

Transforming the traditional Joget Sonde dance for the preservation of Malay culture

Doki Saputra, Fery Aidil Saputra, Rizma Oktafiani*, Sisla Olivia, Winda Fitriani

Universitas Islam Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

*Correspondence author: rizmaoktafiani375@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

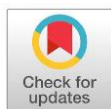
Purpose: to analyze the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari, Pekanbaru, and how Malay cultural values are maintained in the process of adapting a traditional dance into a modern performance form.

Method: this research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing observation, interviews, and documentation, with data analyzed through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and conclusion.

Findings: the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari has transformed movement, music, costume, and stage presentation to align with modern aesthetics. The dance movements have become more varied, traditional music is combined with modern instruments, costumes are made more dynamic, and performances are staged on formal platforms. Despite these innovations, Malay cultural values such as politeness, togetherness, beauty, and cultural identity are preserved. This transformation demonstrates creative and sustainable cultural preservation.

Implications: the research indicates that innovations in transforming the Joget Sonde dance enable the creative preservation of Malay culture while remaining relevant to modern society. The findings can serve as a reference for artists and cultural managers in developing strategies to adapt traditional arts so that they remain vibrant, appealing, and educationally valuable.

Originality: this research comprehensively examines the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance while demonstrating the creative and adaptive preservation of Malay cultural values.



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Introduction

Traditional dance is one form of cultural expression that reflects a society's values, norms, and identity (Hou, 2025). Traditional dances are born and developed over generations as an integral part of the social and cultural life of the communities that sustain them, while also serving as a medium for preserving cultural heritage. In the

context of Riau Malay culture, dance plays a strategic role in transmitting values such as politeness, togetherness, and harmony, which constitute the core character of the Malay community (Suryani et al., 2025; Uri et al., 2025). One traditional Malay dance that developed in the coastal regions of Riau is the Joget Sonde dance. Originally, this dance served as community entertainment during traditional ceremonies and celebrations, presented in a simple, spontaneous, and interactive manner. Over time, Joget Sonde has evolved beyond its traditional context, transforming form, function, and presentation to remain relevant to the needs of modern society.

The phenomenon of transforming traditional dances into creative or modern performance forms has been increasingly evident across various regions, including Pekanbaru. The Joget Sonde dance, as performed by Sanggar Buih Selari, demonstrates innovations in movement, musical accompaniment, costume, and stage design. This transformation is an effort to adapt to contemporary audience preferences while simultaneously broadening appreciation for traditional dance (Chandnasaro, 2025; Yang, 2024). Nevertheless, these transformations continue to uphold Malay cultural values as the dance's primary identity. This phenomenon is of academic interest because it illustrates efforts toward dynamic cultural preservation, one that is not stagnant but can adapt without losing its traditional roots. The transformation of the Joget Sonde dance raises several academic questions, including the forms of change in its presentation, the extent to which traditional Malay values are maintained, and the role of arts studios in balancing the preservation of tradition with innovation in performance art. Therefore, a thorough study is needed to understand the transformation process of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari as a representation of the development of traditional dance in the modern era.

Previous studies have extensively discussed the transformation of traditional dances, such as the research by Susanti & Syafriana (2017); Gea & Mansyur (2023) on Joget Sonde as a creative dance, Evadila et al. (2019) on the transformation of Zapin Bengkalis into Zapin Meranti, and Sutiawan & Nerosti (2024), which examined the change of Joget Dangkong into Jogi dance in Batam. These studies indicate that dance transformation is a form of cultural adaptation to the changing times. However, to date, few studies have specifically examined the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance, as developed by Sanggar Buih Selari in Pekanbaru, particularly those focusing on changes in performance elements while maintaining cultural values. This research gap forms the main rationale for conducting the present study. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the transformation of Joget Sonde at Sanggar Buih Selari as a case study, providing a comprehensive analysis of changes in movement, music, costume, and stage presentation, and their relationship to the preservation of Malay cultural values.

