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THE HARMONIZATION OF TRADITION AND SUSTAINABILITY: COSTUME DESIGN IN KALPATARU CONTEMPORARY DANCE AT THE KITAPOLENG FOUNDATION

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This study aims to examine the role of Kalpataru contemporary dance costume design at the Kitapoleng Foundation as a medium of expression that integrates Balinese cultural heritage with the principles of sustainability and design innovation. The focus is on symbolism, sustainable materials, and the contribution of costumes to the narrative of the performance. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with case studies. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the choreographer, designer, and founder of Kitapoleng; observation of performances at IFEX 2024; and visual documentation. Analysis was conducted using data reduction, thematic categorization, and source triangulation methods. The woven ental fabric costumes combine symbols of tradition and sustainability. Design innovations include reinterpretations of Legong headdresses and badong accessories. The costumes reinforce the Kalpataru philosophy of the “tree of life” and increase the audience's understanding of ecological and cultural issues. Cultural negotiation emerges in the reinterpretation of tradition. The results of this research enrich performance studies through the perspective of sustainability. In practical terms, this research offers a model of collaboration between artists and craftsmen as an environmentally friendly design practice based on local culture. These findings also have implications for arts education strategies and the strengthening of Indonesian performing arts in the global discourse on sustainability.

Keywords: Costume Design, Tradition, Sustainability, Contemporary Dance, Kitapoleng Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary dance in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, has experienced rapid growth as a dynamic space that harmoniously integrates cultural heritage with aesthetic innovation. Transformations in the realm of contemporary performing arts not only demonstrate the courage to explore new ideas, but also reflect reactions to global challenges such as environmental degradation, sustainability, and the search for cultural identity in the modern era. This phenomenon is also inseparable from intercultural and cross-media practices that expressively and creatively blend traditional elements. This evolution reflects a cultural shift towards the revitalization of traditional values while adapting to changes in contemporary society (Parani, 2018).

One concrete example of this transformation is the Kalpataru contemporary dance created by the Kitapoleng Foundation and performed at the Indonesia Furniture Expo (IFEX) 2024 with the theme REAL (Reflection on Culture, Experiencing Comfort, Adapting to Sustainability, and Leading Innovation). This theme encourages creative actors to present products that combine Indonesian cultural values, comfort, and a commitment to sustainability. In this context, the Kalpataru dance adopts the basic movements of Balinese dance, but is transformed into a contemporary form with the support of costume designs made from woven ental as a representation of local cultural heritage and a symbol of sustainability.

The costume design in Kalpataru performance is not merely a visual complement, but an integral part of the performance narrative. The costumes feature woven ental details as clothing and headdresses (*gelungan*), which are traditionally made from leather or synthetic materials. The use of ental brings ecological value because it is more easily biodegradable while also emphasizing a commitment to the principles of sustainable design (J. Okubo, *personal communication*, 2025). This reflects the global trend in performing arts, which is increasingly oriented towards the creation of sustainability-oriented works. This is in line with the statement that performing arts serve as an important medium for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by encouraging material innovation, enhancing aesthetics, and conveying cultural narratives. They strengthen social influence and expand imagination, promoting a transformative approach that is in line with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda (Cabral & Galvão, 2022).

Despite rapid developments in artistic practice, academic studies specifically addressing the role of costume design in negotiating tradition and sustainability remain limited. Much dance research focuses on choreography, symbolic meaning, or sociocultural context, but has not sufficiently addressed visual and material strategies in costume creation and sustainability. Costumes serve as visual elements that enhance performance, convey character and emotion, thus aligning with the notion that costumes play a crucial role in expressing identity and ideology in contemporary performing arts (Meglin et al., 2018).

