



Cultural Harmonization: Religious and Inter-Cultural Relations in Calengsai Arts

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Abstract

The existence of Indonesian cultures and arts are rich in thought that is extraordinary to be explored, one of them is the typical Banyumas performance art, namely Calengsai (Calung, Lengger, and Barongsai), which is a local wisdom with a myriad of exploration sides for the people. This research tries to re-explore a Calengsai from the perspective of religious and intercultural relations, which mostly previous researchers only focus on the cultural and tourism aspects. This re-exploration of religious and intercultural studies is focus on model of cultural harmonization which purposed to break the conflict in the inter-cultural aspect that exist in Calengsai. The descriptive qualitative analysis is applied on this research to help the researchers to explore the evidence of the data which taken from the field collection. The study finds that Calengsai acts as a 'third space' of cultural hybridity where Javanese and Chinese traditions met through shared spiritual rituals, offering a scientific contribution to postcolonial and symbolic-interactionist scholarship by revealing how art creates new intercultural meanings.

1. INTRODUCTION

Art has the ability to transcend boundaries, merge cultural divides, and stimulate harmonization among diverse communities. In the context of Calengsai art, the researchers focus on the amalgamation of Javanese Banyumasan arts and Chinese cultural traditions as a unique interculturality and spirituality. This intercultural provides a captivating lens to explore the concept of intercultural and spiritualism which are aligned as cultural harmonization. Regardless the background of the historical marginalization, the interplay between intercultural aspect and religiosity within Calengsai offers a transformative potential to transcend boundaries and promote societal cohesion inclusively [1].

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The similarities of the historical background reveals a shared narrative of cultural marginalization and political suppression. During the New Order era in Indonesia, Chinese culture was suppressed and deemed suspicious due to its association with the communism. Chinese traditions and public display were forbidden and banned [2], resulting in marginalization, limiting the recognition and expression of these cultural traditions.

There has been a shift in social dynamics, marking a significant turning point in the cultural landscape of Indonesia [3]. The reformation era brought a dynamic of cultural restrictions, to Chinese culture and local culture suspected with communism [4]. The dynamic of cultural background gives birth to recognition which illuminates an opportunity for cultural harmonization [5]. Thus, the intercultural aspect of Calengsai serves as a combining platform for the Javanese and Chinese traditions, bringing up understanding, appreciation, and unity to the diverse communities.

Religiosity also plays a pivotal role in the concept of cultural harmonization within Calengsai. The spiritual essence embedded in the art form serves as a common thread that connects Javanese and Chinese cultures. The shared values and beliefs rooted in spirituality create a bridge for intercultural understanding and harmony [6]. Through rituals, symbols, and the exploration of the spiritual journey within Calengsai, practitioners and audiences alike engage in a collective experience that brings up cultural appreciation.

Exploring the art of Calengsai itself is a unique effort for researchers, as it emphasizes several important aspects that differ from other researchers who have studied Calengsai extensively. The uniqueness lies in understanding and rediscovering the art of Calengsai from the perspective of spiritual and intercultural relationships, which creates a rare cultural harmony. On the other hand, the manifestation of acculturation that occurs in Calengsai is not merely what emerges afterward, but also involves observing the process behind the combination of these three art forms. One way is by observing the acculturation that takes place through exploring the spiritual dimension accompanied by intercultural relationships, which potentially yields its distinct value in the art of Calengsai [7] [8].

There is a scarcity of comprehensive studies on Calengsai, while Lengger has received more attention from scholars, making it more accessible for research. The article "Calengsai as a Banyumas Cultural Asset in Support of Tourism" by Dyah Tjaturrini et al. [9], highlights Calengsai's significance. It asserts that Calengsai is not merely a cultural element but also a unique tourism asset for Banyumas Regency. Acculturation has given Calengsai a distinct identity, making it attractive to tourists.

The article "Calengsai and Intimate Interactions Among Faith Believers," by Dyah Tjaturrini et al. [10], examines Calengsai's role in promoting interfaith communication. Calengsai goes beyond its artistic richness to encourage dialogue among believers, bringing up discussions on acculturation, serving a unique collaboration among diverse elements in the Banyumas Regency.

