

Interpretation of the Symbolic Meaning in the Sri Kayun Traditional Dance in Kulon Progo Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Sri Kayun dance, which has served as the official welcoming dance of Kulon Progo Regency since 2022. This research aims to identify, describe, and interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in the movements of the Sri Kayun dance, as well as the cultural values that underlie it. The study is guided by a semiotic approach to explain how symbolic meanings are constructed and represented within the performance. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method using a case study approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, literature reviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the name "Sri Kayun" embodies a philosophical concept of inner and outer beauty that functions not merely as an aesthetic marker but as a normative cultural ideal for the community. The dance movements illustrate respect, humility, social harmony, and cooperation. The study argues that the Sri Kayun dance operates as a symbolic system through which cultural identity and social values are continuously constructed and communicated. Symbolic meanings are embedded in every element of the performance, positioning it as a cultural text that requires interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Special Region of Yogyakarta (*Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*) represents a unique autonomous region endowed with a rich diversity of cultural expressions, positioning it as one of Indonesia's prominent areas in cultivating its identity as the "City of Culture." Its deep historical roots ensure that cultural heritage remains actively preserved and continuously practised, reflecting the enduring vitality of its traditions. This condition underscores the central role of culture as an essential element that must be sustained. Kulon Progo, as one of the regencies within DIY, likewise possesses a wealth of cultural heritage that is equally significant (Kristianingrum & Susanto, 2020).

In a fundamental sense, culture constitutes a way of life encompassing human thought processes, closely linked to reason and intellectual capacity. It includes a wide range of elements, such as knowledge, traditional arts, customs, skills, habits, and systems of belief and faith. These elements are transmitted through social structures, in both tangible and symbolic forms, and are manifested in human actions and material creations. Culture, therefore, embodies a concept of considerable breadth and depth, integrating multiple dimensions of human existence (Indrawati & Sari, 2024).

Statistical data published by satudata.kulonprogokab.go.id reveal a substantial number of artistic communities in Kulon Progo, indicating the dynamic development of diverse cultural forms. In 2024, records show the existence of 1,553 art groups, 18 art and cultural festivals, 35 artists and cultural figures, and 97 art studios within the region. These figures demonstrate that cultural practices continue to thrive in Kulon Progo.

Traditional dance constitutes one of the prominent artistic expressions in Indonesia. It serves not merely as an aesthetic performance but as a medium for articulating meaningful expressions, embodying values, and representing the social life of a community. Traditional dance emerges from human creativity that perceives and expresses the aesthetic dimensions of a community's cultural system. The dances that evolve within society reflect local knowledge, norms, and belief systems, which are manifested through movement, costume, and musical composition. This position situates traditional dance as a cultural text that invites critical interpretation, particularly in relation to the transmission of local values (Wiradharma et al., 2025).

As a cultural practice transmitted across generations, traditional dance plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing local cultural identity. It functions as a medium through which communities articulate their existence while simultaneously preserving their identity. As a form of cultural heritage, traditional dance encapsulates historical experiences and distinctive ways of life across different regions, thereby occupying a central role in identity formation. Previous studies on the Sri Kayun dance have predominantly emphasised descriptive aspects, such as movement, costume, and musical structure, positioning them as technical references for practitioners. This tendency reveals a significant research gap, particularly in the area of in-depth symbolic interpretation and its relation to cultural representation and identity construction. This gap establishes the novelty of the present study, which seeks to examine the symbolic meanings embedded in dance movements as representations of Kulon Progo's local culture (Kasmiati et al., [2025](#)).

Within this context, the present study focuses on the Sri Kayun dance, the official welcoming dance of Kulon Progo Regency, which was formally recognised in 2022. Despite this official status, public understanding of its deeper symbolic meanings remains limited. The relatively scarce scholarly attention to its symbolic dimensions further highlights the urgency of this research. The central problem addressed in this study concerns how symbolic meanings are constructed within the movements of the Sri Kayun dance and how these meanings represent local cultural values. The analysis focuses on the symbolic meanings embodied in the choreography of the Sri Kayun dance, which integrates elements of classical Yogyakarta-style dance with distinctive local movements from Kulon Progo, as well as the cultural values that underlie these elements. Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to identify, describe, and interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in the various movements of the Sri Kayun dance, along with the cultural values they convey.

