

## DEVELOPING KUDA KEPANG ARTS IN A NEW LAND

### *Mengembangkan Kesenian Kuda Kepang Di Daerah Baru*

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### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis bagaimana para migran Jawa di Distrik Kintap mengonseptualisasikan kreativitas mereka dalam mengembangkan seni tradisional Kuda Kepang. Suatu pertunjukan seni yang berasal dari berbagai daerah di Jawa. Membudidayakan seni tradisional di lingkungan baru menghadirkan tantangan karena konteks sosial budaya yang berbeda. Hal ini membutuhkan usaha dan konsep diri untuk membuat perubahan dan beradaptasi dengan lingkungan budaya yang baru. Selain itu, ada tantangan dalam menavigasi ekosistem seni pertunjukan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi etnografi sebagai cara untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana makna dalam konteks budaya terbentuk dalam interaksi sosial. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipan. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa pengalaman masa lalu berfungsi sebagai sumber inspirasi bagi para migran untuk menekuni seni Kuda Kepang. Pertunjukan ini memberikan katarsis pribadi dan sekaligus menghibur masyarakat. Peran anggota Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah sangat penting dalam menjembatani kepentingan pegiat seni Kuda Kepang di Kintab dengan pemerintah daerah Kalimantan Selatan, terutama dalam mengakses dana APBD (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah) untuk kegiatan pertunjukan seni dan pengadaan sarana pendukung lainnya.*

**Kata Kunci:** Kuda Kepang, etnografi, seni tradisional, adaptasi, Kintap

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe and analyze how Javanese migrants in the Kintap District conceptualize their creativity in developing the traditional art of Kuda Kepang. This art form originated in various regions of Java. Cultivating traditional arts in a new environment presents challenges due to differing socio-cultural contexts. It requires effort and self-concept to make changes and adapt to the new cultural environment. Additionally, there are challenges in navigating the performing arts ecosystem. This study employs an ethnographic methodology is a way to identify how meanings in cultural contexts are formed in social interactions. Data collection techniques used in-depth interviews and participant observation. The research reveals that past experiences serve as a source of inspiration for migrants to pursue the art of Kuda Kepang. These performances provide both personal catharsis and simultaneously entertain the community. The role of members of the regional People's Representative Council is very important in bridging the interests of Kuda Kepang art activists in Kintab with the

South Kalimantan regional government, especially in accessing funds from the APBD (Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget) for art performance activities and the procurement of other supporting facilities.

**Keywords:** *Kuda Kepang, ethnography, traditional arts, adaptation, Kintap*

## INTRODUCTION

Koentjaranigrat (1990) states that culture is fundamentally intertwined with human identity. Artistic expression serves as a prime example of this connection. Culture is inherent to individuals and fulfills various functions, including an existential one. Then, through culture, humans assert their presence as social beings. Cultural expressions reveal an individual's ethnic and regional origins. Sometimes, culture functions as a source of values that guide social interactions and even a means to attain happiness. Unsurprisingly, when individuals migrate, they carry their cultural identity and may even cultivate it further in their new environment. For instance, Balinese people outside Bali tend to maintain and develop cultural traditions within their communities in their new locale. Similarly, individuals of Chinese or Tionghoa descent remain connected to their ancestral traditions. Likewise, Javanese people often desire to nurture and expand upon the traditions and artistic expressions of their native regions in other places.

Several Javanese art forms have flourished beyond Java, including Wayang Kulit (shadow puppetry), Wayang Orang (human puppetry), Ludruk (folk theater), Reog (masked dance-drama), and Kuda Kepang. This research is particularly interested in the Kuda Kepang tradition practiced by migrants from Ponorogo, East Java, in the Kintab district of Tanah Laut Regency, South Kalimantan. Their artistic creativity not only entertains the community and fosters social interaction among fellow migrants but also seems to resonate with the "native" inhabitants of the region.