This study also positions the art studio as a key actor in the transformation and preservation of local culture in urban environments. The study aims to describe the origins and functions of the Joget Sonde dance, analyze the forms of transformation of Joget Sonde at Sanggar Buih Selari, including aspects of movement, musical accompaniment, costume, and stage presentation, and examine the Malay cultural values that are maintained in the presentation of the modern version of the dance. This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it can enrich academic studies in dance, particularly regarding the transformation of traditional Malay dances. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for artists, dance studios, and cultural institutions in developing traditional dances creatively without neglecting the cultural values inherent in them.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to understand and thoroughly describe the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari, Pekanbaru. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on revealing social and cultural phenomena, particularly changes in the presentation of traditional dance, including aspects of movement, musical accompaniment, costume, and stage performance, along with the associated meanings and cultural values. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct observation of rehearsals and performances of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari, as well as in-depth interviews with choreographers, instructors, and dancers involved in the dance's development. Secondary data were collected through literature studies, including scholarly journals, books, and previous research relevant to the study of the transformation of traditional Malay dances.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine the presentation of the dance, including movement patterns, musical accompaniment, costumes, and stage arrangement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information on the artists' backgrounds, transformation processes, and perspectives on the changes implemented. Documentation, in the form of photographs, videos, and performance archives, was used as supporting data to reinforce the findings from observations and interviews. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing the information relevant to the research focus. Subsequently, the data were presented in a systematic narrative description to facilitate understanding of the phenomena under study. The final stage was concluded by formulating the meaning and patterns of the Joget Sonde dance transformation based on the data analysis. To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation by comparing information from observations, interviews, and documentation. Therefore, the resulting data are expected to be highly valid and accurate, providing a comprehensive depiction of the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari.

Results and discussion

Joget Sonde originates from Sonde village, Rangsang Pesisir district, Meranti Islands regency, Riau province, and is a traditional dance of the Akit ethnic group. This dance was created around the 1960s by a woman named Cik Minah as a form of folk entertainment. Initially, Joget Sonde was performed at traditional events such as weddings and village celebrations. The name "Sonde" was derived from the village of its origin, which was formerly known for its abundance of sonde trees. Its gentle movements, small steps, and relaxed musical rhythm reflect the character of the coastal community, which is simple, friendly, and upholds high standards of courtesy. Over time, Joget Sonde has evolved beyond mere entertainment to serve as a medium of cultural expression, a means of strengthening social bonds, and a symbol of local identity and pride. Due to its significant cultural value, Joget Sonde was officially recognized as an Indonesian intangible cultural heritage in 2016 (Putra & Syefriani, 2025; Virgiana & Syefriani, 2025).

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at Sanggar Buih Selari, the findings indicate that the Joget Sonde dance developed at the studio has transformed its presentation. The teaching of Joget Sonde at Sanggar Buih Selari began in 2021 and has since developed into a creative dance intended for entertainment and

performance. Nevertheless, the studio continues to refer to the basic form of traditional Joget Sonde. Regarding movement, the study shows that traditional Joget Sonde features simple movements with a limited number of core steps. The main movements involve swaying in place with gentle hand motions, without any hip movements. In the version developed by Sanggar Buih Selari, additional movement variations have been introduced, including hip movements and new gestures, such as the *petik bunga* movement, which is absent in the traditional form (Figure 1). These innovations demonstrate that Joget Sonde has undergone significant choreographic development compared to its originally very simple movements.



Figure 1 transformations of Joget Sonde dance movements

Source: primary data

In terms of musical accompaniment, the findings indicate that the Joget Sonde dance was originally accompanied by traditional instruments such as drums, small gongs, and the Malay violin, all performed live. At present, the musical accompaniment has changed to include modern instruments such as keyboards and electric violins, as well as recorded music in MP3 format played through electronic devices. Regarding costumes, the findings reveal a transformation from simple traditional attire to more modern creative costumes. The costumes used at Sanggar Buih Selari feature a wider variety of colors, the addition of sequins, lace, and Malay motifs, and the use of additional accessories such as headpieces and glasses (Figure 2). Despite these modifications, elements of traditional Malay attire are still maintained to preserve the dance's cultural identity.

Regarding stage performance, the findings indicate that the Joget Sonde dance was originally performed in open spaces without a designated stage. Over time, the dance has increasingly been presented on formal stages, such as performance halls and cultural festivals, supported by more professional lighting and sound systems (Figure 3). In addition to changes in the form of presentation, the findings also show that Malay cultural values such as politeness, togetherness, and harmony continue to be preserved in the presentation of the Joget Sonde dance as performed by Sanggar Buih Selari.



Figure 2 transformations of Joget Sonde dance costumes
Source: primary data



Figure 3 transformations of the Joget Sonde dance performance stage
Source: primary data

Transformation of dance movements

The research findings indicate that the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari represents an adaptation of traditional art to the times. This transformation not only involves changes in the visual and technical aspects of the performance but also reflects artists' efforts to sustain traditional dance amid the social and cultural dynamics of modern society. Changes in movement aspects demonstrate the development of choreography aimed at enriching the composition of movements, making them more dynamic and engaging. The addition of movement variations, such as hip movements and new movement patterns, aligns with the view of Gea & Mansyur (2023); Liu (2023), who state that the renewal of movement serves as a strategy for

artists to adapt traditional dance to contemporary audience interests without eliminating its fundamental characteristics.

