



# The Transformation of the Dideng Oral Tradition of Rantau Pandan into Jambi Malay Opera

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## Abstract

Dideng is a folk theatre tradition from Rantau Pandan Village that is currently facing the risk of decline due to limitations in its regeneration process. Despite this condition, Dideng oral narrative art contains rich theatrical, gestural, and musical potentials that can be further developed within contemporary performance contexts. This study aims to transform the artistic potential of Dideng into a Jambi Malay opera prototype as an effort of cultural revitalization. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytic method within a Research and Development (R&D) framework. Data were collected through interviews, observation, documentation, and literature review involving practitioners, cultural experts, and the creative team. The result of this applied research is a Jambi Malay opera prototype entitled *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu*. The transformation process demonstrates how the episodic structure of oral storytelling is reconfigured into a linear dramaturgical form to achieve causal coherence suitable for modern stage performance. The narrative is centered on the breakdown of the uncle-nephew relationship (avunculate), which provides a culturally grounded basis for the emergence of tragedy within Malay social structure. The opera text is constructed through the conversion of a drama script into a poetic libretto, integrating dideng, pantun, and seloko as elements of indigenous dramaturgy. The atmosphere is shaped within a tragic framework, emphasizing emotional depth through monologue and musical expression. This study contributes to the discourse on intangible cultural heritage revitalization by demonstrating that the transformation of oral tradition into contemporary performance is not merely adaptive, but involves a negotiation between cultural continuity and aesthetic innovation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dideng is an oral narrative art that has grown and developed within the community of Rantau Pandan Village, Bungo Regency, Jambi Province. Etymologically, "dideng" means to tell a story or speak [1]. As a product of a specific location and its unique genius loci, Dideng can be categorized as a folk theatre tradition. This argument is based on the characteristics of its performance, namely: 1) originating from legends related to the belief system and customs of the community; 2) utilized as a form of entertainment; 3) performed by non-

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professional community members who possess the talent and skill as narrators; and 4) performances are held in a simple manner with inconsistent timeframes [2]. The Dideng oral tradition of Rantau Pandan should not be viewed as a static folk form, but as a dynamic cultural practice whose relatively stable performative structures function as mechanisms of cultural sustainability; however, in the context of globalized aesthetic shifts, its transformation into opera provides a critical lens for understanding how contemporary Malay aesthetics and cultural identity are negotiated and reconfigured [3].

In an effort to increase its appeal, Dideng narrators have developed artistic strategies to evolve their narrative patterns. Dideng oral narrative art is not confined to oral communication but also utilizes actions and songs. However, the resulting artistic outputs remain limited, as the development process is not grounded in established performance-based disciplinary frameworks, particularly those of performance studies, applied ethnomusicology, and practice-as-research. As a result, Dideng oral narrative art is marginalized by its own community. This is because the Dideng tradition is unable to keep up with the increasingly modern developments in the world [4]. Moreover, the regeneration process of Dideng narrators is facing difficulties, threatening the extinction of this art form. However, Dideng oral narrative art has theatrical, gestural, and musical potential that can be developed into a form of art with high aesthetic value (high art). Given the available potential, Dideng can be developed into a form of total theatre or opera, a performing art that combines drama, dance, and music into a unified whole [5].

This applied research is directed towards a research and development model, selecting Dideng oral narrative art as its material object. This development research aims to explore and develop the artistic potential available within Dideng oral narrative art, which will then be formulated into a more complex art form, namely opera. In this context, the transformation from a folk-based oral tradition into an operatic form also reflects a broader tension between folk and high art categories, where, as argued by Pierre Bourdieu, artistic forms are shaped by systems of cultural value and legitimacy. Opera is a collaborative entertainment from various artistic disciplines that produces a complex performance by combining classical drama and drama [6]. The development focuses on developing the story structure, designing acting, developing movement and dance composition, and developing musicological aspects. The development process of Dideng is carried out comprehensively and responsibly, meaning it uses appropriate disciplinary frameworks and does not undermine the existing cultural structures. At the same time, this process involves negotiating the aesthetic and social implications of repositioning Dideng within a more institutionalized and codified performance form. The achievement of this applied research is the creation of a Jambi Malay Opera prototype that can be publicly tested in a studio (performing arts laboratory). The creation of this Jambi Malay Opera prototype is a long-term project aimed at creating a new style and genre in Malay-themed performing arts. This applied research is a continuation of the basic research of the Drama, Dance, and Music Study Program, Universitas Jambi, entitled "Dideng Legends from Rantau Pandan as a Source of Performing Arts Creation" in 2023. The findings of the previous basic research were a dramaturgy design based on the performative aspects of Dideng art. The outputs of the basic research consisted of: a drama script, dance composition, and music score. The achievement of the previous basic research was the formulation of the concept of Malay opera. Meanwhile, the stage of this applied research is the public testing of the prototype in a studio (performing arts laboratory).