Various terms include Kuda Lumping, Jatilan, Jaran Kecak, Jaran Cenggo, and more known as Kuda Kepang. For this study, the term Kuda kepang will be used. The Kuda Kepang dance utilizes horses crafted from woven bamboo or other materials, shaped to resemble horses and adorned with artificial hair made from plastic cords or similar materials, often braided or coiled. These woven horse figures are further embellished with colorful paints and fabrics. Typically, Kuda Kepang performances depict scenes of mounted warriors, but some also incorporate elements of trance, invulnerability, and magical feats, such as eating glass or enduring whipping without harm. Kuda kepang is an integral part of the Reog performance. Though originating in Java, Indonesia, this dance has also been passed down through Javanese communities in North Sumatra (Joseph Ginting, 2015).

According to (Farrer, 2009), Kuda Kepang is an art form that blends dance and mysticism. The dance embodies the spirit of mounted warriors (cavalry) engaged in battle. The mystical dimension is manifested through extraordinary movements

performed in a trance state, such as consuming glass shards, swallowing fire, or husking coconuts with teeth. The performers are believed to be possessed by spirits or otherworldly entities, granting them supernatural abilities.

Research on Kuda Kepang practices in Johor Bahru revealed that the dance is rooted in "Kejawen" beliefs, involving entering a trance state before performing with the Kuda Kepang horses. According to Siti, this practice reflects pre-Islamic Javanese spiritual traditions (Ahmad et al., 2023).

With the widespread adoption of Islam among the Javanese population, including those who migrated to Malaysia and Singapore, Kuda Kepang dance has significantly adapted to align with Islamic values. These adaptations are the avoidance of intoxicating alcoholic beverages, as Khamr or other inebriating drinks are prohibited in Islam. Consequently, the portrayal of drunkenness in Kuda Kepang performances has evolved into a stylized representation, relying on artificial movements to mimic intoxication without actual inebriation. Furthermore, alcoholic beverages have been replaced with water or mineral water in these performances (Hardwick, 2014).

Upon establishing themselves in new regions, Kuda Kepang practitioners do not merely replicate the original artistic structure (properties, dance, and philosophy). Inevitably, adaptations are made to accommodate the new environment and prevent stagnation of the art form. (Kiswanto, 2019) refers to these changes as "multiple transformations." Within the TSB group, multiple transformations of Kuda Kepang dance between 1998 and 2014 have resulted in five distinct variations. Each phase of transformation involves a process of cultural dialogue through creativity, encompassing both inculcation and acculturation, ultimately leading to cultural synthesis. According to Kiswanto, this transformative process is influenced by internal factors originating from within the community and external factors arising from outside the community. The evolution and growth of Kuda Kepang performances are attributed to collective creativity within the group, significantly shaped by individuals' roles, attitudes, and goals, which are then embraced as collective needs. The external factors also play a crucial role. R.M. Soedarsono (2010) highlights that the flourishing of performing arts is heavily influenced by the socio-cultural conditions of the supporting community, including political shifts, economic challenges, changing audience preferences, and competition. These factors can lead to the emergence of new forms of Kuda Kepang dance within the community due to change and adaptation. The process of cultural dialogue through creativity would not occur without specific triggers. Thus, the changes made by adapting the form of the Kuda Kepang dance serve to fulfill new functions or values in response to challenges faced by the TSB group.

The artistic and cultural change characteristics described above resonate with the Kintap District, Tanah Laut Regency situation. According to (Syahdan & Salim, 2022), this district is characterized by its multi-ethnic population, comprising various ethnicities within and outside Kalimantan. These residents engage in diverse

occupations, including civil servants, traders, miners, farmers, and craftspeople. However, the most prevalent occupation is fishing. The fishermen in Kintap District can be categorized as coastal fishermen, characterized by their fishing range within zones IA and IB, with maximum distances of 2 miles and 4 miles from the coast, respectively (Regulation of the Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries of the Republic of Indonesia Number 71, 2016). Their identity as traditional coastal fishers underscores the need for targeted support, such as access to knowledge and technology, to bolster their fishing capacity.