In its original (traditional) form, the Joget Sonde dance featured simple, limited movement patterns, with a relatively small number of basic movement variations, grouped into approximately three main types. The dominant movement was *lenggang*, performed in place, in which dancers gently swung their arms while maintaining a relatively static foot position. Hip movements were not emphasized, resulting in an overall impression of simplicity, spontaneity, and modesty, in keeping with its original function as community entertainment. Along with the development of the times and the demands of performance contexts, the movements of the Joget Sonde dance have transformed into a process of choreographic development. At Sanggar Buih Selari, this transformation is marked by the addition of new movement variations that were not present in the traditional form, such as the exploration of hip movements, the development of facing directions, and the emergence of creative movement variations, including the *petik bunga* movement. The *lenggang* movement, previously performed in place, has been developed into traveling *lenggang* with variations in level, tempo, and spatial direction, making the dance more dynamic and visually engaging.

Furthermore, the transformation is also evident in the treatment of energy and movement rhythm. Movements that were previously relatively flat and repetitive have been enriched with accentuations that follow modern musical accompaniment, thereby creating a more lively and communicative impression for the audience. Nevertheless, the fundamental characteristics of the Malay movement, gentle, flowing, and refined, are maintained as the primary identity of the Joget Sonde dance. Thus, the transformation of Joget Sonde dance movements represents a form of creative adaptation that integrates traditional movement patterns with innovative elements. These changes aim to enhance the performance's visual appeal while ensuring the sustainability of the traditional dance, keeping it relevant and appealing to contemporary generations without losing its cultural values (Afolaranmi & Afolaranmi, 2024).

Transformation of musical accompaniment

The transformation of musical accompaniment through the use of modern instruments and digital media demonstrates the application of technology in the performing arts. This aligns with the findings of Evadila et al. (2019); Acquilino & Scavone (2022); Sovhyra et al. (2023), who state that musical innovation in traditional dance represents a form of cultural adaptation that enables traditional arts to remain vibrant and accessible to younger generations. The transformation of the musical accompaniment of the Joget Sonde dance is evident in changes to the instruments, modes of presentation, and the function of the accompaniment within the performance. In its traditional form, the musical accompaniment of Joget Sonde employed traditional Malay instruments such as the *gendang*, small gongs, and the Malay violin. This accompaniment was performed live by musicians using simple, repetitive rhythmic patterns, serving as a determinant of movement tempo and a means of creating a lively, intimate atmosphere in community performances.

Along with the times and the demands of modern performances, the musical accompaniment of the Joget Sonde dance has evolved further. At Sanggar Buih Selari, the dance accompaniment no longer relies entirely on live musicians but instead incorporates modern instruments such as the keyboard and electric violin. In addition, the use of digital music in recorded formats (MP3) has become a primary alternative in both rehearsal and performance processes (Cayari, 2021; Kyriakou et al., 2024). The

music can be played through electronic devices such as mobile phones, laptops, or active speakers, making it more practical and efficient (Li et al., 2021). This transformation has also affected the musical structure of the accompaniment. What was previously simple and monotonous has now been presented in a more varied form through the addition of sound layers, more dynamic tempo arrangements, and reinforced rhythms to align with the development of dance movements. Despite the use of modern media, Malay rhythmic patterns remain the primary identity, ensuring that the characteristic features of Joget Sonde are preserved. Thus, the transformation of the musical accompaniment of the Joget Sonde dance represents a form of technological adaptation and artistic creativity in responding to contemporary performance needs. These changes are not intended to replace traditional values but rather to strengthen the function of the accompaniment as a support for dance movements and as an element of performance appeal (Hou, 2025), while simultaneously maintaining the existence of Joget Sonde amid the development of modern performing arts.

Transformation of dance costume

In terms of costume, the changes reflect efforts to enhance the visual aesthetic, adapted to the demands of the modern stage. The addition of ornaments and accessories is not intended to eliminate cultural identity but rather to enhance the dance's visual appeal. This aligns with Pranskūnienė & Zabulionienė (2023); Pramudyarini (2023); Wang (2023) view that the transformation of traditional arts should continue to preserve historical and aesthetic values as integral components of cultural heritage. The transformation of costumes in the Joget Sonde dance can be observed through changes in form, materials, colors, and decorative elements, all adjusted to contemporary performance needs. In its traditional form, the Joget Sonde dance employed simple attire that reflected the everyday life of Malay coastal communities. Female dancers generally wore *baju kurung* Melayu or *kebaya* paired with a sarong, featuring minimal motifs and embellishments. The color palette tended to be soft and natural, with very limited accessories. Makeup and hairstyling were also simple, typically a basic hair bun without prominent ornaments, thereby emphasizing a sense of modesty and simplicity.