The intersection of two cultures within a form of art creates a new order, while still emphasizing collaborative values without eliminating the original essence of each culture. A previous study, "*The Hybridity of the Main Character Ipu in the Film Lovely Man by Director Teddy Soeriaatmadja: A Postcolonial Study of Homi K. Bhabha*" [11] by Putri Marsyanda et al., explains that hybridity occurs due to changes in identity, societal interaction with existing cultures, and the influence of colonialism, which has a significant impact, creating a space of harmony between the two cultures in the form of art.

In addition to the postcolonial perspective, which creates a hybrid space for the two cultures, art or even traditions such as *Grebeg Sudiro*—a cultural celebration from Solo resulting from the merging of Javanese and Chinese cultures—also represent a *Third Space*

that is more expressive. This is further supported by symbolic interactions and the community's understanding of these traditions, leading to a cultural amalgamation that forms new traditions. This aligns with previous studies, such as “*Symbolic Interactionism and Pragmatism*” [12] by Erwan Effendi et al., which explain the existence of symbolic interaction in arts and culture that allows communities to develop an understanding of these cultural elements. Compared to the current study, the novelty lies in exploring the various symbols found within *Calengsai* performing arts in Banyumas region, as a way for the local community to engage deeper with this cultural expression.

Depart from the comprehension above, this research aims to explore the intercultural and religious dimensions of *Calengsai*, focusing on the transformative power of cultural harmonization. By examining the combination of Javanese and Chinese cultures within *Calengsai*, this study seeks to transcend boundaries and face the challenge of marginalization. The intercultural aspect delves into the interaction between Javanese Banyumasan arts and Chinese cultural traditions, while the exploration of religiosity explores the spiritual journey, rituals, and shared values that contribute to intercultural understanding and cultural harmonization within *Calengsai*.

2. METHODS

Based on the introduction, this research is a qualitative research, as it is based on phenomenology regarding the art of *Calengsai* in Banyumas Regency, combined with several theories that will serve as tools to analyze the potential data related to this art form. The data collection does not focus on extensive literature studies or explorations of *Calengsai*, but rather on field research to observe the reality of *Calengsai* in society, particularly its acculturation aspects. To support and ensure data validity, interviews were conducted with various subjects and documentation was used. The researchers conducted interviews about *calengsai* with three informants, Mr. Sirwan, as the Head of Rumah Lengger Banyumas. The second informant is Mas Pico, a lengger dancer who provided firsthand information about lengger lanang and the last informant is Mrs. Maryati, the leader of the Hok Tek Bio Purwokerto Temple, who provided information on the intercultural interaction between Javanese and Chinese cultures, *calengsai*. All of this was done between August and September 2023 to increase knowledge about *calengsai* itself. The data analysis technique used in this research is descriptive analysis, which directly analyzes the data related to the cultural harmonization of *Calengsai*, assisted by two approaches.

The first is Homi K. Bhabha's Theory of Hybridity, which is applied to examine the combination of Javanese and Chinese cultures in the creation of *Calengsai* and the meanings it conveys. The second approach is Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism [13], which is used to analyze the various symbols and signs present in *Calengsai*, as perceived and understood by society, drawing from both Javanese (Banyumas) and Chinese cultural contexts.

Through these elements, this study aims to reveal the spiritual dimensions, intercultural interactions, and cultural harmonization embodied in *Calengsai*, by employing the perspectives of hybridity and symbolic interaction found within society [14]. Specifically, one of the main objectives of this research is to contribute to the practice of inclusive cultural engagement, social cohesion, and appreciation of diverse cultural traditions, by bringing up a harmonious process of cultural acculturation.

The concept of spirituality and intercultural harmonization exists in the form of activities carried out and certainly holds profound meanings throughout the artistic journey. Understanding the concept of spirituality in the acculturation of *calengsai* art can be observed through its purpose, the performers, and the profound meanings derived from it.

Calengsai art is not born in isolation; its inception can be traced back to the acculturation of two distinct cultural traditions - Javanese Banyumasan arts and Chinese cultural elements.