The central problem of this research revolves around the gap between the artists' desire for Kuda Kepang to remain vibrant and serve as a medium of entertainment, contributing aesthetic value to social life, and the reality of its existence in a new environment with pre-existing artistic and cultural traditions. Additionally, social changes, particularly the advent of personal communication media like cell phones, have reduced direct interaction among people as communication increasingly occurs through these media. It poses a challenge for traditional artists to promote and attract audiences to Kuda Kepang performances. Kuda Kepang, as a performing art, relies on direct audience appreciation. It presents a significant challenge for Kuda Kepang practitioners, who must navigate creative innovation to ensure their performances remain engaging and eagerly anticipated .

One of the relevant literature on diaspora is a book written by Lisandhi (2021). In this book, it is stated that diaspora is everyone who lives abroad and their descendants. They carry out creativity and connectivity with their home country community to increase shared prosperity. A redefinition of the meaning of diaspora is also carried out, namely that diaspora is no longer enough to be seen only from its essence and purity, but on the recognition of diversity or heterogeneity with the concept of "identity" that lives in their minds and with the spirit of hybridity.

The novelty of the concept of diaspora in this article is the difference in the place of human migration. The diaspora referred to in this article, their migration is still in one country which is only on a different island. The diaspora still shows the same characteristics, namely that both require an adaptation process in terms of self-concept, collaboration, and technical adaptation such as the use of musical instruments taken from the practice of ethnic arts or other communities.

The first challenge traditional arts face is their inability to compete with modern culture, which thrives alongside the attributes of modernity. Traditional arts lose appeal as they drift further from contemporary attributes, appearing "outdated." Modern arts captivate audiences through their impressive visual attributes, intertwined with new media (Redi Panuju, 2020).

Another challenge traditional arts confront in the era of modernization is their struggle to compete with the attributes of modernization, which tend to transform from empirical to artificial. (Crouch, 2010) defines this artificiality as akin to what Jurgen Habermas

describes as a visually oriented constructed reality. This constructed reality, created by information technology and graphics, represents reality. Crouch even suggests that this constructed reality is perceived as accurate.

In our society, we encounter a phenomenon similar to Crouch and Habermas's. Most of our time is spent interacting not directly with our environment but through a mediated public sphere represented in the cyber world. People assume that interaction on social media no longer requires face-to-face communication. Interaction persists, but it tends to be mediated. People communicate more through WhatsApp groups than through direct meetings. Consequently, direct contact becomes rare, yet its scarcity makes it something to be longed for.

Crouch's study in China revealed several findings that can be considered research propositions. Traditional arts in China have undergone significant metamorphosis, with performances of traditional arts like the Barongsai decreasing in frequency. The Barongsai can still be enjoyed through YouTube channels, videos, films, or visual posts on other social media platforms.

External technological factors have influenced how practitioners perceive their traditional arts. It begins with feelings of inferiority, reinforced by the dominance of modern visual arts, ultimately impacting societal appreciation for traditional forms. Sigit Mashyuril (2009) observed this in his thesis on the Cobrosiswo traditional art form in Margorejo Tempel, Sleman, Yogyakarta, established in 1972. Before the ubiquity of gadgets, the community enjoyed weekly performances held in public squares or organized by the community for celebratory purposes such as wedding receptions, circumcision ceremonies, or specific rituals that attract public participation within a locale. After the 2000s, with the rise of personalized media, such performances became rare.

Observing the changes in the social ecology where Kuda Kepang exists, it is unrealistic for Kuda Kepang to develop solely through its own identity. There is even resistance from certain perspectives. Inevitably, Kuda Kepang must collaborate with other art forms to reach and be loved by the community. Research by (Rudianto et al., 2022) demonstrates the importance of collaboration between art forms to accommodate existing differences. Rudianto studied the traditional Reyog Ponorogo art form. In this research, Reyog Ponorogo could coexist with the Kebo-bule art form and product-based arts like souvenirs.

