaranan evolved through successive cultural phases, adapting from the Hindu-Buddhist period to the Islamic era while retaining core performative elements. The trance component, in particular, is understood as a remnant of earlier animistic cosmologies that persisted through later religious transformations. In this view, the roots of Jaranan are considered older than the introduction of Hinduism to Java and may even be associated with early stages of horse domestication prior to the fifth century BCE. This layered historical understanding positions Jaranan as a deeply embedded cultural practice whose continuity reflects long-term processes of adaptation, syncretism, and symbolic resilience across shifting civilizational contexts.



Figure 1: Evolution of Jaranan Thik Ponoragan.

The journal article *Mapping Morphosemantic Categories in Javanese Onomatopoeia* provides a linguistic explanation for the origin of the term *Jaranan Thik/Thek* through the framework of Javanese onomatopoeia (Fitriana & Suparno, 2025). The word “*thik*” is categorized as an onomatopoeic form that imitates a light striking or tapping sound. Phonologically, the high-front vowel /i/ systematically conveys meanings associated with smallness, lightness, and sharpness. Within morphosemantic analysis, sounds such as *thik* are classified under low-scale augmentation, referring to sounds characterized by low intensity and minimal impact force. This categorization illustrates how phonological structure encodes perceptual qualities within Javanese sound symbolism.

In the context of Jaranan performance, the sound *thik* is commonly associated with the distinctive auditory effect produced by the collision of performance properties, particularly the striking or snapping sound generated by the mouth of the *barongan*. Over time, this recurring auditory cue became recognized by the community as a defining acoustic marker of the performance style. The naming of *Jaranan Thik* thus reflects a non-arbitrary linguistic process grounded in sound iconicity, whereby phonological form directly corresponds to sensory experience. As (Fitriana & Suparno, 2025) argue, such morphosemantic patterns demonstrate that lexical formation in Javanese often emerges from perceptual associations between sound and embodied experience. In this sense, the term *Thik* not only denotes a performance variation but also encapsulates a culturally embedded auditory identity.

One of the oldest Jaranan groups identified during the interviews is Nogo Baru Klinthing, originating from Galak, Slahung, Ponorogo. The name “Baru Klinthing” is derived from a local myth associated with Telaga Ngebel, which tells the story of a child who transformed into a dragon-like serpent encircling Mount Wilis. According to

the legend, when the serpent extended its tongue in an attempt to reach its tail, the tongue was severed and subsequently transformed into a whip, an object symbolically associated with Jaranan performances. Historically, the group was established in the 1950s by Mbah Do and is currently led by Mbah Slamet as the cultural successor. The group experienced a period of inactivity during the political turmoil of 1965 and resumed its activities around 1972–1973. Its peak popularity occurred between the 1980s and the early 2000s, when performances attracted large audiences across the region in south Ponorogo.

In terms of stylistic lineage, Nogo Baru Klinthing originally adopted the Banyuwangi performance style known as Jaranan Buto, characterized by intense and sometimes aggressive trance expressions. Over time, however, the group underwent a significant transformation toward the Jaranan Senterewe style from Tulungagung or Kediri, which is considered more socially acceptable within Ponorogo society. This shift reflected a conscious adaptation strategy, reducing elements perceived as excessively brutal (frightening or disturbing) during trance sequences. The stylistic transition illustrates how traditional art communities negotiate between preserving inherited forms and adjusting performance practices to align with changing social expectations and cultural norms.

An intriguing aspect of the Nogo Baru Klinthing group is their use of the term “Reyog Pegon” to describe their performance tradition. The designation is significant because the term *Reyog* is culturally distinctive and strongly associated with Ponorogo’s regional identity. Within local discourse, “Reyog Pegon,” also referred to by some community members as Jaranan Pegon, is regarded as one of the earliest forms that later evolved into what is now recognized as Jaranan Thik in Ponorogo. This nomenclature reflects both historical continuity and symbolic affiliation with the broader Reyog cultural sphere.

