



## Tracing the History and Cultural Dynamics of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang District, Malang Regency

Daifanny Aurelya Sugiono Putri<sup>1</sup>, Rizal Zibran<sup>2</sup>, Moch. Muslimin<sup>3</sup>, Nailul Fauziyah<sup>4</sup>

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### Correspondence:

[220102110044@student.uin-malang.ac.id](mailto:220102110044@student.uin-malang.ac.id)

### Affiliation:

Department of Social Studies  
Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and  
Teacher Training, Universitas Islam  
Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim  
Malang, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>  
[220102110044@student.uin-malang.ac.id](mailto:220102110044@student.uin-malang.ac.id)

Department of Social Studies  
Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and  
Teacher Training, Universitas Islam  
Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim  
Malang, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>  
[220102110038@student.uin-malang.ac.id](mailto:220102110038@student.uin-malang.ac.id)

Department of Social Studies  
Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and  
Teacher Training, Universitas Islam  
Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim  
Malang, Indonesia<sup>3</sup>  
[220102110014@student.uin-malang.ac.id](mailto:220102110014@student.uin-malang.ac.id)

Department of Social Studies  
Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and  
Teacher Training, Universitas Islam  
Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim  
Malang, Indonesia<sup>4</sup>  
[nailulfauziyah@uin-malang.ac.id](mailto:nailulfauziyah@uin-malang.ac.id)

### Abstract

The cultural practice of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang District has persisted for centuries, yet scholarly attention at the sub-district level remains limited. Existing studies generally examine Kuda Lumping as a Javanese performing art, but rarely explore how ritual structures, symbolic elements, and local historical narratives interact within a single community context. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the historical development and cultural dynamics of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang using an ethnographic approach grounded in ritual performance theory and cultural resilience frameworks. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving 11 key cultural actors, including community leaders, handlers, dancers, musicians, and village elders. Spradley's analytical model domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme analysis was applied to interpret cultural meanings embedded in the tradition. The findings reveal that Kuda Lumping in Ngantang, introduced in the 17th century through local historical figures, has undergone adaptive transformations while retaining core ritual elements such as offerings, prayers, and trance states (ndadi). These practices illustrate how the community negotiates continuity and change through symbolic performance. The study contributes to Javanese performance-ethnography literature by conceptualizing cultural adaptation within Kuda Lumping as a form of ritual resilience that enables the tradition to remain socially relevant in contemporary settings.

### Keywords:

Kuda Lumping; Ritual Performance; Cultural Resilience; Ethnography; Javanese Tradition.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Kuda Lumping often referred to as jaranan or jathilan is a Javanese folk art that combines elements of dance, music, and ritual in a cultural expression that represents spirituality, communal identity, and the relationship between humans and supernatural forces (Azizah Nurul Khasanah et al., 2024). In various Javanese communities, this performance is not only a form of entertainment, but also a means of reinforcing values of togetherness, strengthening social relationships, and maintaining historical awareness that has been passed down from generation to generation (Khasanah & Mufidah, 2023). In the context of Ngantang, Kuda Lumping has a position that goes beyond folk art; this tradition is part of the rhythm of community life, accompanying village rituals, celebrations of gratitude for agricultural yields, and even serving as a symbol of local wisdom that maintains the continuity of the community's social and spiritual values.

The uniqueness of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang becomes even more apparent when this tradition is viewed through a historical and anthropological lens. Various ritual elements such as offerings, prayers, opening prayers, and the trans or ndadi phase play a central role that demonstrates the depth of spiritual values behind the performance (Mukafi et al., 2024; Hardiarini & Firdhani, 2022). These stages not only reveal the relationship between humans and their ancestors and nature, but also provide an insight into how the community interprets the spiritual world in their daily lives. However, the penetration of modern culture, increased public access to digital media, and changing aesthetic preferences among the younger generation have driven a transformation in the format of the performance. The addition of modern instruments such as organs or bass drums, as well as the use of contemporary lighting, shows that the Ngantang community does not view tradition as static, but rather as a cultural practice that can be negotiated without losing its inherent sacred value.

