

## Research Article

# Conservation Values and Values Conservation in the Oral Tradition of Jalawastu Community

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**Abstract.**

This study explores the oral tradition of the Jalawastu community, a tourist village known for its rich customs and traditions. Despite being open to external influences due to tourism, the community remains deeply committed to preserving its cultural heritage, particularly its oral traditions. This study aims to explore the conservation values embedded in Jalawastu's oral traditions and examine the community's efforts to maintain them. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation over a three-day period. Findings show that the community's oral traditions take the form of performances and rituals, which reflect conservation values in both cultural and environmental aspects. Efforts to preserve oral traditions include passing these traditions down to younger generations and routinely conducting performances and rituals. Tourism plays a crucial role in sustaining these traditions, as cultural events have become a source of financial support for the community.

**Keywords:** conservation values, Jalawastu, values conservation

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## 1. Introduction

Modern life is characterized by technological advances, globalization, urbanization, and rapid changes in people's way of life. Technological innovations, such as the internet, fast transportation, and advanced communication tools, have changed the way people work, communicate, and even think. This has had a major impact on the mindset of the new generation, which tends to be more practical, instant, and globally connected.

However, in this increasingly connected world, traditions are often eroded by the tide of modernity. As the younger generation becomes more interested in global trends and contemporary lifestyles, there is a great risk of losing traditional practices that are considered outdated or no longer relevant. Modern life brings challenges in terms of cultural identity. Modernization is often seen as threatening the continuity of tradition

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because of the tendency of people to prefer a more practical and efficient way of life, which often ignores deeper cultural values and a slower pace of life.

On the other hand, tradition plays an important role in maintaining the identity of a society. Tradition includes everything from ceremonies, language, art, customs, to views on nature and social relationships. The continuity of tradition can provide a sense of depth, roots, and meaning in life. It is also a way to maintain local wisdom that can teach more holistic values of life, respect for nature, and relationships between people.

Jalawastu Hamlet in Brebes Regency, Central Java is a hamlet that is famous as a tourist village. The hamlet, which is popular for its Ngasa tradition, was named an Intangible Cultural Heritage in the traditional rites category in October 2019 by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. There are a number of tourist attractions in this hamlet, which are framed in daily life as well as in a number of traditions and traditional ceremonies. It can be said that tradition is what builds the popularity of Jalawastu hamlet.

In addition to the Ngasa tradition which is held every year, and is an official celebration of the local government, there are other unique traditions from the daily life of the Jalawastu hamlet which are an attraction for tourists as well as researchers and cultural learners. One of the famous ones is the tradition of building without using cement and its derivative products. This can be seen clearly when visiting the Jalawastu hamlet, where none of the residents' houses have walls and floors. Even when accommodating the needs of tourists visiting Jalawastu for bathing, washing, and toilets, the Jalawastu community makes ones that do not use cement at all.

This is a form of obedience of the Jalawastu community to the traditions that have been held for generations. Although modernization has touched the Jalawastu hamlet, the community does not want this modernization to change a number of traditions that they hold firmly. The tradition of building without cement materials, as well as several other unique traditions of the Jalawastu community, is a form of oral tradition that is passed down from generation to generation orally.

Dananjaja [1] said that one of the weaknesses of oral tradition is that it is easily abandoned or modified because there are no written regulations. However, this does not seem to apply to the oral tradition of the Jalawastu hamlet community. Although not institutionalized with written regulations, the power of tradition that is passed down from generation to generation still binds the community to follow it until now. This is what motivated this research which aims to reveal the conservation values that exist in

the oral tradition of the Jalawastu community, as well as how the community's efforts to maintain and preserve these values.

