

Managing and Negotiating Cultural Identity: The Adaptive Dynamics of Jaranan Thik in Ponoragan Society

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Cultural Identity Negotiation; Co-Cultural Communication; Jaranan Thik; Ponoragan; Cultural Adaptation; Traditional Performing arts

This study investigates how Jaranan Thik negotiates cultural identity and adapts communicatively within the Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy of Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. Grounded in Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory, it analyzes how a marginalized traditional art community strategically navigates identity through symbolic alignment, structural adjustment, and engagement with institutional actors. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research draws on in-depth interviews with performers, cultural leaders, and community representatives, complemented by documentation and direct observation of performances. The findings identify four key patterns: symbolic assimilation via shared mythological references and terminology; the regulated reframing of trance practices to reshape public perception; religious and institutional affiliations to strengthen moral and structural legitimacy; and aesthetic innovation to attract younger audiences. These adaptive strategies indicate that Jaranan Thik does not merge into the dominant Reyog tradition but instead negotiates recognition through selective alignment while maintaining its essential ritual foundations. By situating the analysis within localized cultural hierarchies, the study broadens the scope of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory and underscores communicative agency as vital to cultural sustainability.

1. Introduction

Cultural identity has consistently occupied a central position in communication scholarship, particularly within plural societies where diverse cultural expressions interact under unequal power structures. Rather than functioning as a fixed trait, identity is continuously produced, negotiated, and contested through communicative practices (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Traditional performing arts serve as significant communicative arenas in which questions of identity, legitimacy, and social acknowledgment are expressed and interpreted. Yet within localized cultural hierarchies, some art forms become formally institutionalized as dominant symbols of regional identity, while others are relegated to marginal or subordinate status.

This condition is significant because cultural marginalization can undermine the sustainability of local cultural diversity (Smith, 2006). When particular traditions receive official recognition, policy backing, and symbolic authority, other traditional arts frequently encounter stigma, exclusion, or pressures toward assimilation (Sasaki & Baba, 2024). Analyzing how marginalized communities navigate adaptation and identity negotiation is therefore crucial for understanding how cultural diversity is preserved or constrained at the local level (Järvelä, 2023). Exploring this relationship

offers broader insight into the dynamics of cultural authority, recognition, and communicative negotiation in plural social contexts. Cultural marginalization poses a serious challenge to the sustainability of local cultural diversity. When certain cultural forms are granted institutional recognition, policy endorsement, and symbolic authority, other traditional arts frequently encounter stigma, exclusion, or pressures to conform to dominant standards (Orbe, 1998).

In Ponorogo, Indonesia, Reyog Ponorogo has been formally positioned as the region's principal cultural identity (Dharojah et al., 2024; Yurisma & Bahrudin, 2020). In contrast, Jaranan Thik, despite its deep historical roots and increasing popularity, continues to occupy a marginal status within the Ponoragan cultural landscape (Murdianto, 2016 (Murdianto, 2016; Saputro, 2023)). This positioning generates tensions surrounding legitimacy, recognition, and long-term cultural continuity, particularly in interactions between Jaranan Thik communities and dominant cultural institutions (Zainul Hamdi, 2008). Examining how marginalized cultural groups adapt and negotiate their identities is therefore essential for understanding how cultural diversity is either sustained or constrained at the local level, as well as for addressing broader concerns related to cultural sustainability and social inclusion.

Existing communication research grounded in Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory has primarily focused on contexts such as migration, educational environments, organizational settings, and minority experiences in multicultural societies (Collier, 2005a; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Orbe, 1998). These studies illustrate how marginalized groups employ strategies of accommodation, assimilation, and resistance to negotiate identity within unequal power structures. Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to traditional performing art communities that operate within localized cultural hierarchies, where dominance is shaped not by demographic difference but by symbolic cultural authority.

In Mark P. Orbe's Co-Cultural Communication Theory, a Co-Culture is conceptualized as a social group operating within a broader societal system characterized by unequal power distribution, wherein certain groups occupy dominant positions while others are structurally marginalized. Within this asymmetrical framework, members of co-cultural groups adopt communicative orientations in response to prevailing norms and institutionalized authority. Assimilation refers to communicative efforts aimed at minimizing cultural distinctiveness to conform to dominant expectations and secure social acceptance or access to resources. Accommodation involves attempts to preserve core cultural identity while simultaneously seeking inclusion within dominant structures or advocating adjustments to prevailing norms. Separation, by contrast, denotes the deliberate rejection of dominant standards and the reinforcement of in-group solidarity and cultural distinctiveness. Collectively, these orientations underscore that co-cultural communication constitutes a strategic, context-sensitive negotiation of identity, power, and social positioning rather than a passive process of adjustment (Orbe, 1998).

Although Co-Cultural Communication Theory effectively explains how marginalized groups navigate dominant power relations through strategies of assimilation, accommodation, and separation, it offers limited insight into the internal processes through which cultural meanings are interactively constructed and sustained. Cultural Identity Theory provides a complementary analytical lens by foregrounding the relational and interpretive dimensions of identity formation. Specifically, it emphasizes the dynamic interplay of avowal (self-definition), ascription (external categorization), and identity salience, highlighting identity as an ongoing communicative co-construction rather than merely a reaction to structural inequality. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, identity negotiation can be conceptualized not only as strategic positioning within hierarchical systems but also as a relational communicative process through which cultural meanings are affirmed, contested, and rearticulated within particular social contexts.