Historical records and accounts indicate that the Javanese and Chinese communities in the Banyumas region have a long history of interaction and exchange, sharing the same historical backgrounds as well as Calung and Lengger is an original arts to confront inequalities during the Dutch colonialization in Indonesia [15]. While the Barongsai or Chinese lion dance presented as the cultural traditions to confront the wickedness.

Barongsai is a symbol of combating wickedness, illustrating the adaptability and resilience of these cultural elements. Calengsai embodies harmonious coexistence, serving as a bridge between cultures and bringing up unity and appreciation among diverse communities. This living narrative reminds us that art can transcend boundaries and promote intercultural understanding, celebrating our shared humanity and the beauty of cultural combination [16].

Calengsai embodies a shared ethos deeply rooted in the historical context of confronting inequalities and wickedness. The Calung and Lengger, originating from Javanese Banyumasan traditions, were historically employed as artistic tools to address and challenge social injustices and inequalities during the Dutch colonial era. On the other hand, the Barongsai represents a rich cultural tradition combating wickedness and evil spirits. These arts, although originating from different cultural backgrounds, converge in their shared goal of addressing societal disparities and promoting a sense of cultural unity and harmony.

The use of symbolism within these arts further underscores their commitment to raise equality and bring up cultural harmonization. These symbols convey powerful messages of resilience, hope, and solidarity, transcending cultural boundaries. Thus, Calengsai serves as a living testament to the potential of art to bridge cultural divides, promote equality, and facilitate cultural harmonization in the intercultural realm. Therefore, it is not surprising that these symbols eventually become important components in the realm of religiosity (spirituality) [6].

However, these symbols can be signs or distinctive elements of what is believed by society, usually implemented in various forms such as rituals, ceremonies, or customs. The same goes for Calengsai, which is a vibrant and evolving art among the broader community, especially in Banyumas. The reason for approaching the symbols in Calengsai is to observe the processes within the art and the symbols themselves. There may also be profound meanings in Calengsai's art and its internal and external influences. It is possible that this could indicate cultural harmonization between the two ethnic groups, Javanese and Chinese, which originated from specific symbols within Calengsai's art and the interactions they possess [17].

Homi K. Bhabha outlines four key concepts in negotiating cultural identity: Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, and Stereotype. This study employs the concept of hybridity, as Calengsai embodies a combination of two distinct cultures—Javanese and Chinese. This combination gives a rise to *Calengsai*, integrating elements of *Barongsai* closely associated with Chinese cultural traditions. The negotiation process between these two different cultures reflects the community's intention to respond to past colonialism [18]. Through Bhabha's postcolonial perspective of hybridity, this study seeks to reveal broader forms of identity negotiation within society.

According to Bhabha [19], hybridity also gives a rise to the concept of the *third space*, in which two intersecting cultures generate new symbols, rituals, and practices that cannot be attributed solely to either side. Instead, they transform into new cultural forms through

intercultural dialogue within society. The identities of the two negotiating cultures do not stand independently but forming a flexible cultural entity capable of embracing collaboration and acculturation. This theory can also be viewed as a foundation for understanding Calengsai as a creative and expressive blend of two cultural traditions.

The theory of symbolic interactionism was initiated by George Herbert Mead to analyze social contexts and realities, particularly how communities perceive and interpret culture, customs, traditions, and art through emerging symbols. This theory interprets the potential interactions and meanings of symbols within a culture through the dynamics of social interaction. In the context of Calengsai, symbolic interactionism is highly relevant, as the performance involves numerous symbols, signs, and instruments, each imbued with philosophical values that shape meaning and understanding within the community. These include symbols from both Javanese and Chinese ethnic traditions, such as the *calung*, *barongsai*, and the symbolic use of colors in Chinese beliefs [20].