The influence of modernization on culture and tradition, and the efforts to preserve culture and tradition in the globalization era have been the concerns in many researches such as Suharyanto and Wiflihani [2], Hiswara et.al [3], Hasnawati et.al [4], but they were not done in Jalawastu community. A large number of studies on the Jalawastu hamlet community have been done, such as Adawiyah [5], Permata dan Birsyada [6], Pramudya et.al [7], Rokhman [8], but mostly focused on the Ngasa traditional ceremony. There has been no research that examines the oral tradition of the Jalawastu hamlet community which is associated with the preservation of the tradition amidst the rapid flow of change.

## 2. Literature Review

Aiming to reveal the conservation values that exist in the oral traditions of the Jalawastu hamlet community and efforts to preserve them, the conceptual study that is the basis of this research is the concept of 1) Oral tradition, and 2) Conservation.

### 2.1. Oral Tradition

There are several definitions of oral tradition presented by several experts. One of them is Putra [9] who said that several types of oral traditions are often found in the form of songs, performances, and speeches. The way of presenting oral traditions varies from performances, games, ceremonies to rituals. In terms of content or messages, oral traditions usually contain instructions, advice, satire, criticism, and even mantras.

In another explanation, Vansina [10] states that oral tradition is a verbal message or speech that is conveyed from generation to generation orally, by being spoken, sung, or delivered using musical instruments. Furthermore, Vansina said that not all oral sources are oral traditions. Only oral sources in the form of statements that have been conveyed from one person to another using language media are oral traditions.

Another expert, namely Dananjaja [1], states that oral tradition is a part of culture that is spread and passed down from generation to generation traditionally among members of society in different versions. The delivery of oral traditions can be in oral form or accompanied by examples of actions and reminders. Before humans knew writing or in prehistoric times, oral traditions were sources of knowledge. Oral traditions can also be used as a starting point in tracing or reconstructing historical events. However, because

they were delivered orally or by word of mouth only, in their development, oral traditions have various versions. This is also the weakness of oral traditions when used as a source of history.

From the explanations of several experts, it can be concluded that the variety of oral traditions can be categorized into two main types, namely:

a). Folk tales.

Folk tales are defined as stories that live among people in ancient times and are told from generation to generation. Folk tales usually contain moral messages. Popular folk tales among Indonesian people have a cultural background according to the region of origin of the folk tale. For example, the folk tales of Sangkuriang from West Java, Malin Kundang from West Sumatra, Timun Mas from Central Java, the Origin of Lake Toba from North Sumatra, and Roro Jonggrang from Central Java are thick with the cultural nuances of each region of origin.

b). Folk language.

Folk language is another example of an oral tradition. Forms of oral tradition that fall into the category of folk language include accents or dialects, slang, merchant language (shoptalk), everyday language that deviates from conventional language (colloquial), circumlocution (the expression “uyut” to refer to “tiger”), the way of naming someone, titles of nobility, speech levels, onomatopoeic words (words formed by imitating natural sounds or voices), and the traditional naming of streets or certain places based on historical legends (onomastics).

## 2.2. Conservation

Judging from its origin, conservation is the act of preserving or protecting something carefully [11]. Roosevelt in 1901-1909 stated that conservation is an effort to maintain what we have wisely. In Indonesia, the history of conservation has existed since the Dutch East Indies era. During the development period, the law on conservation has been regulated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 5 of 1990 concerning the conservation of natural biological resources and their ecosystems. In this case, conservation tends to lead to nature conservation.

In its development, this conservation concept is not only limited to the preservation of natural resources. Rahman [12] stated that conservation also includes physical, value, and cultural conservation. In this concept, Semarang State University (UNNES), which is

a university based on conservation values, formulates conservation that not only refers to nature conservation, but also social conservation. UNNES has a complete structure of conservation pillars, which are categorized into three main pillars, namely the pillar of values and character, the pillar of art and culture, the pillar of natural resources and the environment.

a). Pillars of Values and Character

Values are relatively stable beliefs about specific desired behavioral models and desired end states by the environment. Values are something abstract, but are understood and comprehended by the community of users. Values are something that can perfect humans according to their nature and have moral weight when integrated into certain moral behavior. Values cannot be separated from character. Character determines a person's thoughts and actions. Good character is the existence of intrinsic motivation to do what is good according to the highest standards of behavior in every situation. Good character must have three aspects, namely moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral behavior.