Jaranan Pegon is characterized by a relatively simple performance structure and a strong adherence to traditional Javanese aesthetics, with minimal incorporation of contemporary innovations or creative modifications. The performance maintains classical patterns, including traditional gamelan accompaniment and standardized choreographic movements, emphasizing fidelity to established *pakem* (canonical conventions) rather than stylistic experimentation. Due to its simplicity and adherence to tradition, Jaranan Pegon is widely perceived as representing an early or foundational stage in the development of Jaranan in Ponorogo, prior to its subsequent transformations in response to changing social tastes and cultural dynamics. This continuity underscores the role of tradition not merely as preservation but as a reference point in the ongoing adaptation and negotiation of cultural identity.



Figure 2: The form of the jaranan pegon performance from Nogo Baru Klinthing in 2019 which is believed to be the beginning of the evolution of the jaranan thik creation in Ponorogo.

The term *Jaranan Thik* (or *Thek*) began to gain wider recognition around 1998, marking a significant phase in the development of Jaranan in Ponorogo. During this period, important innovations emerged through the initiative of Bapak Tarom, widely known as Mak Rom, and Bapak Sabar, known as Mak Bleng, two local artists who introduced a creative form of Jaranan in Mojomati Village, Sambit District, Ponorogo Regency. Through the

establishment of the Turonggo Wengker group, they not only introduced new performative elements but also initiated a new phase in the naming and identity formation of local Jaranan traditions.

The emergence of Turonggo Wengker signified a shift in which group names and performance styles functioned as recognizable cultural markers within the community. This development contributed to the broader circulation of the term *Jaranan Thik* as a locally grounded designation shaped by artistic creativity, contextual adaptation, and distinctive auditory and performative features. As a result, the naming of Jaranan in Ponorogo increasingly reflected the agency of artists in defining cultural identity, illustrating how traditional performing arts continue to evolve through innovation while remaining embedded within local social and cultural dynamics.



Figure 3: Today's Jaranan Thik performance form in Sawoo, Ponorogo.

The transformation from *Jaranan Pegon* to what is now widely recognized as *Jaranan Kreasi*, or more popularly known as Jaranan Thik, reflects a significant phase in the stylistic and structural evolution of Jaranan in Ponorogo. This transition marks a movement from a relatively classical and canon-oriented performance model toward a more innovative and artist-driven format that incorporates new choreographic patterns, musical arrangements, and performative expressions. While Jaranan Pegon emphasizes adherence to traditional *pakem*, Jaranan Thik represents a creative reinterpretation shaped by contemporary audience expectations and local artistic experimentation.

Today, several prominent groups exemplify this development. Among them are Nogo Pertolo from Sambit, Putro Purbo Legowo from Kemuning Village (Sambit District), Brandal Loka Jaya, the only Jaranan group based in the urban center of Ponorogo, and Prawiro Gati Taruno, recognized as the sole Jaranan group representing the western part of Ponorogo. The geographical distribution and stylistic diversity of these groups illustrate how Jaranan Thik has expanded beyond its earlier rural bases, adapting to different local contexts while maintaining a shared cultural identity. This evolution underscores the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in the ongoing negotiation of Jaranan's place within Ponorogo's cultural landscape.

5.2. Adaptation and negotiation cultural identity in Jaranan Thek Performance

5.2.1. Symbolic Repositioning through the Term "Reyog Pegon"

One of the most significant findings concerns the use of the term "*Reyog Pegon*" by the Nogo Baru Klinthing group in Slahung, the oldest Jaranan group in Ponorogo since 1955 and still active for today. This designation represents a deliberate symbolic strategy aimed at aligning Jaranan with the dominant cultural identity of Ponorogo, which is institutionally and publicly anchored in Reyog. Rather than presenting themselves solely as a separate Jaranan tradition, the group adopts the culturally authoritative term *Reyog*, thereby situating their performance within the broader symbolic framework recognized as the region's official heritage. This naming

practice reflects a calculated repositioning within the local cultural hierarchy, where symbolic association functions as a pathway to legitimacy.