Beyond adaptive processes, minority identities are subject to ongoing negotiation within communicative contexts that shape behavioural orientations aimed at sustaining cultural distinctiveness. Identity negotiation does not unfold in isolation; rather, it emerges through the dynamic interplay between adaptive adjustments and the reaffirmation of cultural values, norms, and symbolic repertoires. In this respect, Cultural Identity Theory (CIT), as developed by Mary Jane Collier (Collier, 2005b; Collier & Thomas, 1988), offers a critical analytical framework for understanding cultural identity as fluid and interactionally constituted. From this perspective, identity

is neither fixed nor essentialized, but continuously constructed and reconstructed through communication, particularly within intercultural settings and contexts marked by power asymmetry.

This relational dynamic corresponds to what Collier later conceptualizes as negotiated facework, wherein cultural identity is strategically enacted and managed through communicative choices that are attuned to social hierarchies and structural constraints (Collier, 2015). Identity, therefore, is not simply expressed but performatively accomplished within relational and institutional boundaries. Empirical research in contexts of ethnic conflict further supports this view, demonstrating that minority groups frequently mobilize culturally embedded codes, such as indigenous languages, ritual expressions, and symbolic markers to maintain symbolic autonomy under conditions of political or cultural dominance (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Such findings underscore that identity negotiation is both relational and protective in nature: it facilitates engagement with broader social systems while safeguarding cultural distinctiveness. This theoretical orientation is particularly pertinent for examining how marginalized cultural communities negotiate adaptation and affirmation within hierarchical cultural structures.

Conflict and reconciliation constitute enduring dynamics within Indonesia's pluralistic social configuration (Suparto, 2014). Tensions frequently surface when diverse cultural expressions compete for symbolic recognition within communities structured by layered traditions and entrenched hierarchies of cultural authority. Such contestations are not confined to a single artistic genre; rather, they reflect broader processes through which local traditions negotiate their position in relation to socially institutionalized cultural identities. For example, a study conducted at the Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, examines the struggle of the Dolalak Sekar Arum group in Wonosobo to attain social acceptance in a cultural environment where Lenggèr occupies a dominant status. Her findings illuminate the communicative and strategic efforts undertaken by Dolalak practitioners to navigate intergroup tensions and secure legitimacy within a context shaped by established artistic authority (Prastiwi, 2015).

Existing scholarship on Jaranan Thik and other Indonesian traditional arts has predominantly emphasized historical trajectories, ritual dimensions, trance phenomena, or manifestations of cultural conflict (Groenendael, 2012; Nugraheni, 2015; Rofiq & Erwin, 2020). Several studies further document the tensions between Jaranan Thik and dominant traditions such as Reyog Ponorogo, particularly in relation to stigma, religious interpretation, and claims to legitimacy (Murdianto, 2016). However, much of this literature remains descriptive in orientation, focusing on the presence of conflict rather than theorizing the communicative mechanisms underlying identity positioning. Departing from these approaches, the present study conceptualizes identity negotiation as an ongoing communicative process, explicitly framed through Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research advances a communication-centered analysis that elucidates how traditional performing art communities strategically navigate localized cultural hierarchies.

The primary objective of this study is to critically analyze the process of cultural adaptation undertaken by Jaranan Thik within the dominant cultural configuration of Ponorogo, employing Co-Cultural Communication Theory as its principal analytical framework (Orbe, 1998). Although co-cultural theory has been extensively utilized to examine minority communication strategies in organizational, educational, and multicultural environments, its application to traditional performing art communities situated within localized cultural hierarchies remains underexplored. By conceptualizing Jaranan Thik as a co-cultural group operating under the symbolic hegemony of Reyog Ponorogo, this study reframes adaptation not as passive conformity, but as a strategic communicative practice embedded in power asymmetries, struggles for legitimacy, and negotiated social positioning. In doing so, the research extends Orbe's theoretical framework beyond its conventional domains and underscores its analytical utility in examining cultural endurance within traditional artistic systems.

The secondary objective is to deepen scholarly understanding of cultural identity negotiation in traditional art communities through the application of Cultural Identity Theory as developed by Mary Jane Collier (Collier, 2005a; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Rather than approaching Jaranan Thik solely as a cultural artifact or as a site of overt conflict, this study conceptualizes it as a dynamic locus of identity construction, where processes of avowal, ascription, and identity salience are continually

enacted and renegotiated. By integrating Cultural Identity Theory with Co-Cultural Communication Theory, the research advances a theoretically synthesized framework that elucidates the interplay between adaptive strategies and identity negotiation within marginalized cultural formations. This integrative perspective moves beyond descriptive accounts of cultural contestation and offers a communication-centered explanation of how traditional performing arts sustain legitimacy and continuity within dominant cultural regimes.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the advancement of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory by broadening their analytical application to the sphere of traditional performing arts, an area that has received relatively limited attention within communication research. By positioning Jaranan Thik within a localized cultural hierarchy structured by the symbolic dominance of Reyog Ponorogo, the study illustrates that identity negotiation is not confined to migratory, intercultural, or organizational settings. Rather, it also unfolds within intra-cultural power configurations where symbolic authority shapes processes of recognition and legitimacy. Through this lens, identity is conceptualized as a communicatively constituted and hierarchically mediated process embedded in specific regional cultural systems.