b). Pillars of Arts and Culture

Culture is a system of knowledge that includes a system of ideas or concepts contained in the human mind. The manifestation of culture is objects created by humans as cultured beings, in the form of behavior and objects that are real, such as behavioral patterns, language, living equipment, social organizations, religion, art, and so on, which aim to help humans in community life. Culture is the manifestation of human responses to the challenges faced in the process of adjusting to the environment. With the importance of art and cultural values, cultural conservation and art conservation need to be encouraged.

c). Natural Resources and Environment Pillar

In this pillar, there are several aspects that are of primary concern, namely natural resources, artificial resources, human resources, non-biological resources, and biodiversity. Natural resources are divided into several types, including perpetual, renewable, non-renewable, and potential resources. Artificial resources are resources that are deliberately created by humans to meet their needs. Some artificial resources in Indonesia are rice fields, reservoirs, plantations, and dry fields. Human resources consist of the power of thought and physical power possessed by individuals. Power of thought is intelligence that is innate, while physical power or skills are obtained from effort. Human resources are both the subject and object of development. Human

resource development can be seen from three aspects, namely quality, quantity, and population mobility. Meanwhile, biodiversity includes genetic diversity, species diversity, and ecosystem diversity. In addition to the resources that have been explained, this pillar also formulates environmental management which includes green architecture, green transportation, waste management, and clean energy.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method with a case study mode. The subjects of the research were the Jalawastu hamlet community. The informants in this study were categorized into two, namely the main informant and the supporting informant. The main informant was the elder (*Kokolot*) of the Jalawastu hamlet who provided data on the variety of oral traditions and the stories behind the oral traditions. While the supporting informants were the Jalawastu hamlet community who represented the age segmentation, namely children, adolescents, and adults. This study used data samples that were selected purposively according to the research objectives. The object of this research is matters related to oral traditions in the Jalawastu hamlet of Brebes.

Research data were collected in several ways, firstly: in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted with the Jalawastu hamlet community, within a 3-day visit period. Interviews were conducted by visiting the informants' homes, or in the fields, or on the way to the fields. The next data collection technique was observation. Observations were conducted in the midst of the Jalawastu hamlet community in Brebes to collect data that was the focus of the research. Because it is related to oral tradition, the target of observation is the form of the oral tradition's performance, as well as artifacts related to the oral tradition.

Data analysis was carried out using data analysis techniques suggested by Spradley [13] which include 4 stages, namely: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. Domain analysis functions to analyze the context to determine what things are related to oral tradition. Then, taxonomic analysis is carried out to determine the form, meaning, and role of the components in the study, in this case to reveal what conservation values form the oral tradition of the Jalawastu community. Furthermore, componential analysis is carried out which is a combination of domain analysis and taxonomic analysis. The last is a cultural theme analysis to show certain patterns and find out why such patterns can be formed.

## 4. Research Results and Discussions

There are a number of oral traditions known to the people of Jalawastu hamlet. Among the most popular are the centong war dance, the dendong dance, and the story of Pagedongan. In the concept presented by Putra [9], the oral traditions that are the focus of this study are included in the category of oral traditions in the form of performances, namely for the centong war and dendong dance; and oral traditions in the form of rituals, namely in the story of Pagedongan which is the place where the ritual is carried out.

Based on data collected from interviews and observations, it can be concluded that the oral traditions held by the people of Jalawastu hamlet have conservation values, as explained in the next section.

### 4.1. Conservation Values in the Oral Traditions of the Jalawastu Community

#### a). Values of the Perang Centong (Ladle War) Dance

The Perang Centong dance is a form of oral tradition of the Jalwastu community that is conveyed through performances. This dance is always performed at important local community events such as the Ngasa traditional ceremony and in welcoming guests. In villages that no longer hold Ngasa traditional ceremonies, this dance is often performed as part of a wedding ceremony, namely when the first child marries the youngest child, then a Perang Centong dance will be held.

