

Integration of civilization elements in dance choreography: A study of traditional Malaysian dances

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the approach of integrating elements of civilization such as history, customs, and social systems in the choreography of traditional Malaysian dances and how these elements reflect the identity and cultural values of various ethnic groups. This study uses a qualitative approach through field observations, interviews with artists and cultural experts, as well as the analysis of visual documentation from dance performances. Data were analyzed thematically to identify cultural patterns contained in dance movements, choreography arrangements, costumes, and the social context of the performances. The research results show that elements of civilization such as Hindu-Buddhist influence, Islamization, and colonialism have shaped the structure and symbolism in dance, while customs and social norms set ethical boundaries and gender roles in performances. Traditional dance also serves as a medium of social communication, cultural education, and a symbol of community unity. The evolution of choreography is also detected through adaptation to the influences of globalization and technology, which pose challenges for the preservation of cultural identity. However, responsible innovation allows for the continuity of traditional dance in a contemporary context. Overall, the integration of civilizational elements in choreography not only strengthens the value of cultural heritage but also makes dance a dynamic reflection of Malaysia's multicultural.

Keywords: *Traditional dance, civilization, choreography, culture, heritage*

Integrasi unsur peradaban dalam koreografi tari: Sebuah studi tentang tari tradisional Malaysia

Abstrak

Artikel ini meneliti pendekatan integrasi elemen-elemen peradaban seperti sejarah, adat istiadat, dan sistem sosial dalam koreografi tari tradisional Malaysia dan bagaimana elemen-elemen ini mencerminkan identitas dan nilai-nilai budaya berbagai kelompok etnis. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara dengan seniman dan ahli budaya, serta analisis dokumentasi visual dari pertunjukan tari. Data dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola budaya yang terkandung dalam gerakan tari, pengaturan koreografi, kostum, dan konteks sosial dari pertunjukan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa elemen-elemen peradaban seperti pengaruh Hindu-Buddha, Islamisasi, dan kolonialisme telah membentuk struktur dan simbolisme dalam tari, sementara adat istiadat dan norma sosial menetapkan batasan etika dan peran gender dalam pertunjukan. Tari tradisional juga berfungsi sebagai media komunikasi sosial, pendidikan budaya, dan simbol persatuan komunitas. Evolusi koreografi juga terdeteksi melalui adaptasi terhadap pengaruh globalisasi dan teknologi, yang menimbulkan tantangan bagi pelestarian identitas budaya. Namun, inovasi yang bertanggung jawab memungkinkan kelangsungan tari tradisional dalam konteks kontemporer. Secara keseluruhannya, integrasi elemen peradaban dalam koreografi tidak hanya memperkuat nilai warisan budaya tetapi juga menjadikan tarian sebagai refleksi dinamis dari peradaban multikultural Malaysia.

Kata kunci: *Tari tradisional, peradaban, koreografi, budaya, warisan*

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional dance is one of the forms of performing arts that holds an important and critical position in Malaysian society's culture. Each dance movement produced is not merely a form of entertainment or aesthetic performance, but also serves as a medium to convey historical narratives, cultural values, and elements of civilization that have been passed down through generations. Civilization that develops through a society often has a significant influence on the formation of dance art, whether in terms of choreography structure, movement style, costumes, or its social function. In Malaysia, the ethnic diversity such as Malays, Chinese, Indians, as well as the indigenous communities of Sabah and Sarawak, has produced various forms of dance that reflect the identity and character of a community. Each ethnic group has its own unique dance style rooted in the history and belief system they adhere to. For example, the Zapin dance, which originates from the Malay-Islamic culture, features organized and well-structured movements that reflect the values of politeness and the refinement of the Malay community. Meanwhile, the Sumazau dance, which is a source of pride for the Kadazan-Dusun community, depicts their close relationship with nature and the spiritual elements closely tied to traditional beliefs.

Based on historical developments, traditional dances in Malaysia have also undergone various forms of evolution and adaptation due to external influences that came through trade, migration, and colonization. For example, the cultural influence from the Arab and Persian worlds has brought elements of Islamization into the dance arts of the Malay community, altering several aspects of dance choreography such as movement styles and the dress code of dancers. Similarly, the influence of India and China can be detected in certain dances that feature more expressive movements and colorful costumes rich in cultural symbolism. In addition, the arrival of European colonizers such as the Portuguese and the Dutch also influenced the structure and social functions of certain dances, especially in the context of palace entertainment and official events. Nevertheless, traditional Malaysian dances continue to maintain their original characteristics by adapting external elements without sacrificing their cultural values and original identity.