From a practical perspective, the findings hold significant implications for cultural policy, heritage governance, and community-based approaches to cultural sustainability. Acknowledging the communicative agency of marginalized cultural communities such as Jaranan Thik underscores the necessity of inclusive cultural frameworks that extend beyond the privileging of officially institutionalized traditions. The study indicates that sustainable cultural preservation depends not solely on formal recognition, but also on institutional support for locally negotiated strategies of adaptation, symbolic alignment, and identity affirmation. In plural social contexts characterized by the coexistence of dominant and subordinate cultural forms, communicative negotiation emerges as a crucial mechanism for sustaining cultural continuity while navigating structural inequalities.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing an intrinsic case study approach to investigate the processes of cultural identity adaptation and negotiation within the Jaranan Thik community in Ponorogo, Indonesia. The intrinsic case study design was selected on the grounds that Jaranan Thik constitutes a distinctive and context-bound cultural phenomenon requiring comprehensive and situated analysis rather than statistical generalization. This methodological orientation enables an in-depth examination of communicative practices, symbolic interactions, and identity negotiations as they unfold within the natural sociocultural context of Ponoragan society.

The analytical framework is informed by Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory, which provide conceptual tools for examining how marginalized cultural groups communicate, adapt, and negotiate identity within dominant cultural configurations. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate for capturing the lived experiences, interpretive meanings, and subjective perspectives of cultural actors engaged in Jaranan Thik performances and community dynamics.

Fieldwork was conducted across multiple sites within Ponorogo Regency, East Java, particularly in locations where Jaranan Thik groups are actively performing and organizationally established. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure direct experiential knowledge and substantive engagement with the research focus. Selection criteria prioritized individuals with active involvement in Jaranan Thik activities and those possessing informed perspectives on its interaction with dominant cultural forms, especially Reyog Ponorogo.

The key informants comprised Nur Salam, leader of Brandal Loka Jaya (Jl. Abimanyu 43, Ponorogo); Ali, head of the Nogo Pertolo group in Dukuh Kebatan 1, Campurejo Village, Sambit District; Yuli Rohmawati, leader of Putro Purbo Legowo; Mbah Tarom and Sabar representing Turonggo Wengker (also known as Pustoko Pamedhar Jati); Mbah Slamet, senior cultural elder of Nogo Baru Klinthing in Slahung; and Imam, leader of Prawiro Gati Taruno in Sampung. These individuals were purposively selected based on their leadership positions and sustained involvement in the development and performance of Jaranan Thik traditions, ensuring authoritative and experience-based insights into the cultural dynamics under investigation.

The principal informants included Purbo Sasongko, an active practitioner of Jaranan Thik, and Ridho Kurnianto, an academic and cultural observer, both of whom contributed analytical and reflective perspectives on processes of cultural identity negotiation. In addition, Sugeng Wibowo, a community leader from Desa Bajang, Mlarak District, participated as a supporting informant, providing broader sociocultural perspectives on community perceptions and intergroup relations. This multi-tiered informant structure facilitated the incorporation of diverse viewpoints, enabling a comprehensive understanding of adaptation strategies, identity negotiation, and communicative interaction within Ponorogo's localized cultural hierarchy.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants recognized for their extensive knowledge and experience in Jaranan Thik performance and Ponorogo's cultural traditions. Participants were identified on the basis of their expertise, leadership positions, sustained engagement in traditional arts, and acknowledged authority within local cultural networks. This purposive selection ensured that informants possessed a nuanced understanding of the historical evolution, performative structures, and cultural positioning of Jaranan Thik within the broader Ponoragan cultural hierarchy.

Each in-depth interview lasted approximately two to three hours and was conducted either at the informants' private residences or at their respective *sanggar* (training studios), where rehearsals and artistic coordination typically take place. Conducting interviews within these familiar cultural spaces facilitated a more contextualized and reflective exchange, allowing participants to articulate their experiences within the environment in which identity negotiation and performance practices are embedded.

The use of in-depth interviewing enabled a detailed exploration of participants' lived experiences, interpretive frameworks, and communicative strategies related to processes of adaptation and cultural identity negotiation. The semi-structured format, supported by open-ended questioning, encouraged expansive narrative responses and generated rich qualitative data. This approach provided deeper analytical insight into how cultural meanings, symbolic practices, and power relations are expressed, negotiated, and reproduced within everyday cultural interactions.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Historical of Jaranan Thik Ponorogo

The Ponorogo is prominently identified with its emblematic traditional performance, Reyog Ponorogo, which has come to embody the region's dominant cultural symbol. Historical documentation suggests that horse dance performances were already present in Ponorogo in the early twentieth century; however, they operated as constituent elements of Reyog rather than as autonomous artistic traditions. In his 1938 account, Pigeaud described the structure of Réjog Panaraga (Dutch spelling) as comprising three principal components: "*De reog van Panaraga bestaat altijd uit drie hoofdbestanddelen: een barongan (singabarong), een kedhokan (demonische maskerfiguur), en een aantal paarddansers (djaranan)*" (Pigeaud, 1938). This description indicates that Reyog consistently consisted of the barongan or singabarong as the central figure, the kedhokan as the masked counterpart, and a group of horse dancers (djaranan) who complemented and reinforced the overall performance.