The question is whether Kuda Kepang practitioners realize the necessity of collaborating with other art forms for their existence and survival. Further, are all parties aware of reformulating the concept of cultural communication? The decline of traditional arts like Reog is a communication issue. The diminishing of cultural/artistic values from one generation to the next is a problem of how messages are conveyed and individuals' awareness to understand, accept, and ultimately embrace them. According to Panuju (2022), the scope of cultural communication encompasses two aspects. First

is Cultural Communication, which explores how a culture communicates itself so it has functioned within its society. This context is often discussed in Cultural Anthropology research traditions. Second, Communication culture examines communication as a culture itself. A popular book on this topic is by (Carey, 1992), which explains communication's function and existence within specific cultural situations. This second context shares similarities with the study of the position of culture in communication, as written by Aldo De Lozio (2001).

Communication participation lies within social participation, as community involvement in various activities always involves communication, whether for learning (socialization), mobilization, or interaction to find solutions to problems within the community. According to Isbandi (2007), community participation is the community's involvement in identifying problems and potentials within the community, choosing and making decisions about alternative solutions to address problems, implementing efforts to overcome problems, and evaluating the changes that occur.

Traditional arts represent community creativity, playing a crucial role in social change. They can serve as references for thinking, attitudes, and actions. Economic development merely results in the accumulation of material possessions seen as temporary, while political development only yields democracy and power. However, art is intangible, yet it influences social well-being and happiness. Art, like religion, converts objects and power into feelings that bring joy and acceptance to the community. Hence, art is also part of the government's development programs.

One form of community participation in the arts is appreciation. This participation manifests in involvement, acceptance, evaluation, and even willingness to sacrifice (materially or morally) to sustain something considered communal property (Hermansyah, 2019).

This study employs a qualitative research approach, also called a "naturalistic" approach by (Rukajat, 2018). This approach is characterized by the following: (1) data collection in natural settings, (2) the researcher as the primary research instrument, (3) a focus on detailed description, (4) an emphasis on process, (5) interpretation of behaviors and actions within their cultural context, (6) prioritization of firsthand data, (7) highlighting contextual characteristics, (8) adopting an emic perspective (valuing the participants' viewpoints), (9) unobtrusive participation, and (10) ongoing analysis throughout the research process.

This research method utilized is an ethnography of communication. According to Semetko (2012), ethnography functions both as a research method and a theoretical assumption. It assumes that implicit cultural logic systematically organizes societies and ways of life. One of the tasks of ethnography is to uncover these implicit cultural logics that motivate and create filters for selecting and shaping meaningful interpretations. Ethnography aims to describe communities and subcultures from an insider's perspective. As a research method, the researcher learns how a community

thinks and acts as indigenous. Theory can emerge from the researcher's engagement with the data and their discoveries.

Informants were selected from among Kuda Kepang dance performers residing in the Kintab district of Tanah Laut Regency, South Kalimantan. Eleven individuals from various regions in Indonesia participated, including Yogyakarta, Banyuwangi, Ponorogo, and Boyolali.

Data collection involved observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, participant observation, and triangulation through focus group discussions. Qualitative descriptive analysis was employed. Data gathered from observations, interviews, documentation, and participant observation were transcribed and organized into data displays. Data reduction and theorization were then conducted, culminating in the drawing of conclusions. This data analysis technique follows the model developed by Miles and Huberman (1984), as cited in (Yuwanda et al., 2023).

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

This art form falls under the performing arts genre and is presented attractively to the general public, typically in open spaces. Kuda Kepang is a traditional Javanese dance portraying a group of warriors riding horses. According to Monika Proba, a Canadian art researcher based in Warsaw, Poland, the Kuda Lumping dance originates from Yogyakarta (Direktorat Sekolah Menengah Pertama Kemendikbudristek, 2023).