Although many studies on Kuda Lumping have been conducted at the regional level in East Java, research targeting the dynamics of this tradition at the subdistrict level is still very limited (Falah & Zaki, 2022; Radhia, 2016). In fact, studies at the local level are crucial for understanding how a tradition is practiced and interpreted in a specific context whether through the experiences of the artists, intergenerational relationships, or the social structures that shape the development of the tradition. This gap in research underscores the novelty of this study, which presents an in-depth analysis of the history, ritual forms, social functions, and adaptation processes of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang Subdistrict. Thus, this study not only contributes to the literature on traditional performing arts but also broadens our understanding of how local communities preserve traditions amid the pressures of cultural change.

Based on this context, this study is guided by two main questions: (1) How did Kuda Lumping emerge and develop in Ngantang District? (2) How does this tradition reflect adaptive cultural resilience amid the process of modernization? These questions help to focus the research on two crucial dimensions, namely tracing historical aspects and analyzing the dynamics of cultural adaptation, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of how the people of Ngantang preserve, negotiate, and revive traditions in the present day.

To strengthen its analytical foundation, this study refers to a theoretical framework that views performances as ritual systems that reinforce collective solidarity and communicate cultural symbols, as described in anthropological studies of rituals. This framework is combined with the concept of cultural transmission, which emphasizes the importance of passing on values through intergenerational interaction, as well as the perspective of modern cultural adaptation, which highlights how communities adapt traditions to social and technological changes without losing their sacred roots. Through a combination of these three perspectives, this study seeks to understand Kuda Lumping in Ngantang as a living tradition that continues to evolve, survive, and transform, while affirming its position as an important part of the cultural identity of the community to this day.

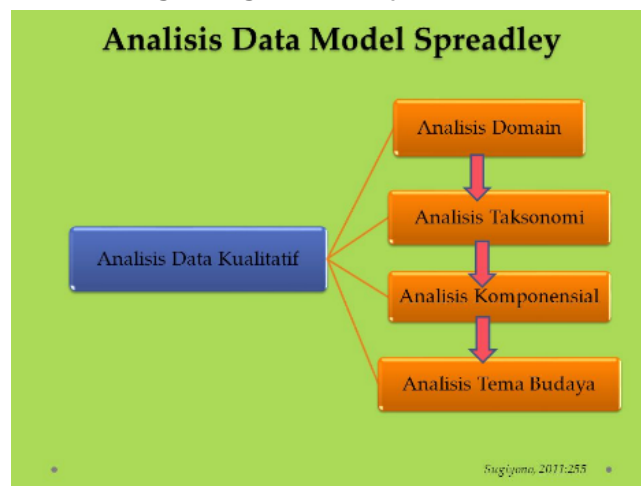
## **B. METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods to explore the meaning of life, ritual symbolism, and cultural dynamics inherent in the practice of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang District. Ethnography was chosen based on the need to understand the social experiences of the artists, the ritual structures they perform, and the value system that sustains the tradition from an emic perspective. This approach allows researchers to capture the meaning behind actions, narratives, and cultural symbols that cannot be reached through quantitative methods or brief observations. Thus, ethnography becomes the most relevant framework for revealing the depth of cultural practices and local interpretations that form the foundation for the sustainability of Kuda Lumping as a living tradition.

Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of performance archives. Participatory observation allowed researchers to be directly present in cultural activities, record social interactions, and understand the flow of rituals before, during, and after the performance. In-depth interviews were conducted with art

group leaders, dancers, trans shamans, gamelan musicians, village leaders, and regular audience members to explore their personal experiences, historical narratives, and understanding of the symbols and cultural rules that shape the structure of the performance. Documentation in the form of photographs, video recordings, and local archives was used to reinforce the historical context and support data triangulation.

Data analysis in this study used Spradley's model, which consists of four stages: domain analysis, taxonomy, component analysis, and cultural themes. However, its application was not mechanical; instead, this model was used reflectively to describe the symbolic structures and cultural patterns underlying the practice of Kuda Lumping. In the domain analysis stage, researchers identified main categories such as cultural actors, ritual symbols, musical instruments, and spiritual values involved in the performance. The taxonomy analysis stage then organized the structural relationships between categories to see the patterns of interaction and function of each element in the ritual. Component analysis explores the differences in meaning and role between cultural components, such as the varying tasks of dancers, shamans, and drummers in evoking trance or maintaining the flow of the ritual. The final stage, cultural theme analysis, allows researchers to summarize the deeper meaning that unites all these cultural elements, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the social and spiritual functions of Kuda Lumping in the life of the Ngantang community.