The establishment of the Sri Kayun dance as an official welcoming performance reflects the local government's deliberate strategy of cultural institutionalization. The designation of a dance as an official regional representation carries inherent political and cultural dimensions, in which performing arts function not only as aesthetic expressions but also as instruments of power representation, tradition legitimization, and cultural diplomacy. This dimension holds analytical significance in understanding how cultural symbols are produced, regulated, and maintained within institutional frameworks. In this regard, the Sri Kayun dance operates as a consciously constructed symbol intended to project the image of Kulon Progo as a region deeply rooted in tradition while remaining adaptive to contemporary dynamics (Elvandari, [2020](#)).

The symbolic meanings embedded in the dance movements do not exist independently but are shaped by the interplay among choreography, social context, and the value system of the supporting community. Each movement in traditional dance typically contains a semiotic layer that reflects relationships between humans and nature, among individuals, and with the spiritual realm. This study adopts an interpretive semiotic perspective to analyze how these layers of meaning are structured and communicated. By analysing movements in the Sri Kayun dance, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how the people of Kulon Progo conceptualise harmony, balance, and the value of politeness, all of which are integral to Javanese culture. Such meanings often remain implicit, thereby necessitating an interpretive analytical approach to uncover them (Al Ghifary et al., [2024](#); Chairunnisa, [2018](#)).

The presence of the Sri Kayun dance in the public sphere also reflects an ongoing process of cultural institutionalization that shapes patterns of value transmission and reproduction. This process generates a tension between preservation and transformation, particularly when symbolic meanings risk being reduced to mere performative functions. The institutionalisation of dance through formal policy frameworks transforms it from an organic cultural expression into a structured, standardised form. This condition may strengthen preservation efforts while simultaneously opening the possibility of a reduction in meaning if emphasis is placed primarily on performance rather than philosophical understanding. This issue underscores the importance of analytical research that safeguards interpretive depth.

The interaction between classical Yogyakarta-style dance elements and local Kulon Progo characteristics within the Sri Kayun dance reflects a broader process of cultural hybridization. This phenomenon illustrates that culture is inherently dynamic and can integrate diverse influences without losing its foundational identity. Such hybridity is analytically relevant for explaining how local identity is negotiated within broader cultural frameworks. This synthesis is an effort to sustain tradition's continuity while simultaneously fostering distinct local differentiation. An examination of

this aspect provides insight into how cultural identity is shaped through the negotiation between the "great tradition" and the "little tradition."

Several previous studies on this topic have generally focused on descriptive accounts of movement, costume, and performance elements, treating them primarily as technical references in dance practice. Studies that offer rigorous analytical examinations of symbolic meaning—particularly those that connect symbolic interpretation with cultural representation and local identity construction—remain limited. Research by Saidi et al. (2025) indicates that studies on batik tend to emphasise symbolic, aesthetic, and identity-related dimensions through semiotic and historical approaches. However, investigations into the ontological and epistemological foundations of batik remain scarce, so this study seeks to address this gap by emphasising the relationship between batik and nature as a fundamental basis for the formation of meaning and knowledge. Fauzi et al. (2025) demonstrate that the *Ngangkring* art tradition in *Dusun Cariu* embodies symbolic meanings within *kawih* lyrics composed in archaic Sundanese, representing philosophical values such as religiosity, environmental awareness, diligence, ethical conduct, and filial piety. Meanwhile, Mawardi (2024) reveals that the *Lengger Banyumasan* dance is deeply rooted in the religious and cultural traditions of the Banyumas community, originally functioning within fertility and prosperity rituals, and continues to maintain strong connections with belief systems and local identity despite its transformation into a form of entertainment.