The importance of traditional dance lies not only in its aesthetic and entertainment aspects but also as an important tool in cultural education and the preservation of national identity. In the context of modern society, the main challenge faced by traditional dance is the threat of extinction due to the lack of interest among the younger generation, the influence of global popular culture, and the lack of systematic documentation. Additionally, rapid social changes and urbanization also impact traditional art practices, making some dances less relevant in today's society. Therefore, the study of the integration of civilizational elements in the choreography of traditional dances is very important to understand how the art of dance can be preserved and continue to evolve in the era of globalization without sacrificing the values and cultural heritage that have been inherited for generations.

This article aims to identify and analyze how elements of history, customs, and civilization are applied in the choreography of traditional Malaysian dances. In addition, this article also aims to understand the role of traditional dance in conveying the aesthetic and ethical values of a culture. In addition, this article seeks to unravel the uniqueness of civilizational elements in inherited dance movements and to what extent they remain relevant in the context of modern society.

The study of the integration of civilization elements in the choreography of traditional Malaysian dances has attracted the attention of many researchers in the fields of performing arts, cultural anthropology, and civilization history. There have been many previous studies that focus on the relationship between history, customs, and social systems in the formation of traditional dances, as well as how these elements are applied in the inherited dance movements. According to Ismail (2018), the elements of civilization in Malay dance have undergone a process of Islamization since the 15th century, particularly after the arrival of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. This process led to adjustments in the aspects of dance movements and the attire of the dancers, where elements considered incompatible with Islamic teachings, such as overly expressive movements or clothing that exposed the body, underwent changes. For example, the Zapin dance, which originated from the Arab world, has undergone an adaptation process within the context of Malay culture, with its dance movements being more restrained and emphasizing elements of order and refinement.

Additionally, a study by Abdul Rahman (2020) examined how ethnic dances in Sabah and Sarawak preserve elements of civilization related to the animistic belief system and rituals of indigenous communities. He found that dances such as Sumazau among the Kadazan-Dusun community and the

Ngajat dance among the Iban community were originally part of religious ceremonies and traditional beliefs. In the context of civilization, these dances are not merely physical movements, but also serve as a medium of communication between humans and the supernatural realm. The elements of civilization in this dance can be seen in the aspect of movement symbolism, where the movements of the hands and feet in Sumazau resemble the flapping of bird wings, which is believed to be a form of homage to ancestral spirits.

Mohamad & Lee (2021) focus on the aspects of ethics and cultural refinement in traditional Malaysian dance. They emphasize that dance is not merely a form of entertainment but also serves as a reflection of the social values held by a society. For example, in palace dances such as Mak Yong and Joget Gamelan, the refinement of culture can be seen in the gentle hand movements and facial expressions, which reflect the values of order, politeness, and elegance that are highly esteemed in Malay culture. This study also compares traditional Malaysian dances with those from neighboring countries such as Indonesia and Thailand, which have movements that are structured and rhythmically gentle in palace dances, indicating the influence of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in the regional dance heritage.

In addition, the study by Tan & Chong (2019) examined how traditional Chinese and Indian dances in Malaysia have also undergone evolution in the context of civilization and cultural identity. They found that the Lion Dance and Bharatanatyam not only retained elements of their original civilizations from China and India, but also underwent a process of adaptation to the local culture. For example, the Bharatanatyam dance, which originated from Hindu temples, has been adapted in the Malaysian context to suit more inclusive cultural events, including performances at national-level ceremonies involving a multi-ethnic community.

In general, the literature review shows that the integration of civilizational elements in traditional Malaysian dance is not merely a static process but is dynamic and evolves with the changing times. Previous studies have proven that dance is not merely an artistic expression but also a primary medium in preserving cultural heritage, reflecting social systems, and conveying the historical narratives of a community. However, there is still room for further research, particularly in the context of how globalization and digitalization impact the continuity of civilizational elements in traditional dance, and to what extent these elements can be preserved in the modern era.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with textual analysis and field research. Data were obtained through literature review, direct observation of traditional dance performances, as well as interviews with dance experts, artists, and academics who have expertise in the field of culture and heritage. Additionally, a choreographic analysis was conducted by examining the elements of civilization contained in the movements, formations, costumes, and expressions of the dance. The data obtained were analyzed thematically to identify the key elements that form the uniqueness of traditional Malaysian dance.