**Figure 1.** Analisis Data Model Spradley (Sugiyono, 2017: 255).

Figure 1. Spradley's Data Analysis Model (Sugiyono, 2017: 255). included in this study illustrates the four stages of analysis and emphasizes that the analysis process is hierarchical and interrelated. The visualization shows how domain analysis becomes the starting point for mapping meaning, followed by the development of structure in taxonomic analysis, the elaboration of emic differences through componental analysis, and finally arriving at the identification of cultural themes as a synthesis of meaning that binds all the data together. Thus, the diagram serves not only as a technical illustration, but also as a conceptual framework that shows how symbolic structures, inter-actor relations, and ritual dynamics can be systematically unraveled through ethnographic analysis.

Ethical aspects were strictly observed in this study. All informants provided informed consent before being interviewed or observed. Their identities were concealed to maintain anonymity and avoid potential social impacts, especially since some of the narratives concerned local beliefs and ritual practices that were considered sensitive. The researcher also maintained a reflective position throughout the research process to minimize bias, maintain cultural sensitivity, and ensure that interpretations respected the emic perspective of the Ngantang community.

The validity of the findings was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as member checking with several key informants. Information from interviews was

compared with field observations and supporting documents to test data consistency. Member checking was conducted by relaying the researchers' initial interpretations to informants to ensure that the analysis results were consistent with their understanding. This strategy provides a strong foundation for the reliability and credibility of the research findings, ensuring that the analysis obtained is not only in-depth but also methodologically valid.

## **C. RESULT & DISCUSSION**

### **Historical Context and Cultural Genealogy**

The results of the study show that the existence of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang has long historical roots and cannot be separated from the socio-political dynamics of Java in the 17th century. Local narratives linking the introduction of this tradition to the travels of Karaeng Galesong an important figure in the history of Sulawesi and Java confirm that the tradition developed through complex intercultural encounters. The presence of the figure of Mbah Sebojoyo as the spiritual guardian of the tradition further clarifies that the process of inheriting this art did not only take place through aesthetic mechanisms, but also through the belief structures and spirituality of the local community. This shows that the genealogy of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang is a combination of cultural migration, spiritual legitimacy, and the internalization of local values that form the foundation of communal identity.

Historically, Kuda Lumping performances have developed not only as a performing art, but also as a cultural practice that supports the agrarian belief system. In this context, the encounter between migrant heroes and village traditional figures became the starting point for the formation of a symbolic system that is considered to unite the human world and the non-human world. The combination of historical narratives, local myths, and spiritual authority strengthened the legitimacy of the tradition in the eyes of the community, making it an integral part of daily rituals. Thus, the history of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang confirms its nature as a cultural archive that contains collective memories, communal norms, and belief structures that continue to be reproduced in performances.

### **Ritual Symbolism and the Structure of Performativity**

Structural analysis of the performance shows that Kuda Lumping in Ngantang contains a complex symbolic system organized through a clear sequence of rituals. The opening sections, such as suguh, sesaji, and prayers, are mechanisms for sacralizing space, marking the transition from the profane world to the ritual space. From Clifford Geertz's perspective, this stage can be understood as an effort to organize a symbolic system that allows the performers and the community to enter into a shared structure of meaning. Musical instruments such as the kendang, jidor, and ketipung not only serve as accompaniment, but also as a means of evoking a rhythmic atmosphere that connects the dancers' bodies with collective cultural memory.

The dance movements that mimic horses, changes in formation, and energetic body dynamics construct a performative identity that can be analyzed through the perspective of cultural performativity. Each movement is not only an aesthetic expression, but also a symbolic act that represents strength, resilience, and spirituality. At the peak of the ritual, the trance phase (ndadi) becomes an important point that demonstrates the phenomenon of liminality as described by Turner (1969). In this phase, the dancers enter a liminal state where the boundaries between individual consciousness and communal consciousness merge, creating what Turner calls "communitas" a moment of emotional equality that strengthens solidarity and social cohesion. Thus, the symbolism of the Kuda Lumping ritual not only shapes the structure of the performance, but also regulates social and spiritual relations within Ngantang society.