Through Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, these interactions and their interpretations can be further explored. Accordingly, the application of this theory to the art and culture of Calengsai in Banyumas provides a unique assumption: that by engaging with these various symbols, the community can gain a deeper understanding of the meanings embedded within art and culture, particularly within Calengsai.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Calengsai (Calung, Lengger, dan Barongsai)*

The acculturation is exemplified in the art of Calengsai. The initiative began during the leadership of The Banyumas regent, Mardjoko around 2008. Ibu Sri Rahayu from Kecamatan Purwokerto Timur, with her remarkable ideas and innovations for Banyumas' arts, particularly Lengger Lanang dance, played a pivotal role in this effort. This collaboration emerged from the realization that Banyumas comprises not only the Javanese but also a significant Chinese population, particularly in Kecamatan Purwokerto Timur. Hence, the desire to collaborate and acculturate these arts into Calengsai was born.

The birth of Calengsai garnered extraordinary responses from the community due to its unprecedented blend of art and culture. For the first time, Banyumas' arts combined three distinct elements—Calung, Lengger, and Lion Dance—within a harmonious framework. Ibu Sri Rahayu began by recruiting dancers of Chinese descent, notably from SMA Bruderan Purwokerto. The training process was led by Ibu Sri Rahayu and her team, with an eagerly anticipated collaboration with Pak Mantep, the leader of the Barongsai group. This collaboration was a significant step in Calengsai's development. The first Calengsai performance, featuring around 45 artists and crew members, took place during Mardjoko's 100-day celebration.

The history of acculturation led to the incorporation of several key arts that laid the foundation for Calengsai. Consequently, Calengsai's uniqueness arises from its dual heritage, combining the following:

a. Banyumas's Lengger Lanang Dance

The cornerstone of Calengsai lies in the Lengger dance, a unique Banyumas tradition. This traditional dance is performed by males, standing out as different from the norm where female dancers usually dominate. Lengger Lanang carries its own spiritual essence and is often utilized in various ceremonial rituals as an opening dance, embodying a pure combination of masculine and feminine aspects in each performer.

b. Banyumas' Calung

The second crucial component of Calengsai is the traditional musical instrument, Calung, which accompanies the entire performance. Crafted from bamboo, Calung spans three octaves—low, medium, and high. This unique instrument is adaptable and can be tuned according to the performance's context. The Calung reflects the Banyumas community's openness and acceptance of things as they are [21].

c. Barongsai Art Dance

The final cornerstone of Calengsai's cultural combination is the Barongsai or Lion Dance. Its incorporation into Calengsai is rooted in the spiritual meaning it holds for the Chinese community. The presence of the Lion Dance aims to enhance and embody spirituality. The energetic, expressive, and mesmerizing movements of the Lion Dance captivate spectators. Typically performed by individuals with martial arts backgrounds such as Kungfu. The Lion Dance showcases extraordinary acrobatic movements contributing to its uniqueness.

In essence, Calengsai represents a harmonious blending of Javanese and Chinese cultural elements, creating a truly exceptional and valuable art form that resonates with both communities.

Table 1. Themes, Supporting Quotes, and Interpretations of Spiritual and Cultural Values in Lenggeng Lanang and Calengsai Art.
[Source: Research Team, 2023]

Theme	Quote	Analysis and Interpretation
Controversy surrounding Kesenian Lenggeng Lanang	" <i>Banyak Pro-Kontra yang menyebutkan Kesenian Lenggeng Lanang adalah sebuah penyimpangan yang nyata.</i> " "Many pros and cons mention that Lenggeng Lanang art is a clear deviation."	This quote highlights the polarization of opinions surrounding Kesenian Lenggeng Lanang. While some perceive it as a genuine deviation, it is important to acknowledge that differing viewpoints exist within society.
The Professionalism Perspective	" <i>Namun, hal tersebut bukan benar-benar merubah segalanya alias menyimpang tetapi sebagai bentuk profesionalitas saja sebagai pelaku seni [38].</i> " "However, this does not really change everything, but is simply a form of professionalism as an artist."	This quote suggests that while Kesenian Lenggeng Lanang may seem unconventional, it can also be understood as a display of professionalism among those involved. This highlights the complexity of its interpretation.
Role of Education and Religion	" <i>Ditambah juga karena minim edukasi yang diperoleh masyarakat, apalagi dengan membawa doktrin agama.</i> " "This is compounded by the lack of education received by the community, especially when it comes to religious doctrine."	This quote emphasizes the role of education and the influence of religious doctrines in shaping the public perception of Kesenian Lenggeng Lanang.