This study makes a distinct contribution by moving beyond the predominantly descriptive, technical orientation of previous research toward a more rigorous analytical exploration of symbolic meaning in traditional dance. While earlier works have examined symbolic, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions across various art forms—including batik, *Ngangkring*, and *Lengger*—these studies remain fragmented and have not explicitly integrated symbolic interpretation with frameworks of cultural representation and local identity construction. The present study advances scholarly discourse by positioning the Sri Kayun dance as a "cultural text" analysed through a semiotic perspective, thereby linking symbolic interpretation to processes of identity formation and cultural institutionalisation. This approach not only addresses the existing research gap but also proposes a more comprehensive analytical model for understanding traditional dance as a dynamic site of meaning production in contemporary cultural contexts.

This research contributes to the field of cultural studies by providing a deeper interpretive understanding of the symbolic meanings embedded in institutionalised traditional dance. A nuanced understanding of the dance's symbols and values can enhance collective awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage. In the context of globalisation and cultural homogenization, such analysis strengthens the resilience of local cultures. The study serves not only as scientific documentation but also as a reflective instrument for maintaining the continuity of cultural identity amid rapid social transformation.

This study examines the Sri Kayun dance within the cultural context of Kulon Progo through four main objectives: first, to analyze Kulon Progo as the locus of the emergence of the Sri Kayun dance; second, to explore the historical and cultural context underlying its creation; third, to interpret variations in movement as a symbolic system within the dance; and fourth, to identify the representation of cultural values embodied in the performance of the Sri Kayun dance.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive, qualitative case study method to explore the complexity of the phenomenon without experimental manipulation of a group, an individual, or an object. Data were collected through (1) non-participant observation, (2) in-depth interviews with choreographers, studio owners, and dancers, and (3) a review of relevant scholarly literature, including archival materials and documentation related to the research subjects. The dataset comprises field notes derived from observations, verbatim interview transcripts, visual documentation of dance movements, and pertinent textual sources. The validity of the findings is ensured through the triangulation of data sources and supporting literature (Rachman et al., 2024).

The triangulation process was carried out by integrating data obtained from observations, interviews, and literature review, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings through cross-verification across multiple sources. The selection of research informants was conducted using purposive sampling, based on predetermined criteria established by the researcher. Informants were chosen for their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the Sri Kayun dance. The study engaged a limited number of key informants representing diverse roles in the production and performance of the dance.

The analytical process proceeded through several stages, including data reduction, categorisation, coding of symbolic elements within the dance movements, and interpretive analysis using a semiotic framework. At this stage, each movement was examined as a system of signs comprising signifiers (the forms of movement) and their corresponding signified meanings, which were subsequently interpreted in relation to their social and cultural contexts. This analytical procedure enables a systematic, in-depth interpretation of the symbolic meanings embedded in the Sri Kayun dance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Kulon Progo as a Socio-Cultural Locus of the Sri Kayun Dance

The research is situated in Kulon Progo Regency, one of the administrative regions within the Special Region of Yogyakarta (*Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*), which is endowed with abundant natural, social, and cultural resources that are actively preserved. A significant portion of Kulon Progo's territory is inhabited by rural communities whose cultural life remains deeply rooted and vibrant. The Sri Kayun dance emerges directly from this socio-cultural environment, where communal values, traditions, and local expressions are integral to everyday life. Kulon Progo thus provides the cultural foundation that shapes the meaning, function, and interpretation of the Sri Kayun dance.



Figure 1: Sri Kayun dance performance

Source: Infopublik, 2022

Artistic activities in Kulon Progo receive institutional support through structured cultural programs, including festivals, performances, and ceremonial events organised by governmental and cultural bodies. These initiatives reflect an ongoing process of cultural reproduction that is both organised and sustained (Rizqi, 2024). The presence of Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA) further serves as a strategic cultural space in which traditional arts are publicly displayed and negotiated within a modern context. Cultural actors and institutions actively reposition traditional performances, including the Sri Kayun dance, within broader social, ceremonial, and promotional frameworks. This process enables the dance to function simultaneously as a ritual performance, a marker of cultural identity, and a medium for representing Kulon Progo to wider audiences.