From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, this strategy can be interpreted as an effort to bridge the gap between *avowal* and *ascription*. Internally, Jaranan Thik communities avow their identity as a distinct performance tradition with its own historical roots and aesthetic structure. Externally, however, dominant cultural discourse tends to ascribe symbolic centrality to Reyog as the primary cultural representation of Ponorogo. By adopting the label *Reyog Pegon*, Nogo Baru Klinthing narrows the dissonance between self, definition and external categorization, recalibrating identity salience in ways that foreground shared symbolic ground while preserving internal distinctiveness.

Importantly, this symbolic assimilation does not imply the dissolution of Jaranan's identity. Instead, it demonstrates how marginalized cultural groups strategically manage identity presentation within hierarchical systems. The use of *Reyog Pegon* enables the group to claim cultural proximity without surrendering performative autonomy, illustrating how identity negotiation operates through selective alignment rather than complete absorption.

5.2.2. Reproduction of the Klanasewandono - Dewi Sanggalangit Myth as Shared Symbolic Repertoire

Another significant finding concerns the incorporation of the Klanasewandono–Dewi Sanggalangit narrative within certain Jaranan Thik performances. This myth, which forms the foundational storyline of Reyog Ponorogo, is reproduced in Jaranan contexts as a means of situating the performance within a culturally familiar narrative framework. In particular, the episode depicting the cavalry troops of Prabu Klanasewandono being ambushed in the forest by *Celeng Srenggi*, the wild boar manifestation associated with Prabu Singobarong, is frequently referenced. The attack occurs amid rivalry over Dewi Sanggalangit, reinforcing themes of competition, heroism, and supernatural confrontation. By drawing upon this shared mythological episode, Jaranan Thik establishes symbolic continuity with Reyog's narrative universe while embedding its own performative identity within that framework.

This narrative reproduction reflects a strategic recalibration of identity salience. Rather than emphasizing differentiation from Reyog, Jaranan Thik foregrounds common mythic ancestry, shifting identity perception from "distinct" to "culturally kin" (*serumpun*) within Ponorogo's broader cultural imagination. This sense of kinship is further reinforced by geographical and cultural proximity, as both traditions are rooted in communities located around the foothills of Mount Wilis and within the broader Mataraman cultural sphere. Such spatial and cultural continuity strengthens the perception that Jaranan and Reyog share a common cultural ecosystem. Through this alignment, the gap between avowed identity and dominant ascription is reduced, allowing Jaranan Thik to be interpreted not as an outsider tradition but as part of the same regional cultural lineage.

The incorporation of this myth does not dissolve Jaranan's unique stylistic and ritual elements. Instead, it repositions the tradition within a shared cultural genealogy, enabling Jaranan Thik to negotiate legitimacy through narrative affiliation rather than direct competition. This finding illustrates how mythological alignment operates as a communicative strategy for redefining identity boundaries within a hierarchical cultural landscape, transforming potential marginality into relational proximity.

5.2.3. Controlled Trance to Culturally Legitimate Performance

A central theme emerging from the findings concerns the reframing and moderation of trance practices within Jaranan Thik. Historically, certain forms of possession and particularly extreme acts such as consuming broken glass or raw meat, were perceived by segments of Ponorogo society as "*nggilani*" (disturbing or frightening). In response to such negative social ascriptions, several groups shifted their stylistic orientation from the more aggressive Jaranan Buto style toward the Senterewe style, which is considered more socially acceptable within the local cultural context. This transition reflects not the abandonment of trance, but its recalibration within evolving moral and aesthetic expectations.