The use of thematic analysis is a suitable approach to deeply examine the meanings, symbols, and cultural values contained in traditional dance choreography. This is done by organizing data into several levels of interpretation. The first step involves repeated reading of the raw data to gain a comprehensive understanding. This is followed by initial coding, which is the process of identifying key elements in the data such as keywords, meaningful phrases, or recurring cultural concepts. In the context of this study, coding may involve terms such as rituals, heritage, symbolism, customs, modern adaptations, or nuances of movement. These codes are then organized into sub-themes and main themes that encompass aspects of history, customs, social norms, value systems, and the evolution of choreography.

For example, through interview data with choreographers and traditional dancers, as well as observations of performances such as Zapin, Mak Yong, and Sewang, themes such as “the influence of colonial history in dance narratives,” “the preservation of traditional values in body movements,” and “cultural adaptation in the context of contemporary performances” were found to recur repeatedly. These themes were then linked to the framework of civilization theory and cultural aesthetics to construct an analysis narrative based on ethnographic evidence.

The main strength of thematic analysis is its ability to construct meaning from data both inductively and deductively. The inductive approach allows themes to emerge naturally from the data

without the bias of initial theories, while the deductive approach enables researchers to test specific themes that have been identified based on previous theories or studies. Through this study, a combination of both approaches is used to balance new discoveries and validation against conceptual frameworks such as the theory of cultural aesthetics (Arnold Hauser), the theory of cultural representation (Stuart Hall), and the theory of socio-cultural change (Raymond Williams).

Meanwhile, thematic analysis also allows researchers to depict cultural complexities more flexibly, especially when the data involves visual and movement elements such as in choreography. By interpreting the symbolic meanings in dance movements—such as the delicate hand gestures in Mak Yong as a symbol of Malay politeness or the circular formations in Tarian Sewang as a representation of a united community—thematic analysis can reveal the values of civilization that are not directly stated but are implicitly contained in the performing arts.

Finally, the use of thematic analysis in this study not only allows for the systematic categorization of data but also facilitates the generation of new theories based on local cultural experiences. It also helps to strengthen the research findings by providing scientific justification for traditional choreography as a medium for the transmission of historical values, customs, and civilization within the context of Malaysia's multicultural and ever-changing society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the analysis conducted, this article finds that the elements of civilization in the choreography of traditional Malaysian dances can be categorized into three main aspects: history, customs, and social systems. Each of these aspects plays an important role in shaping the identity of the dance and ensuring the continuity of the cultural heritage passed down through generations. In addition, the findings also show how each of these elements is applied in dance movements, choreography structure, costumes, and artistic expressions practiced by the local community.

The influence of history in traditional dance choreography

History plays a very significant role in the formation and evolution of traditional dance choreography in Malaysia. Each type of dance that develops within a society not only showcases the aesthetics of art but also records the changes in civilization that occur across various historical eras. Historical factors influencing the choreography of traditional Malaysian dances can be analyzed through several key dimensions, including the influence of Hindu-Buddhist civilization, Islamization, colonialism, and globalization, which have transformed the form and function of dances in society.

Custom and social norms as forms of influence in traditional dance

Customs and social norms also play an important role in the formation and transformation of traditional dance choreography in Malaysia. Every movement, formation, facial expression, and element in the dance not only aims to entertain but also reflects the values upheld by a society. Customs that encompass traditions and taboos inherited through generations form the basic structure of the dance, while social norms play a role in determining how the dance should be performed within a cultural context.

In the context of Malaysia, which has a multi-ethnic society with diverse customs, traditional dances have evolved in accordance with the social systems and values practiced in each community. Through the study by Mohamad & Lee (2021), it is explained that customs and social norms not only influence the performance style and movements in dance but also determine gender roles, attire, and the function of dance in society. This explanation will discuss the influence of customs and social norms in three main aspects: the structure and movements of dance, gender roles in dance, and social and ritual functions in society.

Social system and the function of dance in society

The social system is a structure that regulates interactions and relationships within society based on certain norms, values, and institutions. In the context of culture, the social system determines the roles of individuals within the community, including in performing arts such as traditional dance. Dance is not merely a form of entertainment, but also serves as a tool for social communication, expression of identity, medium of education, and an instrument for community unity. Each community in Malaysia

has a form of traditional dance that reflects the social organization and value system inherited through generations.

In this discussion, the social system and the function of dance in society will be analyzed in four main aspects: the function of dance in social hierarchy and community status, the role of dance in social interaction and community unity, the function of dance as a medium of education and cultural value transmission, and dance as a tool for expressing identity and symbolizing ethnic uniqueness.

