



Harmony of Tradition and Modernity: The Acculturation of Kejawen Culture in Malang City from the Perspective of Urban Society.

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Abstract *This study aims to analyze the process of acculturation between Kejawen culture and modernity within the urban society of Malang City. Amid the currents of globalization and urbanization, Kejawen traditions face the challenge of maintaining their existence without losing their core values. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document studies involving community leaders, youth, and cultural practitioners. The findings reveal that acculturation occurs harmoniously through symbolic transformation, revitalization of cultural practices, and the utilization of digital media. Kejawen culture continues to thrive by adapting to the modern context while preserving its spiritual meaning and embedded local wisdom. This study emphasizes the importance of community-based preservation strategies and the integration of local cultural values into multicultural education as efforts to strengthen cultural identity amid societal changes.*

Keywords: *Cultural acculturation, Kejawen, modernity, urban society*

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INTRODUCTION

The progression of time, marked by modernization and globalization, has significantly impacted the socio-cultural life of urban communities. Malang City, as one of the major cities in East Java, is no exception to the wave of modernity that influences various aspects of life, including culture. Amidst rapid urban development and lifestyle transformation, local traditions such as *Kejawen* continue to assert their presence. *Kejawen*, a belief system and cultural values rooted in Javanese tradition, is characterized by its spirituality, harmony with nature, and distinctive local wisdom. On the other hand, the urban society of Malang now lives in an atmosphere dominated by modern rationality, advanced technology, and a globalized lifestyle.

Modernity is often perceived as a threat to the sustainability of traditional cultures. However, in certain contexts, it may give rise to processes of acculturation that foster harmony between the two. Malang, known as a city of education and a cultural tourism destination, possesses dynamic social diversity, making it a compelling social laboratory for examining the interaction between *Kejawen* culture and modern values. According to data from the Malang City Statistics Agency (BPS 2023), the urban population in Malang has increased annually, accompanied by a shift toward more modern

cultural consumption patterns. Nevertheless, various *Kejawen* practices such as *selamatan* rituals, *slametan bumi*, and Javanese spiritual-based alternative healing continue to be maintained within the community, albeit in transformed forms.

Previous studies have highlighted the dynamics of *Kejawen* culture in the modern era. Wahyudi and Lestari (2021) found that *Kejawen* has undergone a process of re-actualization in urban life through symbolic and ritual adaptation. Meanwhile, Prasetyo and Nurhadi (2020) revealed the dual identity of modern Javanese society, navigating between traditional values and global demands. Rahmawati (2022) emphasized the role of cultural communities in preserving *Kejawen* values in urban areas. In addition, Santosa (2020) argued that acculturation is not merely a form of resistance, but also a creative process through which local cultures give rise to new expressions that align with contemporary contexts. This aligns with the findings of Fitriani and Nugroho (2021), who noted that urban youth continue to adopt *Kejawen* values in more symbolic and selective ways. Sari (2023) also affirmed that *Kejawen* culture persists through digital media and spiritual community activities. Lastly and Utami (2021) suggested that the sustainability of *Kejawen* culture depends on an ongoing process of social negotiation between older and younger generations.

Based on this background, the present study aims to explore the process of cultural acculturation between *Kejawen* and modernity in the everyday lives of urban communities in Malang City. Specifically, this research seeks to understand the forms of harmony that emerge between tradition and modernity, the factors that influence the persistence of *Kejawen* culture, and how urban residents negotiate their cultural identity in a modern context. The uniqueness of this research lies in its contextual qualitative approach that positions Malang as a distinctive social space where *Kejawen* tradition and urban modernity converge. Few studies have specifically examined cultural acculturation from the perspective of urban society with a focus on Malang. This study is expected to contribute to the discourse on local culture in the context of social transformation in the modern era and serve as a reference for the development of social and cultural education relevant to current societal dynamics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to explore in-depth the process of cultural acculturation of *Kejawen* in the urban community of Malang. This approach was chosen because it can capture the complex social and cultural dynamics through direct interaction between the researcher and the research subjects. Qualitative research is interpretive and aims to understand the meaning behind social phenomena from the participants' perspectives, which aligns with the objectives of this study (Moleong, 2021; Khairunnisa and Suryadi, 2023). The descriptive qualitative method allows the researcher to describe and analyze the phenomenon of *Kejawen* cultural acculturation contextually and deeply without intervening with the objects of study. According to Sugiyono (2021), this method is effective for examining phenomena that are natural and cannot be manipulated, such as cultural mixing and the process of internalizing traditional values in urban society.