Several previous studies have addressed dance costume design and sustainability in the Balinese context, but gaps exist that warrant further in-depth investigation. Studies such as Mahendra's work on "Kostum Tari Pancering Dewata" (Pancering Dewata Dance Costume) focus on creating costumes inspired by visuals of sacred traditions, but do not specifically explore sustainable material aspects or the ecological value of transforming local materials into contemporary dance narratives (Mahendra et al., 2023). A study of the traditional Balinese costume design "Bèrbudi Bawa Leksana" highlights the importance of preserving traditional textiles and supporting local industries. However, it has not explored the mediation or negotiation between tradition and sustainability challenges in contemporary performing arts, particularly dance costumes (Pradnya Paramita et al., 2022).

From this perspective, the study of Kalpataru dance costume design is crucial, as it positions local materials (woven woven fabric) not only as innovation but also as a bridge for

negotiating between tradition and sustainability in the current cultural context. It also emphasizes the role of costume as a tool for cultural translation that reinforces ecological narratives in contemporary Balinese performing arts. Research on this theme of negotiation has not been extensively researched or thoroughly analyzed in previous studies.

The Kalpataru dance represents the “tree of life,” offering powerful ecological and spiritual symbolism. Through the costumes, the audience is invited to reflect on the relationship between humans and nature, as well as sustainable innovation. This emphasizes that costume design is not only an aesthetic product, but also a space for ethical values and cultural identity. The Kalpataru performance is a locally-based Balinese work that has been reworked in a contemporary way and has the potential to strengthen ecological awareness and enrich the global discourse on art.

This paper aims to examine in depth how costume design in Kalpataru dance represents the harmony between Balinese tradition and the principle of sustainability. Theoretically, this article contributes to enriching the literature on sustainable costume design in contemporary performing arts in Indonesia. Practically, the results of this study are expected to inspire designers, choreographers, and art institutions to create works that are not only aesthetically pleasing, but also ethical, contextual, and relevant to global issues. Thus, this research affirms the position of Indonesian performing arts, especially Balinese, as an important factor in the global discourse on sustainability, innovation, and cultural identity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study model. This research approach focuses on understanding a phenomenon through detailed descriptions and analysis of specific cases, utilizing methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document studies to collect comprehensive data (Jamaluddin & Sopiah, 2018). The approach in this study focuses on an in-depth exploration of costume design in the Kalpataru contemporary dance by the Kitapoleng Foundation. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for understanding symbolic meaning, cultural values, and sustainability principles in the context of performing arts without manipulating variables. Case studies allow researchers to explore complex phenomena that are rich in social interactions, aesthetics, and cultural narratives through direct involvement in the field (Yin, 2018).

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with costume designers, choreographers, and craftsmen; participatory observation of the creative process and performances at IFEX 2024; and visual documentation in the form of sketches, photographs, and performance recordings. Secondary data includes scientific articles, the Kitapoleng Foundation archives, and literature related to costume design and sustainability. Research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria including direct involvement in costume design, understanding of the philosophy behind the work, and application of sustainability principles (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data analysis was conducted inductively through three stages: (1) data reduction by organizing information into thematic categories such as “traditional symbolism,” “sustainable materials,” and “visual narratives”; (2) presentation of data in the form of narrative descriptions linking field findings with theoretical frameworks; and (3) verification of conclusions to ensure validity. Data credibility was strengthened by triangulating sources and methods to make interpretations more reliable (Flick, 2018).

Table 1. Research Procedures

(Source: Diantari, 2025)

Research Stage	Primary Activities	Techniques/Instruments
Data Collection	Interviews with designers, choreographers, founders	In-depth interview guidelines
	Observation of the creative process and performances	Field notes, visual documentation
	Collection of supporting documents	Archives, articles, academic literature
Data Analysis	Data reduction is the main theme	Thematic coding
	Presentation of data in descriptive narratives	Contextual description
	Verifikasi kesimpulan	Triangulation of sources and methods
Validation of Findings	Interpretation consistency test	Cross-check with informants and literature

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Costumes as a Narrative Medium in Kalpataru Performances

The costumes in the Kalpataru dance are not merely visual accessories, but rather a medium of narrative expression that conveys a philosophical message about the tree of life. The materials, colors, and shapes of the costumes create a performance atmosphere that aligns with the theme of Adapting to Sustainability from IFEX 2024. The effective synergy between costume design and choreography enhances the impact of the performance, allowing for a deeper connection between the materials and the movements. This collaboration fosters a deeper expression of the performance's message through a tangible experience (Smith, 2022).