### **Cultural Adaptation and Contemporary Social Dynamics**

Field findings show that Kuda Lumping in Ngantang is at an important crossroads between tradition and modernity. The introduction of modern instruments such as organs, bass drums, and variations of popular music is a form of adaptation that affirms the flexibility of tradition in responding to the changing tastes of the younger generation. This adaptation can be

understood as a process of cultural resilience, namely the community's ability to maintain the core values of tradition while accommodating new elements. Thus, modernization does not necessarily weaken tradition; on the contrary, it opens up space for creativity that allows the community to maintain cultural relevance.

Player regeneration is an important issue in the sustainability of traditions. Educational mobility, economic pressures, and changing entertainment preferences have led to a decline in youth participation. However, the continued involvement of young people shows that these traditions have strong symbolic appeal for some members of the community. They act as cultural mediators, bringing together old values and new aesthetics, while enabling performances to continue amid social change. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of cultural transmission, in which cultural values and practices persist as long as there is intergenerational interaction that enables the reproduction of meaning.

In addition to internal factors, external challenges such as a lack of institutional support and budget constraints also affect the sustainability of art groups. These limitations have an impact on the provision of property, costume maintenance, and the frequency of performances. However, the community has demonstrated its ability to innovate through self-funded fundraising, collective work, and the use of digital media as a means of documentation and promotion. This adaptability shows that the sustainability of Kuda Lumping depends not only on its spiritual value, but also on the social solidarity and creativity of the community that supports it.

### **Integration of Findings and Theoretical Implications**

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that Kuda Lumping in Ngantang is a cultural tradition that moves dynamically between two poles: continuity and change. This tradition survives because it reinvents itself through a strong ritual structure, flexible transmission patterns, and creative adaptation to the modern context. The integration of historical, performative, and adaptive elements shows that Kuda Lumping functions not only as a performing art, but also as a mechanism for collective identity formation, a reinforcement of social cohesion, and a means of reproducing spiritual values that remain relevant over time.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings enrich the discourse on cultural performativity and liminality by showing that the transition phase not only functions as a spiritual mechanism, but also as a social space that enables collective renewal of values. Furthermore, the concept of cultural adaptation shows that modernization does not always threaten tradition, but can instead be a catalyst that strengthens its relevance. Thus, this study shows that Kuda Lumping in Ngantang is a concrete example of how local traditions can survive, evolve, and find new forms in the contemporary cultural landscape.

### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study shows that Kuda Lumping in Ngantang District is a cultural practice that has been shaped by historical interactions, ritual symbolism, and ongoing social adaptation. This tradition not only reflects a long-established ancestral heritage, but also demonstrates the community's ability to reorganize the structure of the performance to remain relevant amid social change and the pressures of modernization. Through an ethnographic approach, this study confirms that ritual performativity, trans dynamics, and patterns of cultural transmission play an important role in maintaining the stability of communal values that exist within Ngantang society.

This study contributes to ethnographic research by demonstrating how local ritual performances operate as adaptive cultural systems under the influence of globalization. These findings expand our understanding of how traditions function not only as symbolic expressions, but also as mechanisms for reproducing collective identity, spaces for negotiating values, and means of maintaining cultural continuity in the context of social change. Thus, this research challenges previous ethnographic views that tend to position tradition as a static entity, and shows that cultural practices survive through their ability to adapt and accommodate new elements without losing their core meaning.

In practical terms, the research findings have important implications for cultural policy development. Local governments and cultural institutions need to strengthen structural support for traditional arts groups by providing rehearsal spaces, facilitating regeneration, and providing sustainable funding assistance. Lol- and community-based youth engagement programs can be an effective strategy to ensure the sustainability of traditions, given the role of the younger generation as agents of cultural inheritance who bridge classical values with contemporary dynamics. In addition, the integration of digital technology in the documentation and promotion of Kuda Lumping can increase the visibility of traditions at the regional and national levels, while expanding community participation.

Overall, this study shows that the sustainability of Kuda Lumping in Ngantang does not solely depend on the aesthetic power or sacredness of the ritual, but rather on the collaboration between the community, the younger generation, and cultural institutions in building an adaptive system that allows the tradition to continue to thrive amid changing times. By combining historical, performative, and adaptive dimensions, this study confirms that local traditions have significant capacity as cultural resources that can strengthen identity and social cohesion in contemporary societies.

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