

The Jaran Kepang Traditional Dance Art in Banyuwangi Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesian island of Java is known for its many traditional arts, one of which is the Jaran Kepang traditional dance. Jaran Kepang is a performance art performed by several dancers in an open space accompanied by Javanese gamelan music. This dance depicts a group of horsemen going to war. Thin woven bamboo sheets are shaped like horses and ridden by a performer during the attraction. In addition, the Jaran Kepang dance has a magical element where the dancers are in a trance state. East Java Province is one of the provinces that has Jaran Kepang art. Banyuwangi is one of the regions that still actively carries out this art. Efforts to preserve traditional culture are one of the important issues in traditional cultural activities in a region. This research was conducted with the aim of describing the Jaran Kepang traditional dance art in Banyuwangi and Malang regencies, East Java province, Indonesia. The research was conducted using an interview model using the snowball method to gather information. The interviewees were selected as five people who were generally artists or leaders of art organizations. Those selected have at least 10 years of experience in the art of Jaran Kepang. Interview materials covered dance, art properties, and aspects of cultural, philosophical, and religious values. The research results show that Jaran Kepang Banyuwangi possesses cultural, philosophical, and religious values. The artistic elements, including the performers' costumes, art equipment, offerings, and dances, have their own meaning.

Keywords: Jaran Kepang, Banyuwangi, Traditional, Dance, Art

INTRODUCTION

Jaranan or Kuda Lumping or Jaran Kepang is a Javanese traditional dance art that is developing rapidly and also colors the world of performing arts (Marzakina et al., 2017). Kuda Kepang is a traditional Javanese dance that tells a war story and is performed by a group of soldiers riding horses (Agung & Soetopo, 2019). Kuda Lumping is an art that combines dance and music and contains elements of magic (Andika & Purba, 2023). The name Jaran Kepang comes from the word Jaran, which is an animal (horse) used as a means of transportation (vehicle) and kepang, which is woven bamboo (Prastiawan, 2015). The dancers, numbering 16-20 people (Siregar & Sari, 2019), use Kuda Lumping as their vehicle, usually tending to move as if they were with the horse under their control (Dewi et al., 2022).

Jaran Kepang dance is an art that has been passed down from generation to generation and is a game that reflects human behavior or nature (Agung & Soetopo, 2019). This art has three functions, namely ritual, folk exhibition or festival, and entertainment spectacle (Prastiawan, 2015). The style or character of the art appears because it is greatly influenced by the nature or character of the local culture, where the community comes from or lives (Fadhilah et al., 2024). Jaran Kepang art is known to have cultural values (Rahmawati, 2021)(Erawati & Viaeriseftiani, 2021)(Noviana et al., 2024), spiritual values (Agung & Soetopo, 2019)(Fadhilah et al., 2024), character values (Noviana et al., 2024) and nation values (Haryati & Darmawati, 2024)(Pratomo et al., 2020), social

values (Nadilla & Asriati, 2024), mutual cooperation values (Gea et al., 2021), economic values (Fitriyani et al., 2024)(Aisyah et al., 2022), and as a learning medium (Khasanah et al., 2024)(Hieronimus & Yediya, 2014).

Jaranan art combines elements of dance accompanied by Javanese gamelan, physical exercises, and spiritual or magical elements. The performance is held in an open space large enough for both the dancers and the audience. Jaranan performances generally consist of two sections: a general dance session and a dance session where the performers enter a trance. This art requires personnel and equipment with specific functions. In addition to the dance equipment, Jaranan also requires prayer accompaniment and offerings for the trance-inducing session.

Efforts to preserve traditional culture generally face a major problem, as the process of hereditary transmission is carried out through oral or direct transmission. Artists and activists acquire knowledge, information, and artistic expertise from their predecessors. This problem arises because these predecessors are generally elderly, and the process of oral transmission cannot be carried out optimally.