The different names associated with this art form are linked to the places where the community develops it. The name Kuda Lumping is commonly used in West Java, Jathilan Hamengkubuwono in Central Java and Yogyakarta, Kuda Kepang in Surabaya, Jaranan Sang Hyang in Bali, Jaranan Buto in Banyuwangi, and even Jaranan Turonggo Yakso in Trenggalek.

As quoted from Selasar.com, the Kuda Lumping dance's history remains uncertain. Numerous versions of its origins are circulating, and each version's truth or original source remains unclear.

The final version of the origins of Kuda Lumping is the most comprehensive one. It tells the story of a powerful king from Java (Sevilla Nouval Evanda, 2020).

The historical origins of Kuda Kepang remain uncertain, as described by (Verelladevanka Adryamarthanino & Nibras Nada Nailufar, 2021). While its exact genesis is unknown, various narratives have emerged, each offering a different perspective on its beginnings. One prevalent belief ties Kuda Kepang to the support of common people for Pangeran Diponegoro's cavalry in their resistance against the Dutch. Another version links the dance to the struggles of Raden Patah, aided by Sunan Kalijaga, against Dutch colonialism. Nevertheless, another interpretation sees Kuda Kepang as representing the Mataram troops' training exercises under Sultan Hamengkubuwono I in preparation for battles against the Dutch. Despite these diverse accounts, the true origins of Kuda Kepang remain elusive. However, its incorporation

of animistic beliefs suggests its existence might predate the Hindu-Buddhist era, possibly originating in ancient kingdoms.

According to cultural observer Emha Ainun Nadjib (1985), Kuda Kepang expresses the oppressed's turmoil. The dancers, ready to consume glass shards and adorned with thorny salak skins, seemingly comply with these acts that are impossible to avoid. This interpretation views such practices as political support for the marginalized.

Over time, Kuda Kepang has evolved into a testament to cultural fusion. It seamlessly collaborates with other art forms, such as Jaipong from West Java and its Banyuwangi adaptation. Notably, in Tulungagung, Kuda Kepang collaborates with Reog Ponorogo, resulting in "Reog Kendang." The performance of Reog Kendang is characterized by many narrative versions. One prominent version is the tale of Panji Klonon Swandon, which diverges significantly from the original narratives of Reog Ponorogo and Kuda Kepang. This version recounts the unwavering determination of a warrior from Bantarangin, a kingdom within the realm of Dhaha. Another distinct narrative centers around the eruption of Mount Kelud.

The Reog Kendang performance narrates the procession escorting the bride, Queen Kilisuci, to Mount Kelud to witness Jathasura's work firsthand. This art form primarily features an ensemble of Thifa or Jimbe drums integrated with Jaranan dance elements. Reog Kendang remains a prominent feature in events organized by the Tulungagung Regency Government (Wardani et al., 2020).

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Kuda Kepang has spread throughout Indonesia, following the migration routes of Javanese people, encompassing both transmigration and trade networks. Its reach extends beyond Indonesia's borders, flourishing in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and Suriname. This widespread presence highlights Kuda Kepang's remarkable adaptability to diverse ethnic contexts. In essence, Kuda Kepang exemplifies peaceful cultural assimilation, even integrating values from different religions, including Islam. It explains its prevalence in predominantly Muslim regions, as historian (Yulika, 2016) noted. Kosoh S (1994) eloquently narrates the history of traditional arts, including Kuda Kepang, and their harmonious coexistence with the spread of Islam in West Java.

The presence of Kuda Kepang can be traced overseas to Selangor, Malaysia. Beginning with the influx of migrants from the Ponorogo region of Java who settled on the Malay Peninsula, they inhabited Johor and Selangor in the 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Compared to other Javanese groups, the Ponorogo Javanese were particularly inclined to bring along their performing arts as a form of entertainment during their time on the Peninsula, including Reog, Jaranan, Wayang Kulit, Kompang, Wayang Wong, and others. The arrival of the Ponorogo Javanese was prompted by the request of the Sultanate of Johor and the Sultanate of Selangor, who were descendants of Zainal Abidin, the son of Khasan Besari of Ponorogo (Jaringan Santri, 2021).