The evolution and adaptation of civilizational elements in modern choreography

The choreography of traditional dances is no longer static but has undergone transformation in accordance with the changing times, in line with the development of human civilization. This evolution is influenced by factors such as globalization, technology, changes in social values, and innovations in performing arts. In the context of Malaysia, the elements of civilization contained in traditional dances have been adapted into modern choreography without neglecting their original values. This adaptation can be seen in the form of rearranging dance movements, the use of technology in performances, and the incorporation of elements from various cultures to create a more contemporary dance form that is relevant to the current generation.

In this discussion, the evolution and adaptation of civilization elements in modern choreography will be elaborated through four main aspects: the influence of globalization on the development of modern dance, innovations in the use of technology and multimedia in performances, the integration of traditional and modern elements in choreography, and the challenges and strategies for preserving cultural identity in contemporary dance.

Discussion

The influence of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in dance choreography

Before the arrival of Islam, the Hindu-Buddhist civilization had firmly established itself in the Malay Archipelago, especially through great kingdoms such as Srivijaya and Majapahit. The influence of this civilization is not only seen in aspects of administration and social systems but also shapes performing arts, including traditional dances. According to Ismail (2018), many court dances that developed during the early Malay Sultanate era have elements derived from Indian and Javanese performing arts.

For example, the Mak Yong dance, which originated from the Patani palace in the 17th century, contains dramatic and ritual elements associated with Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. The movements in Mak Yong, which are graceful in nature, and the use of mudras (hand gestures) resemble the movements in classical Indian dances such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi. The theatrical elements in Mak Yong also feature mythological narratives centered around gods and goddesses and folk legends, reflecting the influence of the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics (Tan & Chong, 2019).

Additionally, classical Malay dances such as Joget Gamelan also explain the traces of Hindu-Buddhist civilization influence, especially in the aspect of choreography that emphasizes graceful and orderly movements. Joget Gamelan was originally a court dance performed by the nobility in Pahang and Terengganu. The structure of the dance movements retains elements of politeness, subtlety of expression, and continuity of movement similar to the Javanese court dances such as Bedhaya and Srimpi (Mohamad & Lee, 2021). Therefore, it is clear that the early history of the Malay Archipelago, influenced by Hindu-Buddhism, has had a profound impact on the choreography of traditional dances, making elements of order and movement symbolism the main features of classical dances.

The process of Islamization and adaptation of Malay dance choreography

The arrival of Islam in the Archipelago around the 13th century brought significant changes to various aspects of culture, including dance. The process of Islamization has changed several aspects of dance choreography, particularly among the Malay community, which adapted dance elements to align more closely with Islamic values. According to Abdul Rahman (2020), it was found that after the 15th century, Hindu-Buddhist elements in court dances began to be reduced, and the dance movements emphasized aspects of refinement and modesty.

One of the main examples is the Zapin dance, which was introduced by Arab and Persian traders through trade and the spread of Islam. Originally, Zapin was a dance associated with elements of Sufism, where its movements served as a spiritual expression among Sufi followers. However, after this dance

was absorbed into Malay culture, it underwent a process of assimilation that made it more aligned with local values. For example, in Zapin Johor, movements that were originally more free have been arranged to be more structured and modest, showcasing the principles of politeness and self-control in Islam (Ismail, 2018).

In addition, Islamization also brought about changes in the aspect of dancers' attire, namely dance costumes. Before the arrival of Islam, some palace and folk dances displayed the use of more revealing clothing, such as sarongs that did not fully cover the body. However, after the increasing influence of Islam, the attire of female dancers in traditional Malay dances such as Joget and Zapin underwent changes. The kebaya and sarong are paired with a shawl or headscarf to cover the body more modestly (Mohamad & Lee, 2021).

The influence of colonialisme on the evolution of dance choreography

The colonial period involving Western powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch, and British also influenced the development of traditional dances in Malaysia. Since the 16th century, the arrival of colonizers brought Western culture, which somewhat influenced the local performing arts. One of the most obvious examples is the Portuguese dance in Melaka, known as Branyo. This dance is the result of the blending of Portuguese culture with local traditions, producing dance movements that are more partner-oriented and follow a livelier musical rhythm (Tan & Chong, 2019).