The research team has conducted initial communication with several Jaran Kepang artists to identify this art form. One prominent problem is that the younger generation participating tends to be merely performers. They generally lack a comprehensive understanding of the art form, including its history, philosophy, values, meaning, and artistic expression. This lack of understanding tends to lead to actualizations of art that do not conform to its canons (the unwritten rules or agreements within an art form).

This lack of understanding among the younger generation tends to lead to the actualization of art that does not conform to the canons (unwritten rules or agreements within an art form). Non-conformity to the canons is considered to diminish or even destroy the beauty of art, and can even deviate from the intent and purpose of art. Comprehensive information and knowledge of art are needed as a medium to maintain the art of Jaran Kepang according to its canons. Written documentation is needed as the primary source of information. Artists who understand art comprehensively need the support of academics in documenting all aspects related to this art form.

Failure to adhere to these art patterns is considered to diminish or even destroy the beauty of the art, in accordance with its intent and purpose. Comprehensive information and knowledge about the art form are needed as a means to restore Jaran Kepang art to its canons. Written documentation is required as the primary source of information. Artists who understand art comprehensively need the support of academics in documenting everything related to this art.

Research on Jaran Kepang based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) application shows the differences between Jaran Kepang art in West Java and East Java. The results of the research can increase academic knowledge about Javanese culture and advocate for preservation efforts, as well as ensuring the heritage of traditional art in the technological era (Fusnika et al., 2021). East Java has the characteristics of Jaran Kepang art which is generally divided into geographical regions, namely the eastern part (Banyuwangi regency and its surroundings), and the west part (Malang regency and its surroundings).

Jaran Kepang research has been conducted in 14 of the 38 existing provinces. Research has been conducted partially in the provinces namely Aceh (Marzakina et al., 2017)(Viliani et al., 2019), North Sumatera (Andika & Purba, 2023)(Prastiawan, 2015)(Siregar & Sari, 2019)(Dewi et al., 2022)(Fadhilah et al., 2024), Riau (Rahmawati, 2021)(Erawati & Viaeriseftiani, 2021), Jambi (Noviana et al., 2024), Bengkulu (Haryati & Darmawati, 2024)(Pratomo et al., 2020)(Nadilla & Asriati, 2024), West Sumatera (Gea et al., 2021)(Fitriyani et al., 2024), South Sumatera (Aisyah et al., 2022)(Khasanah et al., 2024), East Kalimantan (Hieronimus & Yediya, 2014), West Kalimantan (Fusnika et al., 2021), Central of Sulawesi (Tavip Sunarto, Irianto Ibrahim, 2018)(Bilal et al., 2023), West Java (Kuswandi & Maulana, 2014), Central of Java (Suherman & Anggraeni, 2023)(Zulhilmi & Sudrajat, 2023)(Wiyoso, 2011)(Wiyoso, 2012)(Nurbaiti, 2014)(M, 2019)(Kusumastuti et al., 2020)(Falah & Zaki, 2022)(Pebrianti et al., 2023)(Mukafi & Prawita, 2024)(Khamdhani et al., 2024)(Sa'ati & Indriyanto, 2022)(Mutiarasari & Suwandi, 2022)(Nugroho et al., 2024)(Mustofa et al., 2023), Yogyakarta (Badriyah, 2018) and East Java (Radhia, 2016)(Agung & Soetopo, 2019)(Cahyani et al., 2024)(Rizqiani & Muslimin, 2023)(Kurniawan & Tinus, 2019)(Suprihatin et al., 2022)(Jaya, 2017)(Rahayu & Asrori, 2022)(Aini, 2022)(Permana et al., 2023)(Fatihah & Riyanto, 2024)(Diah et al., 2024)(Afifah et al., 2025).

Central Java and East Java are the two provinces with the most research locations, with 15 and 13 studies, respectively. This is understandable, as these two regions are the origins of this traditional art form. This art form can be found in almost every city in the provinces. These arts share common characteristics in their basic principles, but differ depending on the region where they developed. This is due to the influence of the local environment and culture of each city.