The study of the Sri Kayun dance situates Kulon Progo not merely as an administrative territory but as a dynamic cultural space that continuously produces and reproduces meaning. A cultural-semiotic perspective elucidates how symbols embedded within the Sri Kayun dance are constructed, interpreted, and reinterpreted through social interactions and institutional practices. Social actors, cultural institutions, and policy frameworks actively shape the meanings attributed to the dance, preventing symbolic interpretations from becoming fixed or static. The Sri Kayun dance thus reflects an ongoing negotiation between inherited traditions, local values, and contemporary cultural agendas.

The values embedded in the Kulon Progo community and its rich cultural landscape are articulated through the symbolic elements of the Sri Kayun dance, rendering it inseparable from the socio-cultural context that sustains it (Rizqi, 2024; Zuryani et al., 2025). Its choreography, patterns of gesture, and overall performance structure encode values such as politeness, harmony, respect, and social cohesion. Performers and cultural practitioners actively reproduce these values through disciplined bodily expression, enabling the dance to serve as a medium that translates abstract cultural principles into visible, performative forms.

Kulon Progo reinforces its position as the birthplace of the Sri Kayun dance through a combination of historical experience, social imagination, and collective cultural aspirations. The community ascribes meaning to the dance because it reflects shared identity and locally grounded values shaped through lived experience. Institutional recognition—particularly through the designation of the Sri Kayun dance as an official welcoming performance—further strengthens this process of identity construction. Governmental and cultural institutions actively formalise the dance as a symbolic representation of the region, elevating its status from a local artistic expression to a collective cultural emblem.

The Sri Kayun dance, therefore, operates not only as an artistic performance but also as a form of cultural representation shaped through processes of institutionalisation and identity construction. Cultural actors selectively articulate and present local values through the dance, constructing a coherent cultural narrative that represents Kulon Progo. Both the community and institutional stakeholders continuously negotiate the balance between preserving tradition and responding to contemporary demands, including tourism, public representation, and cultural promotion. Kulon Progo thus serves as a central analytical locus where cultural meaning, identity formation, and institutional processes converge to shape the Sri Kayun dance.

Historical and Cultural Context in the Creation of the Sri Kayun Dance: Cultural Construction and Symbolic Formation

Dance is a form of cultural heritage that serves as a medium for self-expression, communication, and social influence. From a social perspective, artistic works are not solely created to satisfy their creators but are expected to play a meaningful role in broader societal life. This condition underscores the expansive function of art and its significant position within community life. A cultural-semiotic perspective further explains that dance operates as a system of signs through which meanings are produced, circulated, and interpreted within specific social contexts, enabling artistic expression to function simultaneously as a communicative and representational medium.

The Sri Kayun dance represents a creative work produced by artists from Kulon Progo, designed as a welcoming performance for guests. Its creation originated from an initiative proposed by an official from the Kulon Progo Cultural Affairs Office (*Kundha Kabudayan*) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s. At that time, Kulon Progo Regency was undergoing a significant transformation marked by the inauguration of a new international-scale airport, namely Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA). This historical moment reflects a broader socio-cultural shift in which regional development and increased global connectivity are stimulating the emergence of new cultural symbols. Governmental actors actively initiate and support the production of cultural performances as part of institutional strategies to construct and promote regional identity.

This context prompted a critical reflection on the need for a welcoming ceremony that would not merely fulfil ceremonial functions but genuinely represent Kulon Progo. The vision was further strengthened by the expectation that, following the pandemic and the operation of the international airport, there would be a demand for an artistic performance that is engaging, representative, and aligned with available human resources. From this context emerged “—an idea and conceptual framework for creating a specifically designed welcoming dance intended to represent the identity of Kulon Progo Regency (Dewi & Fazri, 2025; Mahadewi et al., 2025). This process indicates that the Sri Kayun dance is not a spontaneous cultural product but a deliberately constructed symbol shaped through institutional intention and collective imagination. Cultural actors actively negotiate among aesthetic considerations, social expectations, and institutional objectives to produce a performance that embodies Kulon Progo.

The Sri Kayun dance does not derive from a particular myth or historical narrative. However, it emerges from creative imagination, with the primary aim of expressing homage and embodying the ideal self-image envisioned by the people of Kulon Progo. In this sense, the Sri Kayun dance extends beyond a purely functional role, serving as a representation of the region’s character—a community known for its friendliness, natural beauty, and strong moral values, which together make it an appealing destination. The naming of the dance as “Sri Kayun” was not incidental but

the result of careful consideration by its creators, who sought a term with profound meaning. This condition demonstrates that cultural meaning within the Sri Kayun dance is constructed rather than inherited, allowing symbolic interpretation to remain open and continuously negotiated among creators, performers, and audiences.