Importantly, performers emphasize that trance (*kesurupan*) remains an integral and sacred component of the tradition. According to Mbah Tarom of Pustoko Pamedhar Jati, Ali of Nogo Pertolo, and Mbah Slamet of Nogo Baru Klinthing, trance is not merely theatrical fabrication but a phenomenon that can genuinely occur during performance. However, they assert that the manifestation of trance is controlled and regulated by the *bopo* (spiritual handler or leader) in each performance. This controlled structure ensures that trance does not escalate into uncontrolled extremity, thereby maintaining ritual authenticity while preventing social disruption. In this sense, trance becomes both sacred and staged ritually meaningful yet performatively managed.

From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, this moderation represents a negotiation between identity maintenance and relational orientation. Internally, trance is avowed as a core marker of Jaranan identity and spiritual legitimacy. Externally, dominant audiences may ascribe negative meanings to intense possession practices. By reframing trance as a culturally refined and controlled performance, Jaranan Thik shifts identity salience from being perceived as “wild” to being recognized as “berbudaya” (cultured) as a peak of each performance. This finding illustrates how Jaranan Thik strategically manages negative social ascriptions without relinquishing its ritual foundations, thereby transforming a potentially marginalizing element into a source of renewed cultural legitimacy.

5.2.4. Religious Symbolic Alignment through “Brandal Loka Jaya”

Another significant finding concerns the use of Islamic symbolic affiliation by the urban-based Jaranan Thik group, Brandal Loka Jaya, which is chaired by Nur Salam. The name *Brandal Loka Jaya* is locally associated with the early name of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the revered *Wali Songo* who played a central role in the Islamization of Java. By invoking a figure deeply embedded in Javanese-Islamic cultural memory, the group situates its artistic identity within a respected religious-historical lineage. This symbolic association is further reinforced by the group’s structural affiliation with the local branch (*Pimpinan Anak Cabang*) of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (GP Ansor) in Ponorogo.

According to Muhibbudin, Chairman of GP Ansor Ponorogo, Brandal Loka Jaya is not merely a form of folk entertainment but serves as a strategic instrument of cultural da’wah, particularly in engaging youth and grassroots communities. He emphasized that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has historically embraced culture as a medium of religious expression rather than opposing it. In his words, “*NU sejak awal berdiri tidak pernah memusuhi budaya. Justru budaya dirawat, diarahkan, dan diisi nilai. Brandal Loka Jaya adalah wajah dakwah Ansor yang ramah, membumi, dan tetap berakidah Aswaja.*” This statement underscores how the group is positioned not only as an artistic collective but also as a culturally grounded religious platform aligned with the Aswaja (Ahlussunnah wal Jama’ah) theological orientation.

While Jaranan Thik has historically been associated with trance and ritual elements that may be contested within certain Islamic discourses, Brandal Loka Jaya foregrounds Islamic symbolism and institutional affiliation to narrow the gap between avowed cultural identity and external religious ascription. This strategy illustrates how religious assimilation functions as a mechanism of moral and social legitimation, enabling Jaranan Thik to sustain cultural continuity while aligning itself with dominant religious values in the urban context of Ponorogo.

5.3. Aesthetic Integration and the Negotiation of Identity Salience

Another important finding concerns the aesthetic integration of Reyog and Jaranan within a single performance stage. This fusion does not merely represent artistic experimentation but reflects a strategic negotiation of identity salience within Ponorogo’s hierarchical cultural landscape. By presenting Reyog and Jaranan together, performers reconfigure the perception of difference, positioning Jaranan not as a peripheral or competing tradition but as an interconnected component of a shared cultural narrative.

This aesthetic negotiation is evident in the practices of groups such as Nogo Baru Klinthing and Putro Purbo Legowo, both of which utilize the *kendang Reyog* as the primary accompanying instrument in their performances.