Research is generally conducted in a single location or on a single arts group. This method has the potential to yield relatively limited findings due to the limited sources of information and data. Research that comprehensively explores the characteristics of the arts in a single province has never been conducted. Furthermore, Jaran art has not been published internationally to support its presence on the international stage. This research was conducted with the aim of describing the Jaran Kepang traditional dance art in Banyuwangi and Malang regency, East Java province, Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This exploratory research on Jaran Kepang art is conducted by gathering information and data from art groups across geographical domains. The research was conducted in two regions: Banyuwangi and Malang, located in the province of East Java, Indonesia. The two regions are approximately 300 kilometers apart. Geographically, Banyuwangi is a coastal area where traditional dance tends to be attractive. Malang, on the other hand, is an inland area near the mountains where traditional dance is characterized by dynamics that rely on physical strength, particularly the dancers' legs.

This research is done through interviews, observation, and documentation of all aspects of Jaran Kepang art. Potential support for the cultural heritage process will be identified through the distribution of a questionnaire. The research results will be published nationally and internationally to support claims of global cultural ownership. The selection of sources is generally carried out using the snowball method, where further research is based on one piece of information related to the artist.

The activity was conducted through observation of Jaran Kepang performances in selected traditional geographic areas. Performances were selected based on performance schedules in the corresponding areas. Information not obtained from the performances was sought through interviews with art groups. Interviews were conducted with a minimum of 5 (five) art groups in each area. The main interviews were conducted with group leaders who generally also act as shamans or shamans of Jaran Kepang. Those selected have at least 10 years of experience in the art of Jaran Kepang. Interview materials covered, dance, art properties, and aspects of cultural, philosophical, and religious values.

RESULTS

Jaran Kepang in Banyuwangi Regency

Jaranan, often called kuda lumping, is a traditional Javanese art form that uses a woven bamboo horse replica as its primary medium. This art form generally developed in Central Java, East Java, and parts of West Java. In Banyuwangi, this art form later experienced acculturation with the local Osing culture. Its introduction is estimated to have occurred in the 18th to 19th centuries, through interactions between the Javanese Mataraman, Blambangan, and Madurese communities. Banyuwangi, as a cultural borderland, provided fertile ground for the development of this art form. Its historical roots are believed to stem from:

1. The tradition of Majapahit warriors riding horses and practicing war.
2. There are no animistic rituals related to ancestor worship, so the movements are imbued with magical and trance-like nuances.
3. The syncretism of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam incorporates spiritual symbols into the performance.

Banyuwangi's Jaranan is not only entertainment, but also has socio-cultural functions, including:

1. A ritual to ward off disaster, where this art form is believed to ward off calamities and bring blessings.
2. A village cleansing ceremony, part of an agrarian tradition, to pray for soil fertility and a safe harvest.
3. A spiritual medium where possessed dancers are believed to act as intermediaries for ancestral spirits.
4. A folk entertainment performed at celebrations, circumcisions, and village festivals.

Entering the 20th century and continuing through the present, Banyuwangi's Jaranan continues to develop. During the Dutch colonial era, Jaranan was often performed at village events, but it was initially considered to contain mystical elements. In the 1970s and 1980s, Jaranan began to gain popularity in Banyuwangi, with numerous jaranan groups established in villages. From the 2000s to the present, Banyuwangi's Jaranan has appeared at festivals, cultural carnivals, and even tourism events (such as the Banyuwangi Kuwung Festival).

The magical elements are retained, but they are also modernized with more varied stage designs and costumes.

For the community, Jaranan is not just entertainment but also a symbol of identity:

1. Spiritual expression, namely the connection between humans and the supernatural.
2. Cultural expression, namely a blend of Javanese, Osing, Madurese, and Balinese.
3. Social expression, namely a means of community togetherness.
4. Aesthetic expression, namely the dance movements, music, and costumes typical of Banyuwangi.