Philosophically, the word “Sri” is understood to signify beauty and nobility, where beauty transcends physical appearance and is reflected in elevated moral values. These include politeness, ethical conduct, and propriety in both behaviour and speech. The term “Kayun,” derived from the Javanese word *Kayungyun*, generally conveys meanings such as being cherished, sought after, and captivating. This term was chosen to express the aspiration that Kulon Progo would attract attention and leave a lasting, joyful impression on visitors, symbolised by the presence of the Sri Kayun dance (Febrianty et al., 2025; Murtadlo & Anshori, 2025). From a semiotic perspective, “Sri” and “Kayun” function as signifiers that encode moral and aspirational values, while their associated meanings serve as signified concepts shaped by cultural context. The naming process thus constitutes a symbolic act that links linguistic expression with the construction of cultural identity. These meanings remain dynamic, continuously interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to evolving social contexts, including tourism, cultural promotion, and regional branding.



Figure 2: The Sri Kayun Welcome Dance, a traditional dance from Kulon Progo Regency
Source: validnews.id, 2022

An analysis of the historical and cultural context of the Sri Kayun dance demonstrates that its creation involves a complex interaction between artistic creativity, institutional policy, and socio-cultural transformation. Each element—historical background, naming, and functional purpose—contributes to a broader narrative in which the dance operates as a medium for constructing and communicating the identity of Kulon Progo. This synthesis indicates that the Sri Kayun dance does not merely convey isolated meanings but forms an integrated symbolic system in which cultural values, identity, and institutional interests intersect and converge.

Movement Variations as a Semiotic System and Cultural Identity Construction in the Sri Kayun Dance

The Sri Kayun dance is a classical Yogyakarta-style traditional dance, characterised by smooth, flowing movements and embodying *pernés* or *kéwes* qualities—graceful and supple—which reflect the idealised gentleness associated with Javanese femininity. The choreography also incorporates elements from the *Angguk* dance, a distinctive local tradition from Kulon Progo that has long been embedded within the community. This integration reflects an ongoing process of cultural negotiation, in which choreographers combine classical and local elements to construct a hybrid identity that remains rooted in local specificity while adhering to established aesthetic conventions.

Human beings think, act, and experience emotions through symbolic expressions that distinguish them from other living beings. Symbols may take the form of objects, events, sounds, or written representations that are imbued with meaning. Within the context of dance, movements function as symbolic media that connect human existence with

both natural and spiritual dimensions (Batubara, [2023](#); Sari et al., [2020](#)). From a semiotic perspective, each movement can be understood as a sign, with the physical gesture serving as the *signifier* and the associated cultural meaning as the signified. These meanings emerge through interpretive processes shaped by cultural context and collective understanding, allowing them to remain dynamic and open to reinterpretation rather than fixed.

Not all movements in the Sri Kayun dance carry explicit symbolic meanings. Many are derived from the established structure of Yogyakarta-style classical dance and selected for their compatibility with the overall character of the Sri Kayun performance. The dance, as a whole, presents graceful, fluid movements that symbolise beauty and elegance, particularly the idealised image of a young Javanese woman. This aesthetic framework provides the structural foundation within which specific symbolic meanings are embedded.

The *trisi* movement serves as the opening sequence, characterised by small, measured steps performed with the heels raised and the knees slightly bent (*mendhak*). This movement often functions as a transitional element when entering or exiting the stage. Symbolically, *trisi* represents the beginning of a process, reflecting readiness, mindfulness, and careful intention in each step. At the same time, this interpretation remains open, as different audiences may perceive it simply as a transitional gesture without attributing deeper philosophical significance.