The adoption of this instrument strongly associated with Reyog, creates auditory familiarity for audiences and symbolically situates Jaranan within the broader sonic framework of Ponorogo's dominant art form. A more explicit integration is found in the performance model of Prawiro Gati Taruno, whose leader, Imam, describes the staged combination of Reyog and Jaranan as a representation of the "true story" in which the cavalry troops of Klana Sewandono are intercepted by the forces of Prabu Singobarong, as narrated in the Bantarangin version of the Reyog legend. By dramatizing this encounter within a single performative space, the group collapses symbolic boundaries between the two traditions and repositions Jaranan as an organic extension of Reyog's mythic universe. This integrative staging demonstrates how identity negotiation operates through aesthetic convergence: rather than asserting separation, Jaranan Thik negotiates legitimacy by embedding itself within a shared mythological and performative continuum.



Figure 4: Adoption of the Reyog instrument in the Jaranan Thik performance in Ponorogo "Kendang" and dancer costumes performed by Nogo Baru Klinting in 2019.

5.3.1. Modern Stage Modification and Generational Repositioning

Another significant finding concerns the modernization of stage production in Jaranan Thik performances. Many groups now broadcast their performances through live streaming platforms such as YouTube, extending their reach beyond local audiences and repositioning Jaranan within digital cultural spaces. The use of digital sound systems has become central to this transformation, particularly in enhancing the clarity and resonance of *gending* (musical compositions), making them more aesthetically appealing to contemporary listeners. In addition, the incorporation of multicolored stage lighting and modern lighting effects has altered the visual atmosphere of performances, creating a more immersive and spectacle-oriented experience.

These performances increasingly adopt structured stage layouts with safety barriers and standardized stage equipment, reflecting alignment with contemporary event management norms. Night-time staging has become more prevalent, not only following local entertainment patterns but also maximizing the visual impact of lighting technology. Some groups have further experimented with integrating modern musical elements, including DJ-based arrangements, to attract broader and younger audiences. As a result, Jaranan Thik performances have become more appealing to youth demographics, who are accustomed to digitally mediated and visually dynamic entertainment formats.

This modifications reflect a strategic shift in identity salience toward modernity and adaptability. While the ritual and choreographic foundations remain intact, the aesthetic framing is recalibrated to resonate with contemporary cultural sensibilities. Rather than signaling a rupture with tradition, this modernization demonstrates how identity is co-constructed in response to generational expectations and media environments. Through technological integration and aesthetic innovation, Jaranan Thik negotiates its relevance in a changing cultural landscape while sustaining its core cultural identity.

5.3.2. Discursive, Institutional, and Governmental Recognition

A further major finding concerns the increasing institutionalization and governmental recognition of Jaranan Thik within Ponorogo's official cultural framework. In 2017, Jaranan Thik was featured as the opening performance of the 24th National Reyog Festival, an event traditionally centered on Reyog as the region's primary cultural icon. The initiative was spearheaded by Yuli Rohmawati of the Putro Purbo Legowo group. The performance, which lasted approximately eight minutes and featured seven *barongan*, was supported by funding from the Department of Tourism (approximately IDR 700,000). Although limited in duration and budget, this inclusion symbolically repositioned Jaranan Thik from a peripheral folk art into a formally acknowledged component of Ponorogo's cultural agenda.

Subsequently, Jaranan Thik expanded its visibility beyond regional events by participating in the International Mask Dance Festival in 2019. This participation marked an important step in repositioning the tradition within broader national and international performance circuits. In parallel with this growing recognition, the *Ikatan Seni Jaranan Thik Ponorogo* (ISJTP) was formally established in 2017 and, by around 2019, had consolidated approximately 75 member groups across Ponorogo Regency. The formation of ISJTP institutionalized Jaranan Thik as an organized cultural entity capable of collective representation, coordination, and negotiation within governmental and cultural policy structures.