As the function of dance has evolved into a form of stage performance, the costume of Joget Sonde has undergone development and modification. At Sanggar Buih Selari, traditional costumes are creatively redesigned to become more dynamic and visually engaging without abandoning their distinctive Malay characteristics. Changes are evident in the costume, such as shortening skirts below the knee to facilitate movement and accommodate choreographic demands. In addition, brighter, more contrasting colors have been introduced to enhance visual appeal under stage lighting. Transformation is also apparent in the addition of decorative elements such as sequins, lace, and distinctive Malay motifs, which are reinforced as markers of cultural identity. Makeup and hairstyling have likewise evolved, with the inclusion of decorative hair buns, flowers, and hair styling variations to create a more attractive appearance for the dancers. Some performances also incorporate modern accessories, such as glasses, as a characteristic feature of creative presentations that distinguish the studio's version of Joget Sonde from its traditional form. Despite these various modifications, the costume of the Joget Sonde dance continues to uphold the values of modesty and Malay aesthetics. These costume adaptations are not intended to erase traditional identity but rather to respond to the aesthetic demands of modern performances (Amirulloh & Badaruddin, 2024; Utoh-Ezeajugh & Ume, 2025). Thus, the transformation of Joget

Sonde costumes represents an innovation that supports the sustainability of traditional dance, ensuring its continued relevance and appeal to contemporary society.

Transformation of the performance stage

The shift of the performance context from open spaces to formal stages reflects the changing function of the Joget Sonde dance, from local community entertainment to a representative and ceremonial performing art. This finding aligns with the study by Susanti & Syafriana (2017); Sugita et al. (2021); Yuliati et al. (2023), which asserts that innovations in performing arts are intended to expand the scope of audience appreciation and attract younger generations. The transformation of the Joget Sonde performance stage can be observed in changes to the performance space, technical arrangements, and the relationship between dancers and the audience. In its traditional form, the Joget Sonde dance was performed in open spaces without a designated stage, such as house yards, village fields, or other open areas. Dancers and audiences were positioned in proximity without clear barriers, creating an intimate, interactive, and participatory atmosphere. Performances were conducted simply, without planned lighting or sound arrangements, adapting to the conditions of the surrounding environment.

Along with the development of dance as a form of formal performance art, the stage for the Joget Sonde dance has undergone significant changes. Today, Joget Sonde is performed more frequently on formal stages such as theatres, halls, and festival platforms. Performances are presented with a more structured stage arrangement, complemented by lighting, sound design, and stage decorations that enhance the performance's aesthetic value. This setup allows the dance to be presented in a more focused and professional manner, making it accessible to a larger audience. The transformation of the stage also affects the way the dance is presented. Dancers are required to adjust their facing directions, formations, and movement expressions so they are clearly readable from greater distances. The direct interaction that was previously dominant has decreased, replaced by visual communication through choreography and stage artistry. This has encouraged the development of more varied floor patterns and movement compositions. Thus, the transformation of the Joget Sonde performance stage represents an adaptation to the development of modern performing arts. These changes do not diminish the traditional values of the dance but rather expand its expressive possibilities and the reach of its performances, ensuring that Joget Sonde remains present, relevant, and appreciated by a wider audience.

Malay cultural values after transformation

The transformation of the Joget Sonde dance has not diminished the Malay cultural values that underpin its creation and performance. Although the dance has undergone innovations in movement, music, costume, and stage presentation, the noble values of Malay culture remain the primary identity of the dance. These values are reflected in the dancers' attitudes, expressions, and the meanings embedded in every element of the performance. One of the core values that is consistently preserved is politeness. In Malay culture, politeness is manifested through gentle, restrained movements and a graceful, proper body posture (Nasir et al., 2025; Uri et al., 2025). Despite the development and elaboration of movements, Joget Sonde continues to present refined and controlled gestures, ensuring that the performance does not violate the moral norms and ethical standards of Malay society.