This configuration illustrates that Jaranan historically functioned as an integral yet hierarchically subordinate component within the Reyog performance structure. Although not occupying the primary symbolic position, the horse dancers were indispensable to the narrative coherence and aesthetic composition of Reyog. The incorporation of Jaranan within the Reyog framework thus reflects an early manifestation of cultural hierarchy, wherein Jaranan operated under the symbolic authority of the Singabarong figure. This historical embeddedness provides a critical foundation for interpreting contemporary processes 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 genealogy of Jaranan to the legend of Dèwi Sanggalangit, the princess of Kediri. According to this narrative, the princess proclaimed that any suitor capable of presenting an

unprecedented and extraordinary performance would be granted her hand in marriage (Groenendael, 2012). In response, the King of Bantarangin as identified in historical sources as Toh Bagus and in Ponorogo folklore as Klanasewandono, together with his minister Pujangganong, assembled a Jaranan troupe composed of horse dancers, gamelan musicians, and a barongan figure. Their principal rivals were the King of Lodoyo, Singabarong, and his minister Singakumbang, both portrayed as possessing supernatural abilities to transform into formidable animals such as lions and wild boars.

As van Groenendael observes, “Hence in this legend, popular in Kediri and environs, the horse dance relates to 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 ké pang group comprising four horses, a mask for Pujangganom, and a group of musicians” (Groenendael, 2012). Within this mythic framework, Jaranan emerges not merely as an aesthetic performance but as a cultural expression embedded in narratives of royal contestation, symbolic authority, and heroic rivalry. The legend underscores the historical interconnection between horse dance performances and themes of power, legitimacy, and competition, motifs that continue to inform the symbolic interplay between Jaranan and Reyog within the broader cultural imagination of Ponorogo.

The historical origins of Jaranan may be conceptualized through two interrelated layers: oral tradition and documented processes of historical adaptation. Oral accounts frequently situate Jaranan within prehistoric ritual practices, suggesting that the performance predates the emergence of major religious and political systems in Java (Mauricio, 2002). Ethnographic interviews with artists in Malang, for instance, associate Jaranan with early communal hunting rituals in which participants imitated the movements of wild animals, such as boars, tigers, and horses, prior to undertaking collective hunts. These mimetic enactments were understood to invoke animal spirits, while trance states were interpreted as expressions of spiritual possession or manifestations of ancestral power.

From a historical-analytical perspective, Mauricio contends that Jaranan evolved across successive cultural epochs, adapting from the Hindu-Buddhist period into the Islamic era while preserving fundamental performative elements. The trance dimension is regarded as a vestige of earlier animistic cosmologies that endured through subsequent religious transformations. Within this framework, the origins of Jaranan are considered to predate the introduction of Hinduism to Java and may even be linked to early phases of horse domestication prior to the fifth century BCE. This stratified historical perspective positions Jaranan as a deeply rooted cultural practice, whose persistence reflects long-term processes of adaptation, syncretism, and symbolic resilience across shifting civilizational landscapes.

The article *Mapping Morphonosemantic Categories in Javanese Onomatopoeia* offers a linguistic account of the term *Jaranan Thik/Thek* through the analytical lens of Javanese onomatopoeia (Fitriana & Suparno, 2025). In this framework, the word *thik* is classified as an onomatopoeic expression that imitates a light striking or tapping sound. Phonologically, the high-front vowel /i/ is systematically associated with semantic nuances of smallness, lightness, and sharpness. Within morphonosemantic categorization, sounds such as *thik* fall under what is termed low-scale augmentation, referring to acoustic phenomena characterized by relatively low intensity and minimal impact force. This classification illustrates how phonological features in Javanese encode perceptual and sensory qualities, demonstrating the patterned relationship between sound structure and meaning.

In the performative context of Jaranan, the sound *thik* is typically linked to the distinctive auditory effect produced by the interaction of performance properties, particularly the sharp snapping sound generated by the barongan’s mouth mechanism. Over time, this recurring acoustic feature became socially recognized as a defining sonic marker of the performance style. The designation *Jaranan Thik* thus reflects a non-arbitrary process of lexical formation grounded in sound iconicity, wherein phonological form corresponds directly to embodied sensory experience. As Fitriana and Suparno (2025) argue, such morphonosemantic patterns indicate that lexical development in Javanese frequently arises from perceptual associations between sound and lived experience. In this regard, the term *Thik* signifies not merely a stylistic variation, but also the crystallization of a culturally embedded auditory identity.

One of the earliest Jaranan groups identified through field interviews is Nogo Baru Klinthing, based in Galak, Slahung, Ponorogo. The designation “Baru Klinthing” derives from a local myth associated with Telaga Ngebel, recounting the story of a child who transformed into a dragon-like serpent encircling Mount Wilis. According to the legend, when the serpent attempted to reach its tail by extending its tongue, the tongue was severed and later transformed into a whip—an object symbolically linked to Jaranan performance practices. Historically, the group was founded in the 1950s by Mbah Do and is presently led by Mbah Slamet as the cultural successor. The ensemble experienced a temporary cessation during the political upheaval of 1965 and resumed activities around 1972–1973. Its period of peak prominence spanned from the 1980s to the early 2000s, when performances drew substantial audiences across southern Ponorogo.

With regard to stylistic genealogy, Nogo Baru Klinthing initially adopted the Banyuwangi-derived Jaranan Buto style, noted for its intense and occasionally aggressive trance expressions. Over time, however, the group transitioned toward the Jaranan Senterewe style originating from Tulungagung or Kediri, which is perceived as more socially acceptable within the Ponorogo cultural context. This stylistic reorientation reflects a deliberate adaptive strategy aimed at moderating elements deemed excessively extreme or unsettling in trance sequences. The shift exemplifies how traditional art communities negotiate the tension between safeguarding inherited aesthetic forms and recalibrating performance practices in response to evolving social norms and audience sensibilities.