Institutional legitimacy was further strengthened in 2020 when Lisdyarita was formally designated as the *biyung* (symbolic patron) of Jaranan Thik Ponorogo. By 2026, she assumed the role of acting Regent of Ponorogo, reinforcing the symbolic proximity between Jaranan Thik and regional political authority. From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, these developments illustrate a transformation in external ascription: Jaranan Thik is increasingly categorized not as a marginal or subordinate tradition but as part of the officially recognized cultural repertoire of Ponorogo. This discursive and institutional alignment demonstrates how identity negotiation extends beyond performance aesthetics into the realm of policy, governance, and symbolic power, enabling Jaranan Thik to secure structural legitimacy within a historically Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Jaranan Thik negotiates its position within Ponorogo's Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy through a patterned combination of symbolic alignment, structural recalibration, and institutional engagement. Rather than confronting the symbolic dominance of Reyog directly, Jaranan Thik communities strategically reposition themselves within the same cultural universe. The adoption of terms such as "Reyog Pegon," the reproduction of shared mythological narratives, and the integration of Reyog musical elements illustrate how identity salience is recalibrated from differentiation toward relational proximity. From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, these practices narrow the gap between avowal and ascription, allowing Jaranan Thik to maintain internal coherence while adjusting to externally imposed cultural hierarchies. Identity, therefore, emerges not as a fixed cultural essence but as a communicatively managed construct shaped by context and power relations.

At the performative level, the moderation of trance practices and the transition from Jaranan Buto to the more socially accepted Senterewe style reveal a negotiated balance between identity maintenance and relational orientation. While trance remains a core ritual marker, its expression is reframed as controlled and culturally refined rather than excessive or "wild." This controlled reframing reflects what Co-Cultural Communication Theory describes as strategic adaptation within unequal systems, where marginalized groups selectively adjust communicative practices to reduce risk and enhance legitimacy. Importantly, such adjustments do not indicate cultural dilution but rather demonstrate hybrid identity formation where assimilation and preservation coexist. Jaranan Thik exemplifies how traditional communities may engage in adaptive recalibration without relinquishing symbolic authenticity.

Institutionally, the inclusion of Jaranan Thik in official festivals, the establishment of the *Ikatan Seni Jaranan Thik Ponorogo*, and affiliations with religious and governmental structures further transform its external ascription from

marginal folk practice to recognized cultural entity. These developments suggest that identity negotiation extends beyond aesthetic modification into structural and policy domains. The study thus contributes to expanding Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory into the domain of localized cultural hierarchies, showing that identity negotiation occurs not only in migratory or organizational settings but also within intra-cultural power structures. Jaranan Thik illustrates that cultural sustainability in plural societies depends on communicative agency, where adaptation, alignment, and affirmation function as interrelated strategies for securing cultural legitimacy.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Jaranan Thik does not survive within Ponorogo's Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy through passive endurance, but through strategic communicative negotiation. By integrating Co-Cultural Communication Theory and Cultural Identity Theory, the findings reveal that Jaranan Thik communities actively manage the tension between avowal and ascription through symbolic alignment, controlled ritual reframing, aesthetic integration, religious affiliation, and institutional engagement. Rather than positioning themselves in direct opposition to Reyog, Jaranan Thik groups selectively recalibrate identity salience, foregrounding shared myths, instruments, and narratives while preserving distinctive ritual and performative elements.

The moderation of trance practices, the adoption of the term "Reyog Pegon," the integration of Reyog musical instruments, the incorporation of Islamic symbolic affiliation, and the increasing participation in governmental cultural events collectively illustrate a patterned strategy of negotiated legitimacy. These practices do not signify cultural dilution; instead, they represent hybrid identity formation in which relational orientation and identity maintenance operate simultaneously. Jaranan Thik demonstrates that assimilation and accommodation can function as communicative resources for sustaining cultural continuity without dissolving symbolic distinctiveness.

Ultimately, this study underscores that cultural marginality within localized hierarchies is not a fixed condition but a dynamic position shaped through communicative action. The case of Jaranan Thik extends the application of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory into the domain of traditional performing arts, showing that identity negotiation occurs not only in migratory or organizational contexts but also within intra-cultural power structures. By foregrounding communicative agency, this research highlights how traditional art communities can strategically navigate dominance, secure institutional recognition, and sustain cultural legitimacy in plural societies.

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