The research is conducted in Malang City, East Java, chosen for its unique characteristics as an urban area with a strong Javanese cultural background. Malang is known as a city of education and tourism, experiencing intensive modernization while still preserving local cultural heritage, including the enduring *Kejawen* practices in daily life Santosa and Hakim (2023). The existence of cultural communities, historical sites, and spiritual activities related to *Kejawen* makes Malang an ideal site for studying the acculturation between tradition and modernity.

The research subjects consist of three main groups. First, community leaders and cultural experts who have a deep understanding and experience of the values and practices of *Kejawen*. They serve as the primary sources for understanding how *Kejawen* culture is preserved, transformed, and passed on. Second, the urban youth of Malang who are an important indicator in examining how traditional values remain relevant and internalized in their lives. Third, the general public of Malang,

who are both actors and witnesses in the interaction between traditional culture and modernity in public and private spaces.

Data collection techniques in this study use methodological triangulation, combining in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews are conducted with community leaders, Kejawen cultural practitioners, and youth representatives. This technique allows the researcher to obtain rich, narrative, and layered qualitative data that reflect the participants' subjective experiences and personal reflections on the acculturation phenomenon Creswell and Poth (2018). Participatory observation is carried out by the researcher directly engaging in cultural activities such as slametan rituals, ruwatan, Kejawen meditation, or spiritual community activities in Malang. The goal is to gain a contextual understanding of how cultural practices are carried out and how modern elements are incorporated and accepted in these activities. The researcher's direct presence in the field also helps capture non-verbal, symbolic, and emotional aspects that cannot be explained only through interviews Denzin and Lincoln (2020). Documentation study is used to complement field data by exploring written documents, such as archives, books, articles, and digital content (videos, social media) related to Kejawen culture and cultural activities in Malang. This documentation helps the researcher trace the historical trajectory and dynamics of Kejawen culture over time and observe how the representation of this culture is constructed in modern public spaces.

The data analysis technique used is thematic analysis. This analysis is conducted through three main stages: data reduction, categorization, and drawing conclusions. First, the data collected from interviews, observations, and documentation is selected to identify relevant information focused on the research topic. Second, the data is grouped based on emerging themes during the data collection process, such as the meaning of Kejawen in modern life, cultural preservation strategies, and forms of acculturation. Third, the researcher synthesizes interpretations and draws conclusions based on relationships between the categorized themes. To maintain data validity, this study uses source triangulation. This technique involves comparing data from various informants and data types (interviews, observations, documentation) to ensure consistency and validity of the information. Additionally, the researcher also performs member checking, confirming preliminary findings with informants to ensure the researcher's interpretations align with the participants' perspectives and experiences.

Research ethics are also an important consideration. All participants will be provided with clear information about the purpose of the research and their rights as respondents, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher guarantees the confidentiality of participants' identities and maintains integrity in presenting data and research findings. In accordance with qualitative research guidelines, the research process is carried out reflectively, participatively, and openly to new meanings that may emerge during the research Neuman (2020).

RESULT

The preservation of Kejawen values amidst the rapid tide of modernity presents a complex phenomenon. Hadi Sutarjo, a prominent Kejawen spiritual leader in Malang, stated that values such as *eling lan waspada*, *sangkan paraning dumadi*, and *ngajeni* remain integral to the lives of the community, particularly in the outskirts or cultural communities. Traditional practices such as *slametan*, *tahlilan*, pilgrimages, and various ceremonial customs are still performed, albeit with adaptations to time, technology, and the needs of urban society. For instance, communication among community members now occurs largely through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This aligns with the findings of Suyanto and Subagya (2021), who identified a "digital retraditionalization" trend in Indonesia, where local values are communicated via digital media as an adaptation to modernity.