Elements of Dance and Costume

In the Banyuwangi Jaranan Kepang performance, the number of dancers is usually adjusted to the dance formation and the jaran dance ritual. Generally, there are 4, 6, or 8 kuda kepang (braided horses) depending on the number of main dancers. An even number is considered to symbolize cosmic balance (right-left, male-female, the

real world—the supernatural). The dancers consist of both men and women. In a ritual context, the number of kuda kepang is also interpreted as a symbol of ancestral warriors guarding the village.

The dancers' attire includes a crown/headband (udeng) that symbolizes vigilance and clarity of thought. Black and white usually signify the balance between good and evil, as well as self-control in trance performances. The black dress is embroidered with gold, symbolizing strength, steadfastness, and protection from negative influences. The gold embroidery with a vine/leaf motif symbolizes nobility, majesty, and a connection to the spiritual world. 4. The gold tassels on the chest and arms symbolize cultural richness and fluidity of movement. They also serve as visual markers to enhance the dancers' authority in the arena. A yellow scarf around the waist symbolizes clarity, prosperity, and spiritual energy. In ritual contexts, the yellow scarf serves as a boundary between the real world and the supernatural.

Black-and-white batik cloth embodies local identity. The black-and-white motif symbolizes the duality of life that must be maintained in balance. Black trousers with blue decoration and gold trim, where black symbolizes strength and steadfastness. Blue symbolizes serenity and supernatural protection. The gold trim symbolizes majesty and respect for ancestors. Anklets with jingles signify a magical call to guardian spirits in the Jarana performance. They also serve to emphasize the rhythm of the dancers' foot movements. The body position (horse stance with hands on waist) symbolizes readiness, alertness, and courage in facing challenges. This valiant attitude demonstrates the dancer's role as a medium between humans and the spiritual world.



Figure 1. Jarana Kepang Performance in Banyuwangi

Art Equipment

The braided horse (Jarana Kepang) symbolizes the vehicle of ancestral warriors and embodies the magical powers of horses, representing a gallant, swift, and powerful animal. Symbolically, the horse serves as the dancer's transition from the human world to the supernatural world (trance) and represents the loyal and brave warriors of Banyuwangi, which in the past had a kingdom called Blambangan. The braided horse also symbolizes the connection between the physical world (dancer) and the supernatural world (ancestral spirits).

The horse-shaped device is made using woven bamboo. The bamboo is sliced thinly, 1-2 millimeters thick, and woven into a strong, thin sheet. This sheet is then shaped like a horse and reinforced with thicker bamboo slices around the horse's shape. The horse measures approximately 100 cm long and approximately 60 cm high. Larger palm fibers or yarn are used for the horse's hair and tail. The horse is colored using paint to match the desired horse color.



Figure 2. Banyuwangi kepang horse

The Banyuwangi braided horse has a distinctive color variation, generally lighter than other regions. These colors are not chosen randomly but are imbued with symbolic meaning. Black symbolizes strength, courage, and protection. It represents a valiant warrior facing danger. In a spiritual context, black people are believed to ward off disaster and ward off evil spirits. White symbolizes purity, sincerity, and spirituality. It symbolizes the upper world, purity of heart, and connection with ancestors. It is typically used by dancers with calmer roles, as a counterbalance to the dark colors.

Red symbolizes passion, courage, and lifeblood. It symbolizes energy, anger, and physical strength. Dancers with red horses are usually more aggressive and agile. Yellow/gold symbolizes prosperity, wealth, and light. It symbolizes hope for prosperity and blessings. It is often used as the center of the formation or as a group leader. Green symbolizes fertility, nature, and new life. It connects humans with the agricultural world and harmony with nature. The symbolic meaning of colors in dance formations is that these colors, when combined in jarana formations, depict the entire cycle of life. Black and white symbolize the balance of the cosmos, good and bad, dark and light. Red and yellow symbolize the energy of life and glory. Green symbolizes the fertility of the land, prayers for the harvest.