Additionally, the British colonizers who introduced Western education and entertainment policies also changed the public's perception of dance. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Malay performing arts such as Mak Yong and Randai experienced a decline because they were considered incompatible with the modern educational values introduced by the British (Ahmad & Suriani, 2022). However, some folk dances like Joget and Inang have evolved by incorporating influences from Western music and dance styles. For example, modern Joget adapts several elements from European dances such as the waltz and polka, making it more suitable for social performances and official events (Mohamad & Lee, 2021).

The influence of globalization and adaption of modern dance choreography

In the era of globalization, traditional Malaysian dances continue to undergo changes due to the increasingly dominant influence of foreign cultures. The study found that traditional dances are now being adapted with contemporary elements to make them more relevant in the context of modern performing arts. In the context of "giving a new lease of life." For example, several art groups have combined traditional dance movements with elements of modern dance such as ballet, hip-hop, and contemporary dance to attract the attention of the younger generation (Ahmad & Suriani, 2022).

In addition, traditional dances such as Zapin and Ngajat are now presented in a more dynamic and energetic form at international festivals to meet the needs of a global audience. This can be seen in several international cultural arts competitions, where Malay dances are presented with more dramatic modern lighting and staging elements, without altering the foundational movements that have been passed down through generations (Ismail, 2018). This shows that although history continues to shape the identity of traditional dance, elements of innovation and adaptation still occur to ensure the continuity of cultural heritage in the modern era.

Structure and movement of dance based on customs and social norms

In most traditional societies in Malaysia, dance movements are designed to reflect modesty, balance, and harmony. This is in line with the values that form the foundation of the social systems of the Malay, Kadazan-Dusun, Iban, Chinese, and Indian communities. Ismail (2018) shows that in Malay dances such as Joget, Inang, and Zapin, the movements are more gentle and controlled, in line with the values of modesty emphasized in Malay culture. For example, in the Johor Zapin dance, every hand and foot movement must be performed with full decorum, avoiding overly aggressive or seductive movements. The movements in Zapin reflect the principle of balance in life. Each step must be performed repeatedly and symmetrically, symbolizing harmony and social stability within the community (Tan & Chong, 2019).

On the contrary, in the Kadazan-Dusun community in Sabah, the Sumazau dance highlights slow movements resembling the flapping of an eagle's wings, which are believed to bring blessings and harmony to the community. The calm and repetitive movements in the Sumazau reflect the philosophy

of the Kadazan-Dusun community, which emphasizes the balance between humans and nature (Abdul Rahman, 2020). Tradition plays a role in establishing that this dance should not be performed excessively or aggressively because it is considered a tribute to ancestors and the spirit of nature.

As a comparison, the Iban community in Sarawak has the Ngajat dance, which features more dynamic and powerful movements, especially for male dancers. This dance depicts the heroism and strength of the Iban warriors, with firm hand movements and foot steps that reflect bravery. Although this dance is more expressive compared to Malay dances, customs still play a role in determining that the dance should be performed in an orderly manner, such as during Gawai Dayak, the annual celebration of the Iban community (Mohamad & Lee, 2021).

From another perspective, traditional Chinese dances such as the Lion Dance and Dragon Dance are also influenced by the social norms of Chinese society that emphasize bravery and blessings. The movements in the Lion Dance must follow a specific structure that symbolizes the balance of Yin and Yang energy, and they must be performed by individuals who have undergone special training because this dance is considered a symbol of good fortune (Tan & Chong, 2019).

The role of gender in traditional dance choreography

Customs and social norms also influence the division of gender roles in traditional dance. In many cultures in Malaysia, there is a clear separation between male and female dances, determined by social responsibilities and the concept of personality within the community.

In Malay culture, traditional dances such as Joget and Inang often feature male and female pairs, but their movements are governed by norms of propriety. Women are not allowed to perform movements that are too open or seductive, and men are not allowed to perform movements that are overly naughty and aggressive towards women, and interactions between male and female dancers must be conducted with full respect. In certain variations of Joget, there is a prohibition against male and female dancers making direct contact, in line with Islamic values that emphasize boundaries in gender interactions (Abdul Rahman, 2020).

On the other hand, in the dances of the Iranun community such as Sumagayan, this dance is performed only by men because it symbolizes bravery and valor. The movements in this dance, based on martial arts, reflect the status of men in the Iranun society as protectors, leaders, and warriors. Meanwhile, Iranun women have their own softer dances, such as Dayang Sulud Sulampit, which emphasize gentleness and grace as the main values upheld by women in that society.