In addition, the values of togetherness and social harmony are also consistently maintained. From the beginning, Joget Sonde has served as a form of community entertainment that strengthens social bonds. This value is still evident in group dance presentations, floor patterns that reflect unity, and the overall performance atmosphere, which emphasizes intimacy and collective enjoyment, even when presented on formal stages. The value of beauty and Malay aesthetics also remains an inseparable element. Malay aesthetics emphasize balance, harmony, and refinement, whether in movement, musical accompaniment, or costume design (Yusof et al., 2025; Zulkifli et al., 2025). In the transformed version, these aesthetic elements are further enhanced through more visually engaging arrangements, while still adhering to motifs, colors, and forms that reflect Malay cultural identity.

Furthermore, the values of cultural identity and respect for tradition continue to be preserved as the main foundation of the transformation (Akhatova et al., 2024). The development of the Joget Sonde dance continues to draw on its basic movement patterns, Malay rhythms, and the underlying cultural philosophy. This demonstrates the artists' awareness of maintaining continuity between tradition and innovation. Thus, Malay cultural values such as politeness, togetherness, beauty, and cultural identity remain the essence of the Joget Sonde dance despite its transformation. The innovations implemented do not eliminate these values; rather, they strengthen Joget Sonde as a traditional art form capable of creatively adapting while retaining its authentic identity.

Creative cultural preservation and sustainability

Despite undergoing various innovations, the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari continues to uphold Malay cultural values such as politeness, togetherness, and social harmony. This demonstrates that the transformation is dynamic and adaptive rather than a displacement of tradition, as it strengthens the dance's cultural identity. Thus, the transformation of Joget Sonde can be understood as a form of creative and sustainable cultural preservation, since the changes do not aim to eliminate or replace traditional values but rather adapt the presentation to remain relevant to contemporary developments. In this context, cultural preservation is not rigidly maintaining the old form, but an adaptive process that enables traditional dance to remain vibrant and appreciated by modern society (Qian & Saearani, 2025). Creativity is evident in the development of the performance's various elements, including movement, musical accompaniment, costume, and stage design (Yao, 2025). The addition of new movement variations, the use of digital music, costume modifications, and the use of formal stages represent the artists' innovations in enhancing the performance's visual appeal and aesthetics. These innovations are implemented while maintaining the distinctive characteristics of Joget Sonde, such as the gentle Malay movement style, the value of politeness, and the atmosphere of togetherness, thereby preserving cultural identity.

Meanwhile, sustainability is reflected in Joget Sonde's ability to be passed down and practised by younger generations. With a more modern presentation that aligns with contemporary audience preferences, Joget Sonde not only survives as a cultural artifact of the past but also evolves into an active and dynamic performing art. This transformation provides opportunities for dancer regeneration, expands the function of performances, and enhances public appreciation of traditional dance arts. Thus, the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance represents a strategy for cultural preservation that balances traditional values with innovation. Through a creative and sustainable approach, Joget Sonde maintains its Malay cultural identity while adapting to social and

aesthetic changes over time, ensuring its continued vibrancy and meaning in contemporary society.

Conclusions

The transformation of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari represents a creative and sustainable adaptation of Riau Malay traditional art to contemporary demands, encompassing changes in movement, musical accompaniment, costume, and stage design. Although innovations have been introduced to enhance visual appeal, choreographic dynamics, and the use of modern media and staging, Malay cultural values such as politeness, togetherness, social harmony, aesthetics, and cultural identity remain at the core of the dance. This transformation not only expands the scope of appreciation and relevance of Joget Sonde in the modern era but also demonstrates that cultural preservation can be conducted dynamically through a combination of tradition and innovation. As a result, the traditional dance continues to thrive, is embraced by younger generations, and remains a symbol of identity and pride for the Malay community.

The implications of this study indicate that the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari can serve as a model for creative and sustainable cultural preservation. The findings provide evidence that innovations in movement, music, costume, and stage design do not diminish traditional values but rather enhance the appeal and relevance of the dance for younger generations. These findings have practical implications for artists and cultural managers, underscoring the need to develop innovative strategies that maintain tradition while adapting to modern aesthetic needs. In this way, traditional dance can continue to thrive, be appreciated by a wider audience, and contribute to cultural education and the promotion of Malay identity in the contemporary era.

This study has certain limitations, as it focuses solely on the transformation of the Joget Sonde dance at Sanggar Buih Selari in Pekanbaru, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to variations in Joget Sonde performances across other regions or dance studios. Additionally, the study emphasizes aspects of movement, music, costume, and stage design, while audience perceptions, social impacts, and the economic aspects of performing arts have not been explored in depth. Therefore, future research could expand the scope by comparing the transformation of Joget Sonde across various studios or regions, and by examining the effects of these transformations on public appreciation, youth participation, and the economic sustainability of the art form. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural preservation through dance innovation.

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