A further noteworthy dimension of Nogo Baru Klinthing is its adoption of the term “Reyog Pegon” to designate its performance tradition. This nomenclature carries particular significance, given that the term *Reyog* is deeply embedded in Ponorogo’s regional identity and cultural symbolism. Within local discourse, “Reyog Pegon”—sometimes referred to as Jaranan Pegon—is understood as an early variant that subsequently evolved into what is now widely recognized as Jaranan Thik in Ponorogo. The use of this designation signals both historical continuity and symbolic affiliation with the broader Reyog cultural sphere, thereby reinforcing relational proximity within the region’s hierarchical cultural framework.

Jaranan Pegon is characterized by a relatively streamlined performative structure and a strong adherence to classical Javanese aesthetic conventions, with limited incorporation of contemporary innovation or creative modification. The performance retains standardized formal elements, including traditional gamelan accompaniment and codified choreographic patterns, thereby demonstrating a sustained commitment to established *pakem* (canonical norms) rather than to experimental reinterpretation. Given this emphasis on formal continuity and aesthetic conservatism, Jaranan Pegon is widely regarded as representing an early or formative phase in the historical trajectory of Jaranan in Ponorogo, prior to its subsequent transformations in response to shifting sociocultural expectations and audience sensibilities. This continuity underscores the function of tradition not merely as static preservation, but as a normative and symbolic framework that informs ongoing processes of adaptation and cultural identity negotiation within evolving cultural contexts.

The designation *Jaranan Thik* (or *Thek*) began to achieve broader public recognition around 1998, marking a pivotal stage in the historical evolution of Jaranan in Ponorogo. During this period, significant performative innovations were introduced through the initiatives of Bapak Tarom, widely known as Mak Rom, and Bapak Sabar, known as Mak Bleng—two local artists who developed a creative reinterpretation of Jaranan in Mojomati Village, Sambit District, Ponorogo Regency. Through the establishment of the Turonggo Wengker ensemble, they not only incorporated new choreographic and musical elements but also catalyzed a rearticulation of naming practices and identity construction within the local Jaranan tradition.

The formation of Turonggo Wengker signaled a broader transformation in which group nomenclature and stylistic differentiation began to function as salient cultural identifiers within the community. This shift facilitated the wider dissemination of the term *Jaranan Thik* as a locally grounded designation shaped by artistic agency, contextual adaptation, and distinctive auditory and performative characteristics. Consequently, the naming and categorization of Jaranan in Ponorogo increasingly reflected the role of artists as active agents in the construction of cultural identity. This development illustrates how traditional performing arts evolve through processes of creative

innovation while remaining embedded within the sociocultural frameworks that sustain their legitimacy and continuity.

The transition from Jaranan Pegon to what is now commonly identified as Jaranan Kreasi—more widely known as Jaranan Thik—represents a pivotal moment in the stylistic and structural transformation of Jaranan in Ponorogo. This shift reflects a movement from a predominantly classical, canon-oriented performance model toward a more innovative and artist-centered format incorporating new choreographic configurations, expanded musical arrangements, and diversified performative expressions. Whereas Jaranan Pegon prioritizes strict adherence to established *pakem* (canonical conventions), Jaranan Thik embodies a creative reinterpretation responsive to contemporary audience sensibilities and localized artistic experimentation.

At present, this developmental trajectory is exemplified by several prominent ensembles, including 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 principal representative of Jaranan in western Ponorogo. The geographic dispersion and stylistic heterogeneity of these groups demonstrate the expansion of Jaranan Thik beyond its earlier rural strongholds, reflecting adaptive engagement with diverse sociocultural contexts while sustaining a shared cultural identity. This evolution highlights the dynamic interrelationship between continuity and innovation in the ongoing negotiation of Jaranan's symbolic and institutional positioning within Ponorogo's broader cultural landscape.

3.2 *Adaptation and negotiation cultural identity in Jaranan Thek Performance*

3.2.1 *Symbolic Repositioning through the Term “Reyog Pegon”*

One of the study's most salient findings concerns the strategic use of the designation “Reyog Pegon” by the Nogo Baru Klinthing group in Slahung, recognized as the oldest continuously active Jaranan ensemble in Ponorogo since its establishment in 1955. This nomenclature constitutes a deliberate symbolic maneuver designed to align Jaranan with Ponorogo's dominant cultural identity, which is institutionally codified and publicly represented through Reyog. Rather than positioning themselves exclusively as a distinct Jaranan tradition, the group appropriates the culturally authoritative term *Reyog*, thereby embedding their performance within the broader symbolic framework officially recognized as the region's heritage. This naming practice reflects a calculated repositioning within the local cultural hierarchy, wherein symbolic affiliation functions as a mechanism for enhancing cultural legitimacy.

Viewed through the lens of Cultural Identity Theory, this strategy may be understood as an attempt to reconcile the tension between avowal and ascription. Internally, Jaranan Thik communities articulate (avow) their identity as an autonomous performance tradition with its own historical trajectory and aesthetic configuration. Externally, however, dominant cultural discourse ascribes symbolic primacy to Reyog as the definitive representation of Ponorogo's identity. By adopting the label *Reyog Pegon*, Nogo Baru Klinthing effectively narrows the disjunction between self-definition and external categorization, recalibrating identity salience to emphasize shared symbolic ancestry while maintaining internal distinctiveness.