The Perang Centong dance played by two men tells the story of a civil war between Gandasari and Gandawangi which was caused by the different views of the two brothers on faith. Gandawangi wanted to spread Islam in Jalawastu hamlet but Gandasari did not agree. Initially, the war was to be resolved in a brotherly manner by Gandasela as a mediator, but the negotiations ended not as expected. The war continued and was finally won by Gandawangi.

As explained by the *Kokolot* of the Jalawastu hamlet community, the Perang Centong dance conveys an important message related to efforts to maintain tradition, as well as openness in accepting the presence of outside influences. This message is clearly written and implied at the end of the story, which tells of Gandasari with a big heart leaving the village of Jalawastu, because he lost the war. However, before leaving the village of Jalawastu, Gandasari had time to advise Gandawangi to maintain the existing traditions, even though later many people had embraced Islam.

The Perang Centong Dance is also often associated with the peaceful entry of Islam, without coercion, as evidenced by the tools used in war, namely ladles, and not sharp weapons, such as spears, machetes, or others. There is also advice through the song Buah Kawung which fills the dance accompaniment music, namely to live together and maintain ancestral traditions from generation to generation, as stated by Turyati & Widyaningrum [14].

b). Values of the Dendong Dance

The dendong dance has a lighter story compared to the Perang Centong dance. As can be seen from the performance, this dance tells the story of mothers who happily pound rice, and create rhythmic sounds that are entertainment for the Jalawastu community, who are not allowed to play gamelan. Therefore, the dendong dance is a means to express joy and gratitude for the harvest obtained. This dance also contains the values of togetherness and mutual cooperation, which are evident from the collaboration carried out by the performers in pounding the pestle on the mortar. With good cooperation between the performers, a rhythmic sound can be produced, which can be enjoyed for its artistic value. Just like a society that can work together well, and there is no desire to stand out, a harmonious society will be formed.

c). Values in Stories about Pagedongan

In the stories told orally by the community about Pagedongan, there are a number of taboos and prohibitions which, if explored, show noble values related to conservation. One of them can be seen from the prohibition on wearing clothes, or objects made of animal skin, for tourists visiting the Pagedongan complex. This can be seen as an effort to conserve nature, where people are not allowed to use materials taken from living creatures, because in the process of taking them they will definitely have to kill certain animals.

In addition, the story about the half-snake man at the waterfall can also be interpreted as an effort to maintain the sustainability of the waterfall, by minimizing the number of visitors. In this case, nature conservation is carried out by bringing up certain stories about the waterfall, which makes people think twice about visiting it.

Meanwhile, the conservation value associated with the story about the snake in Pagedongan is also a form of cultural conservation in the form of folk language. As explained previously, one form of folk language is the use of certain names that replace the mention of wild animals. The term “mbah buyut” to refer to snakes, shows a love for animals, which is manifested by naming using the analogy of kinship in humans. Mbah



buyut is an elder and respected person, therefore, the use of this word to represent wild animals, shows that society considers wild animals as creatures that deserve to be respected and cared for. When meeting a snake, society is not taught to catch or kill it, but to chase it away, or ask it to move. This is a form of animal conservation.

#### **4.2. Efforts of the Jalawastu Community in Preserving Conservation Values in Oral Traditions**

##### **a). Efforts to Preserve the Perang Centong Dance**

Efforts to preserve the Perang Centong dance tradition can be seen from the frequency with which this dance is performed in various activities. First, this dance is part of the performance presented in the Ngasa tradition which is an icon of the Jalawastu hamlet. Being performed in an annual event attended by many visitors is an important effort in preserving this tradition, both in terms of the performers and the audience.