The costumes of Banyuwangi's Jarana dancers are not merely decorative, but also rich in symbolism:

1. Black, white, and gold symbolized strength, balance, and nobility.
2. Accessories (scarves, rattles, embroidery) symbolized connecting the human world with the supernatural world.
3. The entire appearance builds a Banyuwangi identity full of spiritual energy, artistic beauty, and respect for ancestors.



Figure 3. Costum of Banyuwangi Kepang dancer

The Barongan represents the pinnacle of supernatural power, often considered the incarnation of a wild animal (tiger or lion). Symbolically, it represents both a guardian spirit and a disruptor in performances. The Barongan takes center stage during trance, symbolizing the battle between humans and supernatural forces. The whip serves as a means of controlling the horse and a trigger for the dancer's ecstasy. The whip symbolically represents self-control and the boundary between humans and spirits. The sound of the whip is believed to summon supernatural energies to the performance.



Figure 4. Barongan

The Javanese gamelan consists of drums, angklung, gong, kenong, saron, and others. Gamelan serves as an accompaniment, setting the rhythm and magical atmosphere. Symbolically, the gong represents the universe, closing and opening the cycle. The drum symbolizes the heartbeat, driving the dance. The dynamic rhythm of the music symbolizes the interaction between the physical and the supernatural worlds.

Before the performance begins, the "Peras Jaranan" (or "jaranan") procession is performed, a ceremony where offerings are presented according to specific rules. The "Peras" (or "jaranan") is a form of respect for supernatural powers and ancestors, as well as a request for safety for the dancers, musicians, and the entire community in attendance. Thus, the "Peras Jaranan" serves as a medium connecting the human world with the transcendent realm. A field inventory based on photographic documentation revealed that the Banyuwangi "Peras Jaranan" (or "jaranan") contains at least 20 main elements, each with its own symbolic meaning. The following is a description of these elements.