Promoting Individual Self-awareness	<i>"Tinggal fokus saja dengan mengembalikan kepada diri manusia tersebut masing-masing."</i> "Just focus on returning to each individual human being."	This quote suggests a potential solution—encouraging individuals to reflect on their own beliefs and perspectives—as a way to address the controversy surrounding Kesenian Lengger Lanang.
Spiritual Aspect of Lengger Lanang	<i>"Bentuk sisi spiritual dari Lengger Lanang ini terbentuk dari perjalanan peleburan antara maskulin dan feminin..."</i> "The spiritual aspect of Lengger Lanang is formed from the journey of merging masculinity and femininity..."	This quote highlights the spiritual aspect of Lengger Lanang, emphasizing its connection to concepts of gender, perfection, and local rituals.
Gender Equality in Lengger Lanang	<i>"Sedikit menyinggung persoalan gender, bahwasannya Kesenian Lengger Lanang ini adalah bentuk kesetaraan terhadap gender...[39]"</i> "To touch briefly on the issue of gender, the fact is that Lengger Lanang art is a form of gender equality..."	This quote discusses the unique gender dynamics within Kesenian Lengger Lanang, where men perform in feminine roles, promoting gender equality and advocating against discrimination.
Local Spirituality in Lengger Lanang	<i>"Religiusitas ataupun Spiritualitas terhadap Lengger Lanang adalah bentuk murni kesenian yang tidak terpengaruh agama-agama besar dunia..."</i> "Religiousness or spirituality in Lengger Lanang is a pure form of art that is not influenced by the world's major religions..."	This quote discusses the unique gender dynamics within Kesenian Lengger Lanang, where men perform in feminine roles, promoting gender equality and advocating against discrimination.
Spirituality in Calengsai	<i>"Selanjutnya berpindah pada Calengsai yang sudah terbentuk karena harmonisasi kebudayaan, menyebutkan beberapa nilai spiritualitas yang ada..."</i> "Next, moving on to Calengsai, which was formed due to cultural harmonisation, mentioning several existing spiritual values..."	This quote introduces the spiritual values within Calengsai, particularly highlighting the symbolic significance of Barongsai in spreading goodness and countering negative influences in society.
Commonalities in Spiritual Aspects	<i>"Unsur Spiritual antara Lengger dan Barongsai memiliki kesamaan (Calengsai), masing-masing kedua kebudayaan punya spiritualitasnya yang unik..."</i> "The spiritual elements of Lengger and Barongsai have similarities (Calengsai), each	This points out the common spiritual elements shared between Lengger and Barongsai, creating a unique spiritual aspect within Calengsai. It also mentions the selection process for performers with

	culture has its own unique spirituality...”	extraordinary spiritual journeys.
Rituals for Spiritual Communication	<i>“Bentuk spiritualitas pada Kesenian Calengsai ini, salah satunya pada kolaborasi Calung dan Lengger dengan menambahkan komponen Barongsainya...”</i> “One form of spirituality in Calengsai art is the collaboration between Calung and Lengger, with the addition of Barongsai components...”	This quote discusses the inclusion of Barongsai as part of the spiritual aspect of Calengsai, emphasizing the need for rituals and communication with ancestors or deities in the absence of Liong in Calengsai performances.
Spiritual Concept of Nien in Barongsai	<i>“Konsep barongsai secara spiritual dari cerita Nlen, sebagai monster yang muncul 1 tahun sekali...”</i> “The spiritual concept of Barongsai came from the story of Nian, as a monster that appears once a year...”	This quote introduces the spiritual concept of Nien in Barongsai, emphasizing its role as a seasonal creature and its connection to local rituals and protection against harm.
Respect through Barongsai Replicas	<i>“Sehingga sebagai bentuk penghormatan masyarakat membuat replika dengan Barongsai yang selalu diiringi dengan tabuh-tabuhan.”</i> “As a form of respect, the community makes replicas with Barongsai, which are always accompanied by drumming.”	This quote discusses how the community pays respect by creating replicas with Barongsai, often accompanied by rhythmic drumming.
Nien in Konghucu Beliefs	<i>“Di sisi lain, nien dalam Konghucu identik dengan chilin yang sangat ikonik dalam perjalanan Nabi Kongcu...”</i> On the other hand, Nian in Confucianism is synonymous with chilin, which is very iconic in the journey of the Prophet Kongcu...”	This quote highlights the association of Nien in Konghucu beliefs with chilin, symbolizing the journey of Confucius and the transmission of teachings to future generations.
Spirituality in Konghucu during the New Order	<i>“Spiritualitas konghucu pada orde baru salah satunya adalah dari pendidikan yang masih sulit dan cara pernikahan yang masih menginduk ke agama besar...”</i> “One aspect of Confucian spirituality in the new order is education, which is still difficult, and marriage, which is still influenced by major religions...”	This quote mentions the challenges faced by Konghucu spirituality during the New Order, including difficulties in education and marriage practices that led to discrimination.
Evolution of Barongsai as a Tradion	<i>“Sekarang ini Barongsai sudah menjadi penampilan tradisi dan kebudayaan bagi semua kalangan... [40]”.</i>	This quote describes how Barongsai has evolved into a tradition and cultural performance appreciated by