Performance art is intermedial in nature, combining the body, space, sound design, and visual elements into a unified experience (Bieszczad, 2017). In Kalpataru's performance, costumes blend with dance movements and lighting to create an immersive effect that reinforces the audience's perception of the ecological message. The audience not only sees the costumes, but also appreciates the symbols they contain. From a performative perspective, costumes shape the dancers' stage identity. Carlson explains that costumes serve as markers of identity and influence how dancers interpret their roles and interact with the performance space (Carlson, 2018).

The Kalpataru dance, a contemporary dance, enriches the application of the theory of cultural sustainability which views tradition as an adaptive and active entity (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). The interaction of cultural values with ecological changes strengthens the vitality of tradition in the modern era. This is evident in the Kalpataru work which utilizes woven ental material, namely woven from dried palm leaves, as a sustainable supporting material. The woven ental mat is applied to the costume as a symbol of Indonesian cultural heritage that reflects expertise or skills passed down from generation to generation as well as a form of cultural identity and enhances aesthetic value and contributes to the preservation and appreciation of traditional weaving techniques. The use of woven ental mats in costumes is not uncommon considering that woven ental mats are handicraft products that generally have the main function as sitting and sleeping mats, as well as in traditional activities and ceremonies. The use of woven ental in costume materials emphasizes that materials can act as cultural agents that mediate traditional values, design innovation, and sustainability so that each material choice presents a transformation of identity and ecological narrative in contemporary performing arts (Guattari, 2005).

Costumes with woven ental fabric have a less flexible structure compared to other fabrics, but still allow freedom of movement. They also emphasize the symbol of ecological flexibility in the Kalpataru narrative and become a point of interest in the costumes, which can be responded to with dance movements (J. Okubo, [personal communication, 2025](#)). This is in line with the eco-aesthetic theory which states that art, including costumes, is a medium for dialogue about human relations with the environment, aesthetics, and ecological responses through a participatory, material, and symbolic creative process (Miller, 2005). Therefore, costumes not only beautify the dancers' bodies, but also create characters that come alive on stage.

In addition, Kalpataru costumes play a role in building an emotional dialogue between the audience and the performance. Strong visual elements are able to attract attention and encourage the audience to reflect on cultural values and environmental issues. Fletcher and Tham refer to sustainable design as a practice that not only influences the form of a product, but also the user experience (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). This analogy shows that Kalpataru's costumes create a reflective experience for the audience, bridging the performing arts with ecological awareness. Thus, the costumes in Kalpataru have a dual function as stage aesthetics and philosophical narratives. This research confirms that the role of costumes in contemporary performing arts is expanding, from mere visual ornaments to narrative mediums that connect art, culture, and global sustainability issues.

Integrating Tradition and Sustainability Practices in Costume Design

One of the most striking aspects of the Kalpataru costume design is the integration of Balinese tradition with sustainable materials. The head accessories on the Kalpataru costume use headdresses such as *gelungan*, similar to those used in Legong dance, and *badong* necklaces, which have been transformed in terms of detail and material. *Gelungan* and *badong*, which generally use carved leather, are modified with woven ental material. Ental was chosen because of its natural properties, biodegradability, and representation of handicrafts with high cultural value. This innovation shows that tradition can be revived through new media that are relevant to the current context.

Kusmayati emphasized that the sustainability of traditional art can only be achieved through creative innovation that remains rooted in cultural symbolism (Kusmayati, 2018). This can be seen in Kalpataru, where traditional symbols have not been abandoned, but rather integrated with environmentally friendly design practices. In this way, the costumes not only affirm Bali's cultural identity, but also convey a commitment to global issues such as sustainability.