1. Green plantains, usually presented in large bunches, symbolize fertility, survival, and uninterrupted sustenance. Bananas are a fruit that reproduces easily, so they are believed to symbolize regeneration and eternal life.
2. Pisang klutuk, a small variety of bananas in a bunch. Their presence signifies modesty, loyalty, and harmony. The two banana varieties convey a prayer for a balanced life between simplicity and simplicity.
3. A mature coconut, stripped of its husk, symbolizes the integrity of life. Coconut water is believed to symbolize the source of life, while the versatile coconut fruit symbolizes steadfastness and endurance.
4. The yellow or ivory coconut is used to emphasize the element of purity. This coconut is often positioned as a ward against disaster, so its presence in this role is considered mandatory.
5. White rice, in its raw form, is a symbol of the main food. White symbolizes purity and purity, and is the basis for human survival.
6. Yellow rice, which is white rice mixed with turmeric, produces yellow rice. This element symbolizes sacredness, good luck, and prayers for well-being. In local traditions, yellow rice is also often used as a tamping (rice tamping) to ward off disturbances from spirits.
7. Pancawarna rice, which is five-colored rice consisting of white, red, yellow, green, and black. These five colors reflect Javanese cosmology regarding the five elements of nature and the five cardinal directions. White symbolizes purity, red symbolizes courage, yellow symbolizes nobility, green symbolizes fertility, and black symbolizes strength. Its presence symbolizes the harmony of the universe and human nature.
8. Market snacks, traditional snacks such as rice cakes, apem (apem), and others wrapped in banana leaves, demonstrate the simplicity of agrarian communities. These offerings symbolize prayers for a sweet, simple, and grateful life.
9. Flower arrangements consist of roses, ylang-ylang, and jasmine. Their fragrance symbolizes prayers for a life always remembered with goodness. Flower arrangements also serve as a means of paying respect to ancestors and guardian spirits.
10. Betel leaves arranged with lime and cigarettes. Betel leaves, in local tradition, have the meaning of unification and purification. They are believed to bind good energy and ward off bad energy.
11. Kembang mayang (flower bouquet) is a tall woven coconut leaf decorated with flowers. This element symbolizes fertility, unity, and maintaining energy harmony. Its presence also emphasizes the sacred nuance of the ritual.
12. Janur (coconut leaves) shaped into small containers serve as containers for offerings such as flowers or snacks. The word "janur" is often interpreted as true light, signifying the light of life and a symbol of a promise.
13. Water in a glass or bottle symbolizes purity and coolness. Air is considered a universal element of life, so its presence is mandatory.
14. Coffee is served in small cups. Coffee symbolizes energy and enthusiasm. In local beliefs, coffee is also considered a treat for spirits or guardians so they don't disrupt the streaming of the show.
15. Rolled or manufactured cigarettes are served as a form of respect for ancestral spirits. Cigarette offerings are believed to appease spirits and serve as a symbol of friendship.
16. Sugarcane stalks, usually cut into several pieces, symbolize the sweetness of life, steadfastness, and firmness in facing challenges. In Banyuwangi rituals, sugarcane is often an important offering.
17. Clay vessels serve as containers for the five-colored rice and flowers. Clay symbolizes the meaning and return of humanity to its origins, namely the earth.
18. Incense is burned during the ritual. The smoke is believed to be a medium of communication between humans and the supernatural world. The function of incense is to open a spiritual space so that prayers and requests can be conveyed.
19. Perfume made from flowers or other fragrances is sprinkled around the performance area. Its presence symbolizes purity, attraction, and strengthens the positive aura in the ritual.
20. The Barong's head serves as the energy center, placed on the main side. The Barong is a symbol of protection, warding off disaster, and maintaining balance. In the Jaranan tradition, the Barong is considered a sacred entity with supernatural powers.
21. A live chicken is usually presented to emphasize the ruwatan ritual. It symbolizes the integrity of life and serves as a symbol of assistance from humans to animals.
22. Ayam Peteteng (Peteteng Chicken) is a chicken slaughtered in a ritual. This symbolizes a ransom or blood offering to maintain the balance of the cosmos. It is considered sacred because blood contains life.
23. Silet (a small knife) is used as a symbol of strength, decisiveness, and as a means of cleansing negative energy. In the Jaranan practice, the silet is also synonymous with the dances performed by dancers in a trance state.

24. Kaca beling (broken glass) is an accessory associated with trance performances. Broken glass symbolizes a test of endurance, a cleansing of negative traits, and a demonstration of spiritual power beyond human reason.



Figure 5. Offering equipment (sesaji)



Figure 6. Peras Jaranan

Their symbolic meanings can be divided into three broad categories:

1. Symbols of food and fertility, such as rice, colored rice, bananas, coconuts, and sugar cane.
2. Symbols of purity and warding off disaster, such as flowers, air, perfume, incense, and the Mayang flower.
3. Symbols of sacrifice and spiritual trials, such as a live chicken, Ayam Peteteng, and glass, and the head of a Barong.

Thus, the jaranan dance represents the cosmology of the Osing people (local people of Banyuwangi) which is maintaining harmony between humans, nature, and the supernatural through meaningful symbolic means. This ritual is not only a prerequisite for the performance, but also an expression of Banyuwangi's cultural identity and spirituality.

CONCLUSION

Research on Jaran Kepang in Banyuwangi has been conducted. The results are descriptive, based on interviews with several sources and observations of several art performances. This traditional art form possesses specific values in terms of dance, art properties, and aspects of cultural, philosophical, and religious values. Dance equipment, including costumes, dance sets, and offerings, has its own symbolic meaning. Further research can be conducted in other regions as a comparative study.

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