Ki Hadi emphasized that Kejawen is not rigid or exclusive but flexible enough to acculturate with the times. "Kejawen does not reject modernity. What is rejected is when modernity causes people

to forget their true identity." This analysis is consistent Geertz's, (2020) perspective, which explains that Kejawen, as a Javanese belief system, is more of an "ethos" rather than a dogmatic system and can transform according to the evolving socio-cultural context. Additionally, the emergence of urban spiritual communities such as contemporary *padepokan* (spiritual centers) and locally-based meditation movements offers new spaces for the preservation of Kejawen values. As Rahmawati (2022) observed, urban spiritual communities tend to revive traditional practices as a form of escape from the pressures of modern, fast-paced, and individualistic life.

An interesting finding from this study is the growing interest among the younger generation in Kejawen values, albeit in more flexible interpretations. Fadhila Ayu Ramadhani, a student of Social Studies Education, shared that she only realized that teachings such as *eling lan waspada* (awareness and caution) that she had been taught since childhood were part of Kejawen values. "At first, I thought it was just parental advice. But after attending college and learning about local wisdom, I realized it was part of our cultural identity." This finding aligns with research by Arifin and Setiawan (2020), which suggests that higher education can enhance students' reflective awareness of local culture, particularly in the context of Social Studies Education aimed at strengthening character and national identity.

Meanwhile, Arga Wirawan, a cultural content creator, utilizes social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to spread content about Kejawen philosophy. He noted that many of his followers are young urban individuals who seek meaning in life through reflecting on local values. "I raise philosophies like *sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe* (content in doing work without expecting reward), and people find it very relevant to their lives filled with pressure." In this regard, social media plays a new role in cultural transmission, as Kusnadi (2023) discussed, by allowing the reinterpretation of culture by younger generations through visually engaging and easily accessible forms of communication. However, this finding also reveals an understanding gap. Many young people only understand the outward aspects of Kejawen, such as rituals and symbols, without fully grasping their philosophical meanings. This highlights the importance of cultural education that is not only descriptive but also reflective.

Kejawen values are undergoing reinterpretation and contextualization in the face of modern life. Core principles such as *memayu hayuning bawana* (maintaining harmony with nature), *ngajeni* (respect), and *tri pramana* (thought, feeling, will) are now applied in the contexts of work ethics, urban ecology, and social relations. For example, Arga stated that the principle of *memayu hayuning bawana* is highly relevant to current global issues such as sustainability and climate crisis. He links this philosophy with eco-friendly lifestyles, such as the zero-waste movement and urban farming. "This philosophy provides a spiritual foundation for ecological movements. It's not just a trend, but a soul call to preserve nature." This is reinforced by the study of Wulandari and Prasetya (2021), which indicates that Javanese local wisdom can serve as a foundation for environmental education in large cities if presented with a participatory and contextual approach.

Similarly, the value of *sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe* is understood in the modern workplace as an ethos of selfless work, oriented toward collective contribution. This concept contrasts with the individualistic culture often dominating the professional sectors in urban areas. In the context of education, the principle of *cipta, rasa, karsa* is used by Fadhila as a framework for developing project-based learning media that is humanistic and reflective. This value enriches educational approaches that emphasize not only cognitive aspects but also affective and psychomotor elements, as encouraged by the Independent Curriculum Kemdikbudristek (2022). Overall, Kejawen values prove to be not only relevant but also serve as an alternative ethical system amidst the value disruptions faced by urban society. This transformation reflects the concept of "living tradition," where culture is alive and continuously changes organically Hobsbawm (2020).

The role of education, particularly in Social Studies Education, is highly strategic in bridging tradition and modernity. Ki Hadi and two young informants emphasized that education should not

separate global and local knowledge, but rather integrate them into a productive cultural dialogue. Ki Hadi stated that education should focus more on experience and practice rather than lectures or memorization. He suggested methods such as project-based learning (PJBL), cultural exploration, or intergenerational dialogue. "Invite students to speak with cultural figures, practice culture directly, or create works based on Kejawen values. It's much more meaningful."