Although it initially sparked controversy within the Johor State Fatwa Council due to concerns about Kuda Kepang containing elements of shirk (polytheism), the

persistence of Kuda Kepang enthusiasts eventually quelled the controversy, allowing the art form to continue and flourish. The arguments put forth by the Kuda Kepang proponents included its historical use by Sunan Kalijaga, a revered Wali Songo preacher in Java who was also of Ponorogo descent, as a means of Islamic da'wah (propagation), and the commitment of Kuda Kepang artists in Johor to preserve the tradition (Yayasan Warisan Johor, 2017).

The ability of Javanese culture to adapt to its surroundings reflects the steadfastness with which people uphold their cultural heritage. Like the Balinese, Chinese, and Malays, the Javanese maintain a collective solid identity wherever they reside while adapting to the local context. This is encapsulated in the Javanese saying "empan papan" or the Malay philosophy "di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung" (When in Rome, do as the Romans do). This adaptability is why the Javanese are readily accepted wherever they go. Cultural observer Emha Ainun Nadjib (2013) likens the Javanese to gold, which is valuable as an adornment and a stable commodity due to its strong character. He recounts the story of John McVey, an Indonesianist from Berkeley University, who typed an unpublished novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, creating a narrative about Kuda Kepang in Suriname: "Javanese people, wherever they are, remain Javanese; whatever they do, they are still Javanese."

Similar observations are found in foreign literature. In their book, Bart Barendregt and Els Bogaerts (2016) also highlight the existence of Kuda Kepang in Suriname, which they believe reflects the Javanese people's deep respect for their ancestors.

The data gathered through in-depth interviews and observations will be analyzed following the objectives of ethnographic research to create a constructivist portrayal shaped by the practitioners of Kuda Kepang. The selected informants offer specific interpretations based on their perceptions, past experiences, regional origins, and aspirations. The Kuda Kepang practitioners in the Kintap District exhibit diverse profiles. They are migrants from various regions, particularly Java: Yogyakarta, Banyuwangi, Ponorogo, Bojonegoro, Boyolali, and even Bandung (West Java). Generally, they already possess experience as Kuda Kepang practitioners in their hometowns. Some are second-generation residents of Kintap who feel compelled to pursue Kuda Kepang and follow in their families' footsteps. Others were drawn to it as spectators, developed a fondness for it, and eventually decided to become performers.

Past experiences in their hometowns emerged as a fundamental reason behind cultivating Kuda Kepang in Kintap. There is a longing to relive past experiences as meaningful or valuable activities. Several informants expressed that engaging in Kuda Kepang allows them to entertain themselves and others (the community). Self-entertainment can release frustrations from economic hardships and difficulties adapting to new social situations and conditions. According to Talcott Parsons, it is often called catharsis or psychological adaptation. From the structural-functionalism perspective, adaptation is one-way individuals within a collective achieve a new

equilibrium. Through adaptation, individuals can reduce anxiety, feelings of marginalization, and other negative emotions. They describe this condition using terms like "sumpek" (confined), "sunyi" (lonely), and "tersisih" (marginalized). Engaging in the art of Kuda Kepang creates a novel artistic medium for maintaining social relations and integration while simultaneously serving as a means of mobilization. The experience-based nature of this artistic activity, serving as both a source of the activity itself and a justification for its existence, aligns with communication theories that emphasize experience as a foundational element of communication. This concept is often called the "field of experience" within these theories. This finding serves as the central proposition of this research, underpinning the subsequent ethnographic construction of Kuda Kepang.