	"Nowadays, the lion dance has become a traditional and cultural performance for all circles..."	people from all walks of life, highlighting its rich spiritual and positive values.
Spirituality in Calengsai According to the Chinese Community	" <i>Spiritualitas Calengsai Menurut Masyarakat Tionghoa tetap ada sembahyang dulu untuk menghormati Tien...</i> " "According to the Chinese community, the spirituality of Calengsai still exists in the form of prayers to honour Nian..."	This quote discusses the presence of spirituality in Calengsai according to the Chinese community, emphasizing the practice of prayer to honor Tien and rituals for protection during Calengsai performances.

3.2. Symbolic Interactionism of Spirituality in Calengsai Art

Based on the data from the table above, is one of the reasons why calengsai art is always imbued with spiritual values and its performances are highly impactful for the audience. The spirituality of calengsai art is not limited to a single component, instead there are two distinct components that complement each other: Lengger Lanang dance and Barongsai. Nevertheless, each of them possesses its own spiritual aspects, thus complementing each other and making calengsai art unique and still beloved by people in the modern era [22].

The concepts of religiosity and spirituality are inseparable from the symbolism used within them, constituting the spiritual essence of the small elements within an art form. In the Lengger Lanang Banyumas dance, there are both explicit and implicit aspects of spirituality as follows:

1. The merging of masculine and feminine, establishing a spiritual connection between the dancer and the Creator.
2. The presence of both masculine and feminine elements deepens the ritual aspect of the Lengger Lanang dance. It is believed that if the balance between these elements is not maintained, the ritual performance becomes unbalanced.



Figure 1. Members of Banyumas Lengger Lanang Dance (Representation of Two Genders, Masculine and Feminine, in One Body).

[Source: Research Documentation, 2023]

The spiritual aspect can be seen in the Lengger Lanang dance through its simple movements that are closely tied to Javanese culture. Here are some reasons for the unique religiosity (spirituality) of these elements:

1. The simplicity nature of the Lengger Lanang dance is unaffected by the paradigms of existing religions making a testament to the beliefs of their ancestors.
2. The presence of natural symbols such as rivers, waterfalls, and trees in the dance signifies the spiritual essence of the Lengger Lanang dance as a form of reverence for the Goddess (Sri) of fertility. One of its purposes is to express gratitude for bountiful harvests and abundant blessings [23].

Therefore, the spiritual aspect (religiosity) of the Lengger Lanang dance is clearly evident through its symbolism, the balance of gender elements, local purity, and the rituals performed within it. It is through these unique aspects that calengsai art becomes enriched with complementary charisma and spirituality, creating a harmonious blend.