This approach is supported by research from Setyaningrum (2022), which shows that learning based on local culture can enhance students' cultural identity and promote tolerance in a multicultural context. Fadhila also stated that Social Studies Education should teach culture as something alive, not a dead heritage. She designed a college assignment to create digital content about Javanese philosophy in daily life, which yielded positive results, as many students felt more personally connected to the material. Meanwhile, Arga added that involving local cultural practitioners in formal education processes could be an effective way to transmit values contextually and relevantly. He proposed collaboration between schools and cultural communities to create interactive and transformative learning programs. The importance of education as a medium for cultural harmony is further reinforced by the glocalization approach in Social Studies Education—combining global perspectives with local wisdom Suastra (2020). In this way, students not only understand the world but also themselves within the context of their distinctive local culture.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to understand the dynamics of Javanese cultural acculturation in the context of urban society in Malang, with a focus on the processes of preservation, reinterpretation, transformation of values, and the role of education in the continuity of local culture. The research findings show that this acculturation process is complex, involving various social actors and influenced by technological advancement and globalization of values. In this context, Javanese culture not only survives as heritage but also transforms into an active social asset within modern society.

First, the process of preserving Javanese culture shows an adaptive tendency amid social change. Community leaders continue to preserve various traditions such as *selamatan*, *ruwatan*, and *tahlilan*, with modifications according to the needs of the times. This adaptation reflects the flexibility of culture, allowing Javanese values to persist in urban society. Putra and Lestari's (2021) study emphasizes that the preservation of traditional culture today requires adaptation in form and medium of delivery to remain relevant. In this regard, the use of social media to spread documentation of traditions becomes a strategic step that bridges the digital space with local values. Furthermore, community-based approaches in preserving traditions strengthen social solidarity as a form of resistance against the atomization of urban society Suryani (2020).

Second, the reinterpretation of Javanese values by the younger generation is an essential part of the acculturation process. The younger generation in Malang tends not to view Javanese culture merely in its sacred-ritualistic form, but also as a source of contextual values. Values such as "*nnglurug tanpa bala, menang tanpa ngasorake*" or "*sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe*" are reinterpreted as guiding principles for modern social interactions, such as empathy, collaboration, and the spirit of mutual cooperation in the workplace. This indicates a process of reinterpretation of traditional values into contemporary ethical principles that are pragmatic and egalitarian Yuliana (2022). In line with this, the younger generation utilizes digital platforms to create creative content on local culture, such as short videos, infographics, and podcasts discussing the philosophy of Javanese culture. This becomes a new form of dynamic and interactive cultural expression.

The transformation of Javanese cultural values also reflects a progressive direction. Not only are they reinterpreted, but Javanese values also undergo a functional shift in urban society. For example, the principle of "*memayu hayuning bawana*" is interpreted as a moral call to protect the environment. Youth communities in Malang integrate this principle into activities such as urban farming, waste management, and local-based environmental awareness campaigns. This phenomenon

affirms the role of culture as an instrument of ecological education Ramadhan and Fatimah (2023). This transformation occurs organically as public awareness of environmental crises grows, highlighting the importance of returning to local values that teach harmony with nature. On the other hand, the spiritual values of Javanese culture are also transforming into ethical guidelines for professional life, such as honesty, responsibility, and selfless devotion Nugroho and Setiawan (2021).

In the educational context, Javanese culture is beginning to be integrated into the learning process through a local wisdom approach. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum offers significant opportunities for social studies teachers to incorporate local values into teaching themes. The research findings indicate that students involved in culture-based project activities, such as documenting local traditions, interviewing cultural figures, and exploring cultural sites, demonstrate a deeper understanding of their cultural identity. This aligns with the contextual learning approach, which emphasizes the relevance of learning materials to students' social and cultural environments Fitriani and Hidayat (2022). Through this approach, Javanese values are not merely introduced as historical material but are internalized as behavioral guidelines in social life.

In addition to formal education, the learning of cultural values also takes place in informal spheres, such as within families and communities. Families, as the smallest social unit, play a crucial role in transmitting Javanese values through oral traditions, daily life practices, and exemplary behavior. Meanwhile, cultural communities and community leaders act as guardians of values, connecting younger generations to their cultural roots. The synergy between formal and informal education is key to sustaining local values amidst the global cultural homogenization Wulandari and Prasetyo (2023).