The above proposition aligns with Koentjaranigrat's (1995) migration theory, which states that the movement of people from one place to another is inseparable from the movement of culture. Migration, in its literal sense, is the movement of people. However, individuals within a society first establish their identity through values, norms, belief systems, and culture. When the physical body relocates, its culture inevitably accompanies it, unable to be replaced by a new one. Koentjaranigrat illustrates this by noting the tendency of Balinese migrants to cultivate their arts in new locations, demonstrating the inextricable link between people and their original culture. Similarly, individuals of Chinese, Minangkabau, or other ethnicities continuously identify with the values they bring from their homeland. Even Ponorogo migrants in Malaysia developed their Reog art, and Javanese in Lampung fostered the Wayang Kulit tradition. Understandably, Javanese migrants in South Kalimantan would also cultivate their Kuda Kepang. This orientation towards their original culture can be interpreted as honoring their ancestral land and ancestors; thus, when one longs for one's homeland, engaging in activities reminiscent of one's place of origin suffices.

Acknowledging that participating in Kuda Kepang makes them feel valued is an honest admission of the importance of their social function as individuals. They state they feel meaningful or valuable by entertaining the community and making themselves "important." That is why several informants expressed deep gratitude, even prostrating in gratitude, when the audience was satisfied with their performance. The audience's satisfaction can be seen through their applause after specific moments, then standing up and joining in the dance performed by the artists. Based on the informants' accounts, as recorded in the displayed data, the audience's joyful response is more pronounced when the performance combines Kuda Kepang dance with contemporary music like Campur Sari. Songs by the late Didi Kempot, such as Ambyar, Suket Teki, or Cidro, are particularly popular with the audience here. This situation demonstrates that Kuda Kepang has an excellent capacity for adaptation to other art forms present in the community. Moreover, the effects of this adaptation are not limited to older generations. Based on the researcher's observations in the field, many children imitate the dance

movements they have seen while playing. This situation is aptly explained by Albert Bandura's "Imitation" theory, which states that the effects of communication among children can lead to imitation. It is what the South Kalimantan Provincial Government, through the Culture and Tourism Office, has taken into consideration by issuing a circular to avoid scenes of eating glass shards (broken glass) and raw chicken, as it is feared that the community might imitate these actions under normal circumstances. Glass shards and raw chicken are typically consumed by Kuda Kepang performers when in a trance state.

Another interesting finding in this research is the absence of economic implications for Kuda Kepang's performance. According to the informants, the economic benefits are minimal. For instance, when measured by income generated from performances, they stated that payment from each performance is barely enough to cover the show's costs. Some even reported experiencing losses. However, they expressed their unwavering enthusiasm. Kuda Kepang artistry cannot yet be relied upon as a primary source of livelihood. It is an intriguing phenomenon, considering many social change theories position economic variables as drivers of social change. For example, David McClelland's N-Ach (need for Achievement) theory states that economic motives drive the drive for progress. Economic rewards become important in social change. However, in the case of Kuda Kepang artistry in Kintap, economic motivations can be superseded by the drive for self-entertainment, entertaining others, and the success of entertaining the community, leading to a sense of purpose and value. Nevertheless, they still hope Kuda Kepang artistry can attain economic value and become a livelihood. This optimism is contingent upon the government's involvement in fostering traditional arts, including Kuda Kepang. Kuda Kepang practitioners aspire for a dedicated performance venue akin to the Sri Wedari building in Solo during the 1980s, designated explicitly for Wayang Orang performances, or the Balai Kambang art building, also in Solo, dedicated to Srimulat performances. Their art building could generate income from ticket sales, sponsorships, and other sources. Another source of funding is expected from the local government budget, hence their hope for politicians committed to advocating for traditional arts funding within the Regional Budget, both in Kintap Regency and South Kalimantan Province.

Establishing a dedicated performance space would enable the government to facilitate regular events like the Kuda Kepang Festival. This platform could also serve as a forum for the government to disseminate information about its programs, utilizing the Kuda Kepang art form to communicate development initiatives.