The aspect of spirituality is present in Barongsai as an integral part of Calengsai art, a unique art form originating from the Chinese ethnic tradition. Surprisingly, Barongsai possesses elements and meanings that are deeply religious and continue to be believed by the community, especially among the Chinese population. Some symbols found in Barongsai that carry their own spiritual meanings within Calengsai art include:

1. Barongsai symbolizes various animals from Chinese mythology, such as lions, turtles, unicorns, phoenixes, and snakes. However, in this context, the lion is the predominant and most significant symbol in Barongsai. The lion in Barongsai can be interpreted as a symbol of courage and possesses magical powers, much like the evil spirits on Earth. Another aspect of its spirituality is that Barongsai represents the community's belief in happiness, good fortune, and peace [24].
2. The colors used in Barongsai, such as yellow, white, and red, represent specific spiritual values for the Chinese community. Yellow symbolizes the earth as the center of life, white is associated with wisdom and emotional maturity, while red represents courage, honesty, and loyalty. These colors in Barongsai are a manifestation of how God has shown His greatness through this art form [25].



Figure 2. Preparation of Ritual Offering for the Show (Lengger Lanang Dance), the Evidence of Religiosity (Spirituality) to God. [Source: Research Documentation, 2023]



Figure 3. Processing Ritual With Offering (Before Show), Symbolizing God to Run Smoothly, Be One With Nature, and Prevent Danger From Coming.
[Source: Research Documentation, 2023]

These elements emphasize the extraordinary harmonization and the connection with the Divine in both Lengger Lanang and Barongsai, which contribute to the overall quality of harmonious coexistence within this art form.

The interactions and knowledge experienced by the community regarding the symbols embedded in Calengsai art represent a genuine act aimed at bringing up a deeper understanding of the spiritual meanings derived from these symbols, ultimately directing them toward the Divine. The exploration of symbols such as the *Barongsai*, its specific colors, rivers, trees, and others can also serve as a spiritual pathway for the community to reflect on the extent of their influence on the development of this art form [26]. At the same time, this underscores the strong emphasis that human interaction in relation to the Calengsai art of Banyumas functions as a deeply rooted and enduring cultural identity.



Figure 4. Barong (Java) and Barongsai (Chinese) Are Symbols of Animals That Repel Evil That Can Befall Society.
[Source: Research Documentation, 2023]

A cross-cultural comparison can be found in the Lion Dance, which represents a fusion of Thai and Chinese traditions, shaped through interaction and adaptation similar to that of Calengsai. This hybridity can be observed in its instrumental music, color symbolism, linguistic style, and other key traditional elements rooted in Thai-Chinese cultural exchange [27]. Such a comparison between Calengsai and the Lion Dance highlights hybridity not merely as intercultural exchange, but as a form of cultural harmonization in which two traditions mutually exchange and enrich one another. This process leaves both a strong impression and a tangible reality within society, where cultural fusion is embraced as a creative and expressive medium of understanding [28].

Lengger Lanang and Barongsai Arts share a common experience of controversy and polarized perceptions within the broader societal context. While each art form carries its unique cultural significance, they have often been met with skepticism, resistance, and sometimes

even condemnation from certain segments of society. This shared controversy highlights a broader sociological perspective, as suggested by [29].

These artworks carry meaning through their pictorial elements, and their interpretation is influenced by the historical and social context in which they are viewed (Avaunt, 2021). In essence, artworks are perceived through "historically situated 'period eyes'"—the lenses through which a specific society and period view and interpret them. This sociological perspective emphasizes that controversies surrounding these art forms are not merely about artistic expression but are indicative of larger societal dynamics. The shared controversy and perceptions of deviation surrounding Lengger Lanang and Barongsai reveal the need for a more comprehensive understanding of art's role in society [30]. Recognizing that artworks relate to social and aesthetic issues, and that they are viewed through historically situated perspectives, invites a more nuanced and sociologically informed examination of these controversies. It underscores the importance of appreciating diverse cultural expressions and challenging societal norms that hinder inclusivity and cultural harmonization which impact the evolutions of both cultures.

Observing the rapid development and growing popularity of the Calengsai art cannot be separated from the lingering negative legacies of colonialism. As previously noted, Calengsai emerged and took shape through the interactions between both the colonizers and the colonized, each striving to preserve their cultural identity within society. This process resulted in the blending of Javanese (Banyumas) and Chinese traditions, giving a rise to the creative art form of Calengsai [31]. Such a process can be understood as a phenomenon of cultural hybridity, providing diverse spaces for the development and flourishing of Calengsai within the community.