In Indian community dances, such as Bharatanatyam, gender roles in dance are more flexible but still rooted in customs and social norms. Women often become the main dancers in Bharatanatyam, as this dance is considered a symbol of grace and feminine expression. However, in the modern context, more men are also engaging in this dance, reflecting the changing social norms in Malaysian Indian society that are more open to gender equality (Ahmad & Suriani, 2022).

Social and ritual function in society

Traditional dances are not just entertainment but also serve as a medium of social communication and religious rituals in many communities in Malaysia, especially in the aspect of health, namely traditional medicine. In Malay society, dances such as Ulek Mayang and Mak Yong have ritual elements related to beliefs in the spiritual world. Although Islamization has changed many aspects of Malay performing arts, ritual elements in certain dances are still practiced in specific communities, especially in traditional ceremonies (Tan & Chong, 2019).

In the Kadazan-Dusun community, the Sumazau dance is not just a traditional dance but also part of the Kaamatan ceremony, which aims to honor the spirit of rice. The slow movements in this dance symbolize the harmony between humans and the spiritual world, as well as maintaining the connection between the old and new generations in that society (Abdul Rahman, 2020).

Meanwhile, in Chinese society, the Lion Dance is not only performed as entertainment during the Chinese New Year but also as a ritual to drive away evil spirits and bring good fortune to the community. Each movement in the Lion Dance has symbolic meaning, such as the leaping step which symbolizes the effort to achieve success in life (Tan & Chong, 2019).

The function of dance in social hierarchy and community status

In many traditional societies, dance serves as a marker of social status, meaning that the nobility and common people have different forms of dance. Court dances are usually associated with the ruling class and elites, while folk dances are more closely related to the daily lives of the general public.

For example, in the traditional Malay sultanate, dances such as Joget Gamelan and Tarian Asyik were only performed in the palace by women from the ranks of handmaidens and royal family members. These dances have more refined and exclusive choreography, reflecting the elegance and order that are the main characteristics of the nobility. The slow and controlled movements in Joget Gamelan symbolize the high status of the dancers as well as the refinement of manners emphasized in court culture (Mohamad & Lee, 2021).

On the other hand, folk dances like Zapin, Ronggeng, and Inang are more open and interactive, reflecting the inclusive atmosphere of ordinary community life. In agrarian societies, dances often become part of the celebrations after the harvest season or serve as entertainment during feasts and festivities. Folk dances are also easier to learn and participate in by various layers of society without social class restrictions.

In the Dayak community in Sarawak, the Ngajat dance has different functions according to social status. Ngajat Pahlawan is performed by men as a symbol of heroism and bravery, while Ngajat Indu focuses more on the role of women as guardians of tradition and family harmony (Ismail, 2018). The division of this dance reinforces the social status of individuals in society and maintains traditional values.

The role of dance in social interaction and community unity

Dance serves as a tool to strengthen social bonds within the community, especially in societies that emphasize the values of collectivism and a spirit of togetherness. In Malaysia, most traditional dances are performed in a social context that involves active participation from the community. For example, the Sumazau dance in the Kadazan-Dusun community is not just an artistic performance, but also a form of ritual that unites the community during the Kaamatan Festival. This dance is performed in pairs with gentle and orderly movements, reflecting the unity and harmony of the community.

Similarly, the Lion Dance in Chinese society, which is usually performed during the Chinese New Year or inauguration ceremonies to bring luck and prosperity. The performance of this dance involves interaction between the dancers, musicians, and the audience, who together contribute to a lively and meaningful atmosphere. The Lion Dance serves as a mechanism for uniting the Chinese community, especially during cultural and religious celebrations.

In Indian society, Bharatanatyam and Odissi are not only classical dances but also a form of social communication that unites the community in a religious and cultural context. The performances of this dance often narrate Hindu mythological stories that contain moral teachings and divine values, strengthening the identity of the Indian community in Malaysia (Ahmad & Suriani, 2022).

The function of dance as a medium for education and cultural value transfer

Traditional dances not only serve as entertainment but also as an educational medium that allows cultural and historical values to be passed down to the younger generation. Many traditional dances in Malaysia contain didactic elements aimed at educating society about history, customs, and morality.

For example, in Zapin, the dance movements and accompanying song lyrics often contain Islamic elements, including exemplary stories and teachings about the values of moderation and good manners. This makes Zapin not only a dance but also a medium of da'wah that educates the community through performance art (Mohamad & Lee, 2021).