Another notable finding is the communication patterns employed by Kuda Kepang groups to maintain integration (*silaturahmi*) and share inspiration. Both intra-group and inter-group communication exhibit three distinct patterns:

First, through social media, particularly WhatsApp, each group has a WhatsApp group as a communication medium among its members. An exciting aspect of

maintaining this shared medium is the democratic approach taken. It is evident from the excerpt of an informant's statement during an interview with the researcher, which illustrates the purpose of democratic communication within the WhatsApp group:

*"We utilize a culture of democracy. We have a WhatsApp group where we communicate and discuss everything. If I dominated this group, it would surely fall apart. They would not be satisfied and would feel disregarded. That is why we cultivate a democratic culture here. When everyone is satisfied, there is a sense of unity. Differences do not lead to chaos but become complementary. If we accommodate the members' ideas, they feel a sense of ownership and responsibility to maintain it." (Interview with Syahran, November 25, 2023)*

## **CONCLUSION**

This entertainment function has evolved into their artistic expression's primary focus and orientation. The ability of Kuda Kepang performances to entertain the community has become a measure of the migrants' existence, individually and as a group. When their performances captivate the audience, the migrants feel a sense of purpose and value. One indication of audience satisfaction is when they applaud, stand up, and even join in the dance. At such moments, the performers experience a profound sense of relief and gratitude to a higher power. To express this gratitude, they gesture prostration, kissing the ground.

Due to the dominant focus on entertaining themselves and the audience, other functions of Kuda Kepang performances, such as the economic aspect, are deemed less critical. Kuda Kepang is not yet a reliable source of income. Practitioners do not heavily rely on financial gains from their performances, recognizing that economic appreciation for this art form is still limited. The potential revenue from ticket sales is often insufficient to cover production costs. Nonetheless, they remain optimistic that the economic function will eventually develop. They aspire to one day have a dedicated art space for Kuda Kepang performances. It could be realized with the support of sponsors from the business or political sectors who are passionate about preserving this traditional art form. They also hope for government intervention through cultural preservation programs that allocate funds to construct art spaces in the regional budget at the Tanah Laut Regency and South Kalimantan Province levels.

The practitioners of Kuda Kepang express their hopes for state participation through mediation and facilitation in their artistic activities. They propose the organization of a Kuda Kepang Festival, similar to the annual Reog Festival held in Ponorogo Regency. Such an event, they believe, would not only serve as a platform for showcasing their art but also as a means to disseminate information about development programs, thereby transforming Kuda Kepang into a medium for development communication.

To ensure the continuity of this art form, the practitioners have undertaken several initiatives:

Firstly, they have adapted to the performance's tools, infrastructure, and processes. These changes are intended to align the art form with the current social context and meet the evolving expectations of the audience. These adaptations include modifying the traditional mantras to resonate with the dominant Islamic faith in Kintap. The performance begins with the recitation of the basmallah. Moreover, adaptations have been made to the accessories, incorporating symbols of modernity such as clothing, hats, and other adornments. The musical ensemble has also evolved. Originally dominated by the gamelan, it now includes guitar, keyboard, flute, and even drum band elements. These new instruments allow Kuda Kepang performances to collaborate with other art forms, such as Campursari music, Jaipongan dance, and others.

Secondly, they have established a WhatsApp group to facilitate communication and interaction among members, individually and collectively. Within this group, practitioners have agreed to nurture the art form through democratic communication, mutual sharpening, caring, and nurturing. No single party should dominate or feel superior. Everything is managed through deliberation and consensus. This democratic approach ensures that every member feels valued, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility.

Thirdly, they have formed the Kintap Arts and Culture Association. This institution is envisioned as a platform for articulating the aspirations of Kuda Kepang practitioners, both for internal improvement and for advocating their interests to the government.

Fourthly, The role of members of the regional People's Representative Council is very important in bridging the interests of Kuda Kepang art activists in Kintab with the South Kalimantan regional government, especially in accessing funds from the APBD (Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget) for art performance activities and the procurement of other supporting facilities.

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