The sustainability strategy in Kalpataru costumes is also evident in the reuse and recycle practices. The woven ental costumes are designed with several parts, namely a bustier top, skirt, and accessories that can be mixed and matched with other themed costumes for subsequent performances, thereby minimizing waste. This practice is in line with the trend in contemporary Indonesian design, which increasingly emphasizes environmentally friendly materials and collaboration with local artisans, reflecting a growing awareness of sustainability and cultural identity. This movement integrates local materials, such as bamboo and abaca fiber, into modern design practices, fostering environmental responsibility and the preservation of traditional craftsmanship. The application of these practices indirectly embodies local identity and values, enhancing the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the designs (Susanto et al., 2017).

In addition to functionality, aesthetic innovation is also an important aspect. Symbolic details in the costumes, such as ental curls resembling the tree of life, enrich the visual narrative of the performance, making Kalpataru costumes a collaborative medium between choreographers, designers, and craftsmen, combining traditional expertise with contemporary creativity. This finding reinforces the argument that sustainable design

practices must be rooted in local materials that embody cultural value (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). The Kalpataru costume is a concrete example of how design can integrate cultural heritage with sustainability principles, creating a work that is not only beautiful, but also ecologically relevant.

The Creative Process of Creating Kalpataru Works

The creative process behind Kalpataru's work at the Kitapoleng Foundation stems from a philosophical idea about the “tree of life” combined with the theme of Adapting to Sustainability in IFEX 2024. This concept is translated into dance movements and costume designs through a collaborative process between choreographers, designers, and local artisans. Contemporary performances are generally collective and inherently collaborative in nature, highlighting the social aspects of creativity. This explores how the roles of individuals in the production team interact and complement each other, contributing to a cohesive artistic narrative (Manousakis, 2016). In the Kalpataru performance, the Kitapoleng Foundation choreographer emphasized that the basic movements of Balinese dance remain the foundation, while the costumes were designed to reinforce ecological symbolism.

The selection of costume materials was a crucial first step. Instead of using synthetic fabrics, the designers decided to use woven ental, a traditional material commonly used for mats. This decision was both an exploration of materials and a sustainability strategy. The selection of local and environmentally friendly materials is a form of design activism that can change the way we understand sustainability in the practice of art and fashion (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). Through this approach, the Kalpataru costume is not merely a performance outfit, but a cultural artifact that represents ecological principles.



Figure 1. The Creative Process of Kalpataru Costumes

(Source: Kitapoleng Foundation, 2024)

The next stage is the transformation of form and symbol. The ental headdress, inspired by the Legong dance headdress, and the reinterpretation of the badong necklace, are designed to connect the audience with Balinese tradition, but with a new aesthetic that emphasizes ecological awareness. Such practices demonstrate how aesthetic innovation in performing arts can function as a form of “cultural translation,” a process of negotiation and adaptation that involves deconstructing cultural phenomena while preserving the essence of traditional

symbols, thereby enabling new interpretations in a contemporary context within a global society (Maitland, 2017).

In addition to material and form design, the creative process also involves performative testing. Dancers rehearse in costume to ensure flexibility of movement is maintained, given that the material is stiffer than conventional fabrics. The interaction of the body with this material is part of the aesthetic exploration as well as an embodied experience that influences the dynamics of the performance. This is in line with the view that performing arts are an embodied practice, where the dancers' bodies, space, costumes, and audience interact with each other to form the meaning of the performance (Schechner, 2020).



Figure 2. Kalpataru Costumes

(Source: Kitapoleng Foundation, 2024)

Overall, the creative process of Kalpataru dance shows that contemporary performing arts can serve as a space for negotiation between philosophy, tradition, sustainability, and design innovation. Costumes are not merely the end result, but part of a creative process that involves cultural reflection, material exploration, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Thus, the creation of Kalpataru can be seen as a model for developing works of art that are capable of responding to global issues while remaining rooted in local identity.