Crucially, this form of symbolic assimilation does not signify the erasure or subsumption of Jaranan's identity. Rather, it illustrates the strategic management of identity representation by a marginalized cultural group operating within a hierarchical symbolic order. The invocation of *Reyog Pegon* enables the ensemble to assert cultural proximity and relational legitimacy without relinquishing performative autonomy, thereby demonstrating that identity negotiation in this context operates through selective alignment rather than total absorption into the dominant tradition.

3.2.2 *Reproduction of the Klanasewandono - Dewi Sanggalangit Myth as Shared Symbolic Repertoire*

Another salient finding concerns the incorporation of the Klanasewandono and Dewi Sanggalangit narrative into selected Jaranan Thik performances. This myth, which constitutes the foundational storyline of Reyog Ponorogo, is recontextualized within Jaranan as a means of situating the performance within a culturally recognizable narrative matrix. In particular, performers

frequently reference the episode in which the cavalry troops of Prabu Klanasewandono are ambushed in the forest by Celeng Srenggi—the wild boar manifestation associated with Prabu Singabarong—amid the rivalry for Dewi Sanggalangit. This episode foregrounds motifs of contestation, heroism, and supernatural confrontation. By mobilizing this shared mythic repertoire, Jaranan Thik constructs symbolic continuity with Reyog's narrative universe while simultaneously embedding its own performative identity within that broader cosmology.

This narrative appropriation constitutes a strategic recalibration of identity salience. Rather than accentuating differentiation from Reyog, Jaranan Thik emphasizes a shared mythological genealogy, thereby shifting its perceived status from culturally "distinct" to culturally "kin" (*serumpun*) within Ponorogo's collective imagination. Such perceived kinship is further reinforced by geographical and cultural proximity, as both traditions are historically rooted in communities surrounding the foothills of Mount Wilis and situated within the wider Mataraman cultural sphere. This spatial and cultural convergence strengthens the perception that Jaranan and Reyog inhabit a common symbolic ecosystem. Through this narrative alignment, the disjunction between avowed identity and dominant ascription is mitigated, enabling Jaranan Thik to be interpreted not as a peripheral or competing tradition, but as an integral component of the same regional cultural lineage.

Importantly, the incorporation of this mythological framework does not entail the erasure of Jaranan's distinctive stylistic and ritual features. Rather, it repositions the tradition within a shared cultural genealogy, allowing Jaranan Thik to negotiate legitimacy through narrative affiliation rather than antagonistic differentiation. This finding demonstrates how mythological alignment functions as a communicative strategy for reconfiguring identity boundaries within a hierarchical cultural order, transforming structural marginality into relational proximity.

3.2.3 Controlled Trance to Culturally Legitimate Performance

A central theme emerging from the findings is the reframing and regulation of trance practices within Jaranan Thik performances. Historically, certain manifestations of possession—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 ensembles shifted their stylistic orientation from the more aggressive Jaranan Buto model toward the Senterewe style, which is regarded as more socially acceptable within the local cultural milieu. This transition does not signify the elimination of trance; rather, it represents a recalibration of its expression in accordance with evolving moral sensibilities and aesthetic expectations.

Performers consistently emphasize that trance (*kesurupan*) remains a sacred and indispensable dimension of the tradition. Informants such as Mbah Tarom (Pustoko Pamedhar Jati), Ali (Nogo Pertolo), and Mbah Slamet (Nogo Baru Klinthing), maintain that trance is not a mere theatrical simulation but a phenomenon that may authentically manifest during performance. At the same time, they underscore that its occurrence is carefully regulated by the *bopo* (spiritual handler or ritual leader), who supervises and controls the progression of possession episodes. This structured oversight ensures that trance does not escalate into uncontrolled extremity, thereby preserving ritual authenticity while mitigating the risk of social disruption. In this configuration, trance becomes simultaneously sacred and staged—ritually meaningful yet performatively managed.

From the standpoint of Cultural Identity Theory, such moderation constitutes a negotiated balance between identity maintenance and relational orientation. Internally, trance is avowed as a defining marker of Jaranan's spiritual and cultural legitimacy. Externally, however, dominant audiences may ascribe stigmatizing interpretations to intense possession practices. By reframing trance as culturally disciplined and aesthetically refined, Jaranan Thik recalibrates identity salience, shifting its public image from being perceived as "wild" to being recognized as *berbudaya* (cultured) and artistically accomplished. This dynamic illustrates how Jaranan Thik strategically manages adverse social ascriptions without relinquishing its ritual foundations, transforming a potentially marginalizing feature into a renewed source of cultural legitimacy.

3.2.4. Religious Symbolic Alignment through “Brandal Loka Jaya”

Another notable finding pertains to the strategic deployment of Islamic symbolic affiliation by the urban-based Jaranan Thik ensemble Brandal Loka Jaya, chaired by Nur Salam. The designation *Brandal Loka Jaya* is locally linked to the early appellation of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the revered Wali Songo figures instrumental in the Islamization of Java. By invoking a personality deeply embedded in Javanese-Islamic historical memory, the group situates its artistic identity within a legitimized religious and cultural genealogy. This symbolic positioning is further consolidated through its organizational affiliation with the local branch (*Pimpinan Anak Cabang*) PAC Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (GP Ansor) in Ponorogo.