In addition, Mak Yong, which originates from Kelantan, is a form of dance theater that conveys folk tales and myths rich in educational elements. Although it has undergone changes due to the prohibition of its ritualistic elements, Mak Yong is still recognized as an important cultural heritage in the education of the arts and Malay heritage (Tan & Chong, 2019).

Dance as a tool for expressing identity and a symbol of ethnic uniqueness

Traditional dances serve as a symbol of identity for an ethnic group and strengthen their cultural uniqueness within the multicultural landscape of Malaysia. Each ethnic group has a dance that reflects the values, history, and beliefs that form the foundation of their identity. For example, Magunatip

symbolizes the identity of the brave and resilient Murut warriors. The dance movements that resemble war movements reflect the heritage of the Murut community, which was once known for its warriors who defended their territory.

In Baba Nyonya society, the Dondang Sayang dance is a symbol of unique Peranakan identity, combining elements of Malay and Chinese culture into a performance art form that reflects cultural assimilation.

Similarly, the Kuda Kepang Dance in the Javanese community in Johor depicts stories of warfare and spirituality. This dance is not only a form of entertainment but also a ritual that symbolizes the identity of the Javanese community in Malaysia (Ismail, 2018).

The influence of globalization on the development of modern dance

Globalization has accelerated the exchange of cultures among various societies in the world and made the art of dance more inclusive and dynamic. In the context of Malaysia, globalization has opened up space for the influence of international dances such as ballet, hip-hop, and jazz to be integrated into traditional dances, resulting in new forms of choreography that are more hybrid in nature. For example, the choreography in Contemporary Zapin introduced by modern art groups such as ASWARA (Academy of Arts, Culture, and Heritage) and Istana Budaya has combined the original movements of Zapin with elements of modern dance such as ballet and Latin dance. This approach not only preserves the uniqueness of Zapin as a heritage dance but also makes it more appealing to the younger generation, who are more exposed to international performing arts influences.

Similarly, modern Mak Yong has undergone changes in terms of storytelling and movement. The original ritualistic nature of Mak Yong has been reduced to accommodate the sensitivities of the Islamic community, but at the same time, cinematic and dramatic elements have been added to make it more appealing in the context of the modern stage.

In addition, traditional Chinese dances such as the Lion Dance have also undergone changes in modern performances. If in the past this dance only used traditional drum accompaniment, now it is often combined with electronic music and LED lighting to enhance its appeal to a global audience (Abdul Rahman, 2021).

Innovation in the use of technology and multimedia in presentation

Technology plays an important role in the evolution of modern choreography, especially in the context of staging and delivering the aesthetics of dance. The use of dynamic lighting, LED screens, digital visual effects, as well as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technology has enriched the experience of traditional dance performances in a new form. For example, Zapin Digital, introduced at the Malaysian Arts Festival, has used a digital background that combines images of Malay heritage with modern graphics to create a more immersive atmosphere. Similarly, the use of holograms in the Modern Shadow Play performance allows shadow characters to appear in three-dimensional form without losing their traditional elements.

In modern Indian dance forms like Bharatanatyam Digital, multimedia innovations are used to add a dramatic dimension to the storytelling of Hindu mythology. With the help of lighting and digital graphics, the narrative elements in Bharatanatyam can be enhanced without altering the original movements of the dance.

This innovation not only enriches dance performances but also plays a role in documenting and preserving cultural heritage. Through platforms like YouTube and social media, traditional choreography updated in modern forms can be accessed by a larger audience, including younger generations who may be less familiar with their cultural heritage.

The fusion of traditional and modern elements in choreography

The evolution of modern choreography often involves the fusion of traditional and modern elements into a new form of dance. This includes the rearrangement of dance movements, the use of more contemporary music, and the creation of narratives that are more relevant to current issues.

For example, Contemporary Joget, which is often performed in international art competitions, has combined classical elements of Joget with Broadway dance styles and ballroom dance. More agile and dramatic movements have been added without losing the original characteristics of Joget, such as light footwork and lively musical rhythms.

In the Orang Asli community, the Sewang Dance, which was once performed in ritual ceremonies, has now been adapted into a modern form as a more artistic stage performance. The elements of animistic belief that were once the mainstay of the Sewang Dance have been reduced, but the aspects of symbolic repetitive movements have been retained to preserve the authenticity of the culture.

In contemporary dance, many art groups such as Sutra Dance Theatre and ASWARA have successfully combined elements of traditional dance with modern concepts, creating a unique and relevant form of performance art for today's audience.