In addition to the Ngasa ceremony, the Perang Centong dance is also part of the marriage tradition, especially for the eldest child who marries the youngest child. This is also a form of preservation, which is carried out by continuing to expose the dance to people across generations, who usually attend the wedding ceremony together.

The Perang Centong dance is also often performed at guest welcoming events, or as part of a performance when welcoming guests. This is an effort to introduce and popularize the dance to people who are interested in the Jalawastu hamlet, and visit Jalawastu.

The Perang Centong dance tradition is inherited by always being performed at important events with the aim that this tradition does not fade even though it will certainly change in the future. In addition, the Perang Centong tradition is also passed down orally from parents to children.

##### **b). Efforts to Preserve the Dendong Dance.**

Efforts to preserve the Dendong Dance are not only carried out in the Jalawastu hamlet, during traditional ceremonies or welcoming guests. Moreover, this dance has often been performed in other areas, and has even reached the national stage. The Dendong Dance was once performed at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII), a national park as a summary of Indonesian culture, which includes various aspects of people's of all Indonesian provinces daily lives. It is a form of recognition of the existence of this dance.

No less interesting is the effort to preserve the Dendong Dance carried out on the younger generation. This art has been taught to the young people of Jalawastu, by being taught how to pound it properly so that it produces a beautiful melody. Young girls who learn and practice performing this dance are called the *laskar wanoja*.

c). Efforts to Preserve Taboos and Prohibitions related to Pagedongan

In a number of taboos that apply to the Jalawastu hamlet community, the traditional leaders have strict rules for those who are unable to comply. What is most often expressed by elders and residents is that residents of Jalawastu hamlet are welcome to look for a place to live outside Jalawastu hamlet, if they do not want to obey the taboos and prohibitions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Meanwhile, for visitors, the obligation to obey the rules in force in Jalawastu hamlet is something that cannot be negotiated. This is well socialized by traditional leaders during the welcoming ceremony, and has also been understood by visitors by reading various literature about the Jalawastu traditional village.

### 4.3. Discussion

Some conservation values can be found in the oral traditions of the Jalawastu community. In a reference on conservation concept issued by Semarang State University, there are at least two pillars that can be found in the oral traditions of the Jalawastu hamlet community, namely the pillar of art and culture, and the pillar of natural resources and the environment.

In the traditions of the Perang Cetong dance and the Dendong dance, the pillars of art and culture are clearly visible, where even though society has experienced changes due to the emergence of external influences, the Jalawastu hamlet community continues to strive to maintain its traditions and customs. Meanwhile, in the story of Pagedongan, several values related to the pillars of natural resources and the environment can be traced, including the behavior of caring for fellow creatures, namely animals, and maintaining nature and the surrounding environment.

Regarding efforts to preserve conservation values in oral traditions, it can be seen that this is done in the form of preserving the oral tradition. This process has been going well until now because of community involvement in the efforts of preservation. This is in line with research results of Usmaedi et.al.[15] stating that the key success of cultural preservation is community involvement. The community feels responsible for preserving

traditions by teaching and passing on the traditions to the younger generation. This attitude is very possible because of the benefits gained from maintaining the traditions, namely maintaining the tourist attractions. The existence of oral tradition in Jalawastu community is one of the tourist attractions that brings financial benefits to the community.

There are other traditions in the form of taboos and prohibitions applied in the Jalawastu hamlet, and can be associated with the values of nature and environmental conservation, but are not the focus of this study. This can be an opportunity for further research to study this in more depth.

## 5. Conclusion

Oral traditions in the Jalawastu hamlet community contain conservation values that tend to be more directed towards the conservation of art and culture, although there are also oral traditions that can be traced to their relationship with nature and environmental conservation. Efforts to preserve oral traditions that are also the preservation of conservation values are supported by the advancement of tourism in the Jalawastu hamlet, which provides financial benefits for the community. However, this does not mean that there is no shift at all in the oral tradition. There are a number of actions that can be concluded as ways for the community to adapt to rules and traditions, but in this study, they are not the focus of attention.

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