According to Muhibbudin, Chairman of GP Ansor Ponorogo, Brandal Loka Jaya functions not merely as a vehicle of popular entertainment but as a strategic medium of cultural *da'wah*, particularly in engaging youth constituencies and grassroots communities. He emphasized that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has historically embraced cultural expression as a legitimate channel for religious articulation rather than opposing it, stating that NU has consistently preserved, guided, and infused cultural practices with normative values. Within this framework, Brandal Loka Jaya is positioned as a culturally grounded expression of Ansor's outreach, aligned with the theological orientation of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja). This articulation underscores the ensemble's dual positioning as both an artistic collective and a religiously embedded platform of moral engagement.

Given that Jaranan Thik has historically been associated with trance and ritual elements that may generate ambivalence within certain Islamic discourses, Brandal Loka Jaya's foregrounding of Islamic symbolism and institutional affiliation serves to reduce the tension between avowed cultural identity and external religious ascription. This strategy illustrates how religious alignment operates as a mechanism of moral and social legitimation, enabling Jaranan Thik to sustain cultural continuity while negotiating congruence with dominant religious values in the urban sociocultural context of Ponorogo.

3.3. Aesthetic Integration and the Negotiation of Identity Salience

Another significant finding pertains to the aesthetic integration of Reyog and Jaranan within a unified performative configuration. This convergence transcends mere artistic experimentation and constitutes a strategic negotiation of identity salience within Ponorogo's stratified cultural hierarchy. By co-presenting Reyog and Jaranan on the same stage, performers actively reconfigure symbolic distinctions, repositioning Jaranan not as a subordinate or competing tradition, but as an interdependent element within a shared regional narrative framework.

This aesthetic strategy is particularly evident in the performance practices of Nogo Baru Klinthing and Putro Purbo Legowo, both of which incorporate the *kendang* Reyog as the principal accompanying instrument. Given the instrument's strong symbolic association with Reyog as Ponorogo's dominant cultural form, its adoption generates auditory continuity and embeds Jaranan within the established sonic repertoire of regional heritage. A more explicit mode of integration is observed in the performative model of Prawiro Gati Taruno. As articulated by its leader, Imam, the staged fusion of Reyog and Jaranan is framed as a dramatization of the canonical narrative in which the cavalry forces of Klana Sewandono confront the troops of Prabu Singabarong, as depicted in the Bantarangin variant of the Reyog legend. By enacting this episode within a single performative space, the ensemble effectively collapses symbolic boundaries between the two traditions and rearticulates Jaranan as an organic extension of Reyog's mythic cosmology.

This integrative staging exemplifies how identity negotiation may be enacted through aesthetic convergence. Rather than asserting autonomy through differentiation, Jaranan Thik advances its cultural legitimacy by embedding itself within a shared mythological and performative continuum, thereby transforming hierarchical marginality into relational incorporation within the dominant symbolic order.

3.3.1. Modern Stage Modification and Generational Repositioning

Another salient finding concerns the modernization of stage production in Jaranan Thik performances. Numerous ensembles now disseminate their performances through live-streaming

platforms such as YouTube, thereby extending their reach beyond local audiences and repositioning Jaranan within digitally mediated cultural spheres. The adoption of digital sound systems has become integral to this transformation, particularly in enhancing the clarity, balance, and resonance of *gending* (musical compositions), rendering them more acoustically refined and appealing to contemporary audiences. Furthermore, the incorporation of multicolored stage lighting and advanced visual effects has significantly altered the performative ambiance, generating a more immersive and spectacle-oriented aesthetic experience.

In addition, performances increasingly employ structured stage configurations, including safety barriers and standardized technical equipment, reflecting alignment with contemporary event management practices. Night-time staging has become more prevalent, both in accordance with prevailing entertainment patterns and to optimize the visual impact of lighting technologies. Several groups have also experimented with integrating contemporary musical elements, including DJ-based arrangements, as a strategy to attract broader and younger audiences. Consequently, Jaranan Thik performances have become increasingly resonant with youth demographics accustomed to digitally enhanced and visually dynamic modes of entertainment.

These modifications signal a strategic recalibration of identity salience toward modernity, adaptability, and media responsiveness. While the ritual core and choreographic foundations of the tradition remain intact, the aesthetic framing is deliberately rearticulated to align with contemporary cultural sensibilities. Rather than constituting a rupture with tradition, this process of modernization illustrates how cultural identity is co-constructed in relation to generational expectations and evolving media ecologies. Through technological incorporation and aesthetic innovation, Jaranan Thik negotiates its continued relevance within a transforming cultural landscape while preserving its foundational ritual identity.

3.3.2. Discursive, Institutional, and Governmental Recognition

A further significant finding pertains to the progressive institutionalization and governmental recognition of Jaranan Thik within Ponorogo's formal cultural framework. In 2017, Jaranan Thik was presented as the opening performance of the 24th National Reyog Festival—an event historically centered on Reyog as the region's principal cultural emblem. This initiative, led by Yuli Rohmawati of the Putro Purbo Legowo ensemble, marked a notable symbolic shift. Although the performance was limited to approximately eight minutes and supported by modest funding from the Department of Tourism (approximately IDR 700,000), its inclusion represented a meaningful repositioning of Jaranan Thik from a peripheral folk expression to a formally acknowledged component of Ponorogo's cultural agenda.