The *sembahan* movement is performed by bringing both hands together in front of the face, accompanied by a slight bow of the head and body. This gesture derives from the concept of *sembah*, which conveys respect and humility. In the Sri Kayun dance, *sembahan* functions as a welcoming gesture toward guests while simultaneously expressing values of politeness and reverence. The movement operates across multiple layers of meaning—social, spiritual, and aesthetic—allowing for diverse interpretations depending on cultural perspective.

The flower scattering movement involves gently dispersing flowers in various directions. This sequence directly represents the welcoming function of the Sri Kayun dance. The act of scattering flowers symbolizes the spreading of fragrance and goodwill toward guests. At the same time, the movement operates as both a symbolic act and a visual spectacle, illustrating how ritual meaning and aesthetic presentation coexist within the performance.

The *lampah sekar* movement consists of slow, rhythmic steps combined with refined hand gestures. The term itself combines *lampah* (walking) and *sekar* (flower), evoking a sense of elegance and refinement. This movement represents the idealized character of Javanese women as graceful, composed, and attentive. Such representation reinforces culturally constructed gender ideals, which may also be critically understood as products of social expectations rather than inherent traits.

The *tumpang tali* movement is characterised by overlapping hand gestures that resemble tying a rope. This movement symbolises connection and continuity within social life, reflecting the principles of harmony and interdependence. While it conveys collective values such as cooperation, it also presents an idealised vision of social harmony that may not fully capture the complexities of lived social realities.

The *ulap-ulap* movement mimics the gesture of looking into the distance by raising the hands above the head. This movement symbolises alertness and readiness, representing a forward-looking orientation. It reflects not only the anticipation of arriving guests but also broader aspirations for Kulon Progo's future potential. The movement illustrates how individual gestures can encode collective hopes and shared visions.

The *muryani busana* movement depicts acts of self-adornment through gestures that simulate looking into a mirror, arranging hair, and adjusting clothing. This movement symbolises preparation and self-presentation, reflecting the Javanese philosophical concept of *ngadi sarira*, *ngadi busana*, which emphasises the importance of maintaining one's appearance as a form of respect for oneself and others. It also represents the cultivation of confidence within socially accepted norms.

The *megol* or *ngegol* movement originates from the *Angguk* dance, a traditional form deeply rooted in Kulon Progo. Its incorporation into the Sri Kayun dance reflects a deliberate effort to integrate local cultural identity into a classical framework. This adaptation highlights a conscious cultural strategy in which identity is actively constructed through the selection, reinterpretation, and transformation of movement elements.

An analysis of these movement variations demonstrates that each gesture does not function in isolation but forms part of an interconnected symbolic system. The Sri Kayun dance integrates aesthetic form, symbolic meaning, and cultural values into a cohesive performance structure. The combination of movements constructs a cultural narrative that represents Kulon Progo's identity, illustrating how traditional dance serves as a medium for simultaneously articulating social values, cultural identity, and institutional representation.

Representation of Cultural Values in the Sri Kayun Dance Performance

Beyond its status as an artistic form rich in symbolic meaning, dance functions as a vital medium for cultivating and sustaining cultural identity within a community. Traditional dance plays a pivotal role in strengthening social cohesion by reflecting shared historical and cultural foundations across multiple dimensions of communal life, thereby reinforcing collective identity (Mahmudah et al., [2021](#); Oktavianus et al., [2024](#)). From a cultural-semiotic perspective, dance operates as a system of representation in which values are encoded, performed, and interpreted through symbolic forms. Performers enact signs through disciplined bodily techniques, audiences interpret these signs within specific cultural horizons, and institutions regulate their circulation through curated performances and official events. This interaction generates an ongoing cycle of meaning-making that keeps cultural identity dynamic rather than static.

The Sri Kayun dance extends beyond the display of aesthetic beauty and performative potential; it serves as a representation of the values upheld by the people of Kulon Progo. The beauty conveyed is not confined to visual appeal but encompasses philosophical meanings that reflect gentleness, hospitality, and norms of courtesy in social interaction. These values emerge through interpretive processes involving choreographers, performers, and audiences, allowing for multiple layers of meaning rather than a singular, fixed interpretation. Choreographers encode values through the selection and stylization of movement vocabularies, performers translate them into refined bodily expressions, and audiences decode them through prior cultural knowledge and situational contexts.