This discussion shows that the process of Javanese acculturation is not merely a resistance to modernity but an active effort to reformulate cultural values to align with the dynamics of the times. Tradition and modernity do not exist in a dichotomy that negates each other, but in a dialectic that complements each other. In the context of urban society in Malang, Javanese culture not only survives as symbolic heritage but also becomes a cultural resource that enriches social life. This study demonstrates that the success of acculturation is largely determined by the openness of society to intergenerational dialogue and institutional support in the form of inclusive education and cultural policies.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the sustainability of Javanese culture requires more strategic policy interventions. Local governments can initiate cultural revitalization programs through annual festivals, incentives for cultural communities, and the integration of local culture into tourism development. Additionally, educational institutions need to develop curricula that provide space for exploring local culture as part of strengthening character and national identity. Cross-sector collaboration, involving academics, government, indigenous communities, and the younger generation, is an essential prerequisite for building a resilient cultural ecosystem. Ultimately, this research shows that Javanese culture is not just a story of the past but a living and evolving source of values. In an increasingly complex and digitalized world, values such as balance, harmony, and wisdom embedded in Javanese culture are crucial as ethical guides for social life. Local culture is not an obstacle to progress, but a moral foundation and identity that supports society in facing global challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the dynamics of Javanese cultural acculturation within the context of urban society in Malang, showcasing a complex and meaningful social process. Amidst the rapid currents of modernization, globalization, and digitalization, the urban society of Malang demonstrates a high adaptive capacity in preserving their cultural identity, particularly Javanese values, in a contextual and creative manner. The acculturation process occurring is not a form of total assimilation or the

domination of one culture over another, but a dialogical process that results in a synthesis of traditional and modern values.

Javanese culture, which is associated with spirituality, life harmony, and the relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator, has found new spaces for expression in modern society. Practices such as slametan, ruwatan, tirakat, and pilgrimage have not been entirely abandoned, but have undergone a transformation in form. For instance, slametan, which was traditionally performed within a community framework, is now also carried out in urban areas with adjustments to time and format, sometimes even disseminated via social media. This shows that the core values remain preserved, although their presentation has evolved with the times.

The findings also show that the cultural acculturation process in Malang is an active one, carried out by individuals and communities. Society does not passively accept modernity but selectively chooses, adapts, and even creates new forms of cultural practices that reflect local identity. This reflects a high level of cultural awareness and the community's ability to manage social change in a selective manner. This transformation also shows that modernity is not always a threat to local culture; rather, it can be an opportunity to strengthen the existence of local culture through innovation and revitalization. The involvement of various social actors is key to the continuity of this process. Traditional leaders, religious figures, artists, cultural communities, and the younger generation play strategic roles in preserving Javanese culture. They not only act as culture preservers but also as agents of change who can bridge traditional values with new social realities. For example, local artists and content creators use digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to introduce Javanese philosophy to a wider audience, especially millennials and Gen Z.

Practically, the findings of this research imply that the preservation of local culture must be carried out through a collaborative, cross-sector approach. Local governments, educational institutions, cultural communities, and the media need to collaborate to create inclusive and adaptive cultural expression spaces. Cultural preservation programs should not solely focus on ceremonial aspects but should also touch on educational, creative economy, and youth empowerment aspects. Digitalization of culture, the development of curricula based on local culture, and providing spaces for communities to innovate are crucial strategies in strengthening local culture in the modern era. Furthermore, the success of the Javanese cultural acculturation process in Malang can also serve as a model for other cities in Indonesia facing similar challenges. With an approach that does not negate tradition but revitalizes it in a new framework, society can build a strong and flexible cultural identity. This is essential for maintaining social unity and strengthening social cohesion amidst cultural diversity and the pressures of global homogenization.

However, this study has limitations. The focus on one city and specific community may not represent the entire dynamic of Javanese culture in other regions. Therefore, further research with a broader geographical scope, comparative approaches between regions, or in-depth ethnographic approaches could enrich our understanding of the local cultural acculturation process in Indonesia. Additionally, future studies could explore the role of the younger generation more specifically in cultural preservation, as well as the relationship between Javanese values and contemporary social challenges such as environmental crises, moral degradation, and cultural radicalism. This research reaffirms that the harmony between tradition and modernity is not impossible, as long as there is cultural awareness, a willingness to adapt, and support from all parties. Javanese culture in Malang has proven that traditional values can coexist and even enrich modern life. Acculturation is not the end of local culture, but a new path to keep its spirit alive amidst a constantly changing world.

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