Challenges and strategies for preserving cultural identity in contemporary dance

Although adaptation and innovation in modern dance provide opportunities for the performing arts to evolve, there are also challenges in ensuring that cultural heritage is not lost or tainted by overly dominant external influences.

One of the main challenges is the dilution of cultural identity, where the original elements of traditional dances are increasingly diminished due to overly radical modifications. Ismail (2019) shows that some dances that have been adapted into modern forms have lost their original elements to the point where they are difficult to recognize as cultural heritage.

Furthermore, there is also an imbalance between innovation and preservation, where some art groups tend to lean more towards artistic exploration without considering the historical value of the dance. Therefore, a more cautious approach needs to be taken in adapting traditional dances with modern elements.

CONCLUSION

The study on the integration of civilization elements in the choreography of traditional Malaysian dances has proven that dance is not merely a form of entertainment, but also a medium that showcases the history, customs, social systems, and evolution of a society's civilization. The choreography of traditional dances in Malaysia is deeply rooted in historical influences, where each movement, costume, music, and narrative conveyed is closely linked to the historical journey of the nation. Elements such as cultural assimilation due to trade, colonization, and migration have shaped various dance variations that symbolize the identity of an ethnic group or community. For example, Zapin, which originated from the Arab world, has undergone adaptations to become part of the Malay cultural heritage, while the Lion Dance, originally performed only by the Chinese community, has evolved into a symbol of racial unity in Malaysia.

In addition, customs and social norms play an important role in shaping the choreography of traditional dances. Each dance movement not only serves as an expression of art but also as a reflection of moral values, etiquette, and ethics that have been passed down through generations. In Malay culture, for example, the hand movements and foot steps in dances like Joget and Inang reflect gentleness and politeness, in line with the principles of Malay culture that emphasize refinement of manners. In Indian culture, Bharatanatyam is not just a dance, but also a form of communication used to convey Hindu epic stories such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Indigenous people, on the other hand, use dance as a medium to convey myths and animistic beliefs, with the Sewang Dance being the main example that connects their community with spiritual elements and nature.

Besides historical and cultural aspects, dance also plays a role in the social system and functions of society. Dance is not just a manifestation of culture, but also a tool to strengthen social relationships, unite communities, and even serve as a medium in religious and healing rituals. In this context, dance is often used in wedding ceremonies, the reception of honored guests, as well as religious and healing rituals. For example, Mak Yong, which originally was a palace dance, not only served as entertainment for the nobility but also as a medium of healing in traditional Malay medicine. Similarly, the Magunatip Dance in the Murut community, which was originally used as a training exercise for warriors, has now become a lively form of folk entertainment. This shows that dance is not only limited to aesthetic functions but also plays a role in the social structure and daily life of the community.

However, in line with the passage of time, the evolution and adaptation of civilizational elements in modern choreography have brought new challenges and opportunities in the world of dance. The

influence of globalization, technology, and changes in social values have driven significant transformations in the art of dance, making it more dynamic and relevant to the demands of today's audience. The combination of traditional elements with contemporary features such as modern music, digital lighting techniques, and integration with augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technology has transformed the way dance is presented and received by society. For example, Modern Mak Yong has adapted cinematic and dramatic elements to attract the interest of the younger generation, while Digital Zapin uses graphic elements and multimedia technology to provide a more immersive experience for the audience.

Although this innovation brings a new dimension to traditional dance, it also raises questions about the preservation of cultural identity. The main challenge is how to maintain the authenticity and traditional values in modern adaptations without causing excessive cultural dilution. This study found that many traditional dances have undergone radical changes, losing their original identity due to pressure to adapt to modern tastes. Therefore, a more strategic and careful approach needs to be taken in the effort to modernize traditional dances. Documentation, cultural arts education, and collaboration between cultural experts and modern artists need to be enhanced to ensure the continuity of dance heritage in the era of globalization.

In conclusion, this study shows that the integration of civilizational elements in the choreography of traditional Malaysian dance is an ongoing dynamic process. Dance is not just an art form, but also an archive of history, a manifestation of customs, a reflection of the social system, and a vessel for cultural evolution. It evolves with the times but at the same time needs to maintain its authenticity so as not to be lost from the nation's heritage. Therefore, all parties – whether artists, academic institutions, policymakers, or the general public – must play a role in ensuring that traditional Malaysian dance continues to live and thrive without losing its core values. Innovation and adaptation must be carried out with full responsibility so that this cultural heritage can continue to be passed down to future generations as a symbol of identity, beauty, and the uniqueness of Malaysian civilization.

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