Subsequently, Jaranan Thik extended its visibility beyond regional platforms through participation in the International Mask Dance Festival in 2019, thereby entering broader national and transnational performance circuits. Concurrently, the formal establishment of the Ikatan Seni Jaranan Thik Ponorogo (ISJTP) in 2017—and its consolidation of approximately 75 affiliated groups by 2019—further institutionalized the tradition as a coordinated cultural entity. The creation of ISJTP enabled collective representation, organizational coordination, and structured engagement with governmental and cultural policy institutions, thereby strengthening its capacity for institutional negotiation.

Institutional legitimacy was further reinforced in 2020 with the formal designation of Lisdyarita as the *biyung* (symbolic patron) of Jaranan Thik Ponorogo. Her subsequent appointment as Acting Regent of Ponorogo in 2026 intensified the symbolic and political proximity between Jaranan Thik and regional authority structures. From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, these developments reflect a transformation in external ascription: Jaranan Thik is increasingly categorized not as a marginal or subordinate tradition but as an integral element of Ponorogo's officially recognized cultural repertoire. This discursive and institutional alignment illustrates that identity negotiation extends beyond aesthetic performance into the domains of policy formation, governance, and symbolic power, thereby enabling Jaranan Thik to attain structural legitimacy within a historically Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy.

3.4 Discussion

The findings indicate that Jaranan Thik negotiates its position within Ponorogo's Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy through a patterned configuration of symbolic alignment, structural recalibration, and institutional engagement. Rather than directly contesting Reyog's symbolic dominance, Jaranan Thik communities strategically reposition themselves within the same cultural universe. The appropriation of terms such as "Reyog Pegon," the reiteration of shared mythological narratives, and the incorporation of Reyog-associated musical elements collectively demonstrate a recalibration of identity salience—from oppositional differentiation toward relational proximity. From the vantage point of Cultural Identity Theory, these practices reduce the disjunction between avowal and ascription, enabling Jaranan Thik to preserve internal coherence while accommodating externally structured cultural hierarchies. Identity thus emerges not as a static essence, but as a communicatively negotiated construct shaped by contextual contingencies and power asymmetries.

At the performative level, the moderation of trance practices and the stylistic transition from Jaranan Buto to the more socially sanctioned Senterewe form reveal a negotiated equilibrium between identity maintenance and relational orientation. Although trance remains a core ritual signifier, its manifestation is reframed as disciplined and culturally refined rather than excessive or transgressive. This recalibration aligns with Co-Cultural Communication Theory's conception of strategic adaptation within unequal systems, wherein marginalized groups selectively modify communicative practices to mitigate risk and enhance legitimacy. Crucially, such modifications do not signify cultural erosion; instead, they exemplify hybrid identity formation, in which processes of assimilation and preservation coexist. Jaranan Thik thus demonstrates how traditional communities may engage in adaptive recalibration without relinquishing symbolic authenticity.

At the institutional level, the inclusion of Jaranan Thik in official festivals, the formal establishment of the Ikatan Seni Jaranan Thik Ponorogo, and affiliations with religious and governmental institutions collectively reconfigure its external ascription—from marginal folk expression to recognized cultural entity. These developments suggest that identity negotiation extends beyond aesthetic adaptation into structural and policy arenas. Accordingly, this study broadens the analytical reach of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory by situating them within localized cultural hierarchies, illustrating that identity negotiation unfolds not only in migratory or organizational contexts but also within intra-cultural power configurations. The case of Jaranan Thik underscores that cultural sustainability in plural societies is contingent upon communicative agency, wherein adaptation, symbolic alignment, and affirmation operate as interdependent strategies for securing cultural legitimacy.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Jaranan Thik sustains its presence within Ponorogo's Reyog-centered cultural hierarchy not through passive persistence, but through deliberate and strategic communicative negotiation. By integrating Co-Cultural Communication Theory and Cultural Identity Theory, the analysis reveals that Jaranan Thik communities actively navigate the tension between avowal and ascription through symbolic alignment, the controlled reframing of ritual practices, aesthetic convergence, religious affiliation, and institutional engagement. Rather than positioning themselves in antagonistic opposition to Reyog, these groups selectively recalibrate identity salience—foregrounding shared myths, musical elements, and narrative frameworks while maintaining distinctive ritual and performative characteristics.

The moderation of trance practices, the strategic use of the term "Reyog Pegon," the incorporation of Reyog-associated musical instruments, the articulation of Islamic symbolic affiliation, and increasing participation in state-sponsored cultural events collectively constitute a patterned strategy of negotiated legitimacy. These practices do not indicate cultural erosion; instead, they exemplify hybrid identity formation, wherein relational orientation and identity maintenance operate concurrently. In this respect, Jaranan Thik illustrates how processes of assimilation and accommodation may function as communicative resources for preserving cultural continuity without compromising symbolic distinctiveness.

Ultimately, the findings underscore that cultural marginality within localized hierarchies is not a static or predetermined condition, but a fluid positionality shaped through communicative action. The case of Jaranan Thik extends the analytical application of Cultural Identity Theory and Co-Cultural Communication Theory to the domain of traditional performing arts, demonstrating that identity negotiation unfolds not only in migratory or organizational settings but also within intra-cultural power configurations. By foregrounding communicative agency, this study highlights how traditional art communities can strategically navigate dominant symbolic orders, attain institutional recognition, and sustain cultural legitimacy within plural societies.

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