The evolution of Barongsai serves as an illustrative example. The captivating lion dance performances have adapted over time, driven by human creativity. According to Kozbelt [32] these adaptations have enhanced their appeal, as assessed by the aesthetic system, and enabled Barongsai to transcend cultural boundaries. This evolution reflects the audience's role in shaping the art's development, contributing to its enduring appeal. Similarly, Lengger Lanang art has continued to evolve while preserving its spiritual core. The art form's ability to adapt to changing cultural landscapes and embrace diverse interpretations speaks to its enduring appeal and relevance, as appraised by the aesthetic system. This underscores the audience's influence in shaping the art's trajectory. In the broader context, investigations into the evolution of these arts can inform discussions about the audience's impact on artist styles, the manifestation of universals in high and low art, and the potential discovery of new aesthetic universals, particularly in conceptual art. These studies spoil the relative value of novelty versus adaptive value in aesthetic creativity, highlighting the complex interplay between creativity, aesthetics, and cultural evolution [33][34].

Despite of the controversy between Calung, Lengger and Barongsai, the arts successfully harmonizing all the aspects behind the arts which indicates the feasibility of the evolution



Figure 5. Calengsai Arts (Calung, Lengger, and Barongsai) Are a Form and Proof of Cultural Harmonization Between Two Ethnicities, Javanese and Chinese.

[Source: Research Documentation, 2023]

of the arts in the contemporary realm. In line with the findings of Logie et al. [35], the feasibility and acceptability of an arts-based strategy for fostering feelings of solidarity and connection among trans women of color are reflected in the intercultural aspects of Kesenian Lengger Lanang and Barongsai. These art forms, originating from distinct cultural traditions, serve as powerful tools for eliciting group-based sharing of journeys to self-acceptance within their respective communities.

Much like the arts-based strategy studied, according to Logie et al. [35], Lengger Lanang and Barongsai provide platforms for individuals to express their identities, experiences, and struggles. Within these artistic journeys, participants can explore their cultural roots, confront societal prejudices, and ultimately arrive at self-acceptance. The shared narratives and symbolism within these arts act as catalysts, fostering a sense of solidarity among those who engage with them [36].

In the case of Lengger Lanang and Barongsai Arts, these art forms provide a communal space where participants from diverse cultural backgrounds can come together to create and share their narratives. Collaborative art-making in these contexts becomes a vehicle for individuals to make their voices heard, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers. This practice is particularly relevant in fostering understanding and acceptance among communities with shared historical backgrounds but distinct cultural expressions.

Following Hajisoteriou and Angelides [37] suggests that collaborative art-making allows culturally diverse students to exchange ideas and stories about diversity, Calung, Lengger Lanang and Barongsai facilitate conversations about cultural heritage, shared experiences, and the nuances of intercultural relationships. The process of creating and performing these arts serves as a platform for individuals to articulate their identities, challenges, and aspirations while engaging in dialogue with others who bring their own cultural perspectives to the table.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Calengsai is more than a local performance art. it is a living space of spiritual expression and intercultural dialogue where Javanese Banyumasan and Chinese traditions crossed path. Lengger Lanang embodies spirituality through symbolism, gender balance, and ritual purity, while Barongsai contributes values of courage, protection, and communal solidarity. Through this combination, Calengsai demonstrates how art can transcend historical marginalization, bring up equality, and create a shared cultural identity. By Applying Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity and Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, the research contributes theoretically by showing how intercultural encounters generate a "third space" of new cultural meanings, and it offers practical insight into Calengsai's potential as a model for intercultural education, religious tolerance, and inclusive cultural tourism.

The study's scope is limited to qualitative fieldwork in Banyumas and relies primarily on symbolic interpretation, which may not capture the full diversity of Calengsai practices or wider Indonesian contexts. Future research could compare similar hybrid performances across regions, integrate quantitative measures of social impact, or explore the involvement of younger generations in sustaining Calengsai's relevance. This exemplifies the transformative power of art of Calengsai to bridge cultural divides, affirm spiritual values, and strengthen social cohesion in a multicultural community.

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