The Sri Kayun dance is intended to represent the cultural values, characteristics, and aspirations of the Kulon Progo community. It therefore functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a cultural medium that communicates social characteristics and constructs regional identity (Marsan & Siregar, [2021](#); Nirmala et al., [2021](#)). The performance becomes a representational space in which cultural values are selectively articulated and displayed within a broader process of identity construction shaped by local traditions, public expectations, and institutional agendas, including tourism promotion and regional branding.

Traditional dance also serves as a medium for transmitting social values and cultural norms across generations. It encompasses not only physical movement but also embedded meanings that reflect community belief systems and value orientations. The Sri Kayun dance integrates movement, costume, music, and performance structure into a cohesive symbolic system that communicates values such as politeness, harmony, respect, and social cohesion. These elements do not function independently; rather, they interact to form a coherent cultural narrative representing the identity of Kulon Progo. Costume aesthetics reinforce ideals of refinement, musical accompaniment regulates tempo and emotional nuance, and choreographic patterns structure the progression of meaning throughout the performance. This interrelation demonstrates that symbolic meaning emerges from the totality of performance elements rather than from isolated components.

A critical reading suggests that these cultural values do not operate as universally accepted truths but as negotiated meanings shaped by social contexts and power relations. Institutional recognition of the Sri Kayun dance as an official welcoming performance influences which values are emphasised and how they are presented to audiences. Cultural actors selectively foreground certain values—such as hospitality and harmony—while potentially marginalising others that may not align with representational objectives. This selective articulation reflects the role of cultural production in shaping identity narratives, where representation inherently involves processes of inclusion and exclusion. The Sri Kayun dance thus operates within a dynamic field of meaning in which cultural values are continuously reinterpreted in response to shifting social, political, and economic conditions.

The synthesis of all symbolic elements within the Sri Kayun dance reveals a broader analytical pattern: the dance functions as an integrated system that constructs and communicates cultural identity across multiple levels. Individual movements, aesthetic forms, and performance contexts collectively generate a layered narrative that connects personal expression, communal values, and institutional representation. The Sri Kayun dance demonstrates how traditional performance can simultaneously preserve cultural continuity while adapting to contemporary demands. This synthesis

confirms that meaning does not reside in discrete gestures but emerges from the relational interplay of symbolic forms, interpretive practices, and cultural structures that continuously reshape Kulon Progo's identity within a broader socio-cultural landscape.

CONCLUSION

The Sri Kayun dance extends beyond the domain of performing arts, functioning as a cultural representation deeply rooted in the socio-cultural life of the Kulon Progo community. It operates as a “cultural text,” imbued with symbolic meanings, and serves as a medium of nonverbal communication among creators, performers, and audiences. These meanings are articulated through interconnected elements, including naming, dancer selection, movement variations, and expressive forms. Movement constitutes the primary semiotic medium, in which each gesture functions as a sign linking bodily expression with cultural values. The interpretation of these symbols emerges through cultural experience and social interaction, demonstrating that meaning is continuously constructed and negotiated rather than fixed.

The cultural values embedded in the Sri Kayun dance form a structured symbolic system that represents the collective aspirations and identity of the Kulon Progo community. As a welcoming dance, it encodes values such as courtesy, respect, harmony, and both inner and outer beauty through choreographic patterns and performative expressions. These values function as cultural signs that shape and reinforce the community's self-image as refined, hospitable, and culturally grounded. The performance actively constructs a shared social imagination by projecting an idealised identity, enabling the dance to function as a mechanism for cultural transmission and identity formation across generations.

This study contributes to the development of theoretical perspectives on symbolism and performance by demonstrating that traditional dance operates as an integrated semiotic system in which meaning is produced through the interaction of movement, cultural values, and social context. The analysis advances beyond descriptive interpretation by emphasising the processes through which meaning is constructed and institutionalised. The study remains limited to a specific case and primarily draws on the perspectives of cultural actors, which may not fully capture the diversity of possible interpretations. Future research may extend this inquiry by incorporating audience reception, comparative cultural analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches to deepen the understanding of symbolic meaning in traditional performance.

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