Cultural Negotiation and Research Implications

The Kalpataru costume has become an arena for cultural negotiation between tradition and innovation. On the one hand, the costume, made from woven ental, represents the continuation of a tradition closely linked to local handicrafts. On the other hand, the choice of unconventional materials has sparked a discourse on the authenticity of Balinese dance symbols. Some argue that reinterpreting tradition risks shifting its original meaning, while others see it as a form of revitalization relevant to the modern context. This aligns with Carlson's view that innovation in performing arts often brings about shifts in symbolic meaning, but at the same time opens up space for productive cultural dialogue (Carlson, 2018).

In this context, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity is relevant for understanding how Kalpataru costumes create what is known as a third space—a meeting place between two cultural poles that allows for the birth of new identities that are neither entirely traditional nor entirely modern (Umar & Lawan, 2024). Costumes become a medium that negotiates meaning between Bali's symbolic heritage and the demands of global sustainability, producing hybrid and reflective forms of expression. In this third space, cultural

meanings are not fixed, but are continually negotiated through creative practices involving artists, craftspeople, and audiences.

Such cultural negotiations are important for understanding how the arts community responds to change. Therefore, open dialogue between artists, audiences, and cultural communities is necessary to resolve tensions between traditional heritage and creative experimentation. In the context of Kalpataru costumes, criticism of the use of woven ental material is not only an obstacle, but also an opportunity to enrich the meaning of the performance through critical reflection and renewal of tradition. Thus, costumes can serve as a meeting point between cultural preservation and transformation.

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In practical terms, the collaborative model between the Kitapoleng Foundation and ental craftsmen can serve as a best practice for other art communities in Indonesia. This collaboration demonstrates that costume innovation does not have to abandon tradition, but can be rooted in local wisdom. This is in line with the statement that sustainability in design can only be achieved by involving local communities and cultural practices as part of a living and adaptive creative ecosystem (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). Therefore, Kalpataru shows that the creative process of performing arts can be a social laboratory for testing forms of cultural sustainability. Costumes are no longer understood simply as visual accessories, but as cultural texts that can be read and interpreted in a broader social and ecological context.

Finally, this study confirms that cultural negotiation in costume design is not merely a matter of aesthetics, but also concerns identity, sustainability, and social responsibility. Therefore, the Kalpataru costume can be seen as a medium for critical reflection on the relationship between humans and their traditions and environment, as well as being an inspiration for more inclusive, contextual and sustainable performing arts innovations in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that costume design in Kalpataru contemporary dance at the Kitapoleng Foundation not only serves as an aesthetic element, but also as a medium of philosophical expression that articulates the relationship between Balinese cultural heritage, sustainability principles, and design innovation. Through the use of local materials in the form of ental weaving, the costumes successfully integrate traditional symbolism with environmentally friendly design practices, in line with the theme of Adapting to Sustainability at IFEX 2024. These findings provide a deep understanding that the creative process of contemporary dance costumes can be a dialectical space between tradition and modernity, and reinforce the argument of performance studies theory that emphasizes the function of costumes as markers of identity as well as visual narratives (Carlson, 2018). Therefore, this study does not only focus on aesthetic functions by presenting ethical and ecological dimensions in performance costume design.

The implications of this research are not only important in the academic realm but also open up opportunities for cross-disciplinary exploration between textile design, cultural anthropology, and sustainability studies. The future development of environmentally friendly

textile technologies based on local materials, for example through innovations in Ecoprint fabrics, hemp fibers, and green digital printing, already implemented by industry players in Bali, demonstrates that exploring the optimization of locally resource-based materials is a crucial agenda for future research. Collaboration between academics, designers, artisans, and the arts community can strengthen research on new techniques and the development of fabrics from organic waste, supporting the implementation of a circular economy in the performance costume design ecosystem.

This research significantly advances the cross-disciplinary paradigm between textile design, anthropology, and sustainability studies, positioning costumes as social laboratories for formulating the future of ethical, contextual, and sustainable design. Further development is recommended for testing locally based textile technologies, comparative studies between arts communities, and analyzing the social and ecological impacts of the use of tradition-based costumes across various cultural regions. The Kalpataru dance costume thus demonstrates that tradition-based innovation can bridge the current need for cultural preservation and sustainability practices in contemporary performing arts.

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