This development research of Dideng oral narrative art can be situated within the broader global discourse on the revitalization of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), particularly in the context of sustaining oral traditions amid rapidly changing cultural and aesthetic environments. As emphasized by UNESCO, safeguarding ICH involves not only preservation but also adaptive reinterpretation to ensure its relevance across generations. In this regard,

the transformation of Dideng into a Jambi Malay opera represents a form of revitalization that negotiates continuity and innovation within contemporary performance practices. Such efforts reflect ongoing debates on how traditional arts can be sustained without losing their cultural integrity while responding to globalized aesthetic influences. Within this framework, this applied research adopts a comprehensive and responsible approach to developing Dideng as a living cultural form.

## 2. METHODS

### *2.1 Types of Research*

This research employs a Research and Development (R&D) approach to facilitate the transformation of the Dideng oral narrative tradition of Rantau Pandan into a Jambi Malay opera prototype [7]. Rather than serving as a general product-oriented method, the R&D framework in this study enables an iterative process of exploration, experimentation, and refinement, which is essential for reinterpreting oral tradition within a contemporary performance context. To support this process, a qualitative descriptive-analytic approach is adopted to examine the narrative structures, performative patterns, and cultural meanings embedded in Dideng [8]. This combination is particularly appropriate because the transformation of oral tradition requires both interpretative analysis and creative reconstruction, ensuring that the resulting operatic form remains culturally grounded while adapting to evolving aesthetic contexts. Given the complex and dynamic nature of oral performance, this study does not rely on structured instruments such as questionnaires or test-based interviews, but instead prioritizes in-depth observation, interpretative analysis, and practice-based exploration [9].

### *2.2 Unit of Analysis*

The unit of analysis in research is the object that will be observed in depth [10]. The unit of analysis chosen in this applied research is the Dideng oral narrative art from Rantau Pandan Village. The analytical instruments selected are dramaturgy, choreography, and musicology. Dramaturgy is used to analyze the existing story and subsequently restructure its dramatic structure within a theatrical event design, including the examination of plot progression, character development, narrative conflict, and temporal sequencing. Dramaturgy is the exploration of dramatic texts from a structural perspective to the structuring process to produce dramatic works with the use of appropriate materials [11]. Choreography is used to explore the potential of movement in the Dideng oral narrative art to develop into dance compositions, focusing on parameters such as movement motifs, spatial patterns, body dynamics, rhythm of motion, and performer interaction. Meanwhile, musicology is used to analyze and develop the musical phenomena in the Dideng oral narrative art, including aspects of melodic structure, scale systems, rhythmic patterns, vocal timbre, and instrumental texture, which are then reinterpreted within the operatic framework.

### *2.3 Data Collection Techniques*

The study of art is the study of social construction, therefore data can be collected through observation, interviews and documentation [12]. The primary data collection technique employed in this research is interviewing. Primary data is pure data that is directly obtained from the original source which is used as the main data [13]. Interviews were conducted to obtain firsthand information directly from informants. A two-way conversational process was utilized to facilitate data transmission. Informal interviews were chosen to foster a more relaxed atmosphere, encouraging informants to participate in a casual dialogue and

freely share necessary information. Interviews were recorded, and key points were noted to ensure that no crucial information was overlooked.

The second data collection technique was documentation. This involved recording the research object to discover primary data that would facilitate data identification. Documentation was used to capture Dideng performers in action. This technique was selected to enable repeated data analysis without the need for further involvement from informants. Data obtained through documentation included Dideng lyrics, melodies, narrative patterns, and musical notation. The documentation data was stored in both audio and visual formats to facilitate data analysis.

The third data collection technique was observation. Observation involved direct field research to observe the research object. This direct observation aimed to obtain firsthand data in the field. Additionally, observation could uncover new possibilities during field exploration. Observation was also conducted to validate field data obtained from literature and interviews. In the context of this research, observation involved directly witnessing Dideng performers in action.

The final data collection technique was a literature review. A literature review was employed to supplement any data gaps found in the field. Data that was no longer available in the field may have been recorded in previous studies. Therefore, a literature search was crucial to access lost data. The literature review explored scholarly works such as articles, journals, theses, dissertations, and books. To broaden the research sample, this technique also included non-scholarly works like news articles and critiques.

No	Participant Category	Number of People	Expertise/Role	Duration of Involvement
1	Dideng performers	5	Oral tradition practitioners	3 months (field observation & performance sessions)
2	Cultural experts	2	Local cultural leaders / tradition bearers	Periodic interviews over 2 months
3	Musicians	4	Traditional Malay music practitioners	3 months (music development sessions)
4	Dancers/actors	6	Performers in opera prototype	4 months (rehearsal process)
5	Creative team	3	Director, choreographer, dramaturg	Throughout the research process (approx. 6 months)

#### ***2.4 Development Procedure***

The development of arts and culture is an effort to maintain national identity to increase global competitiveness [14]. The development of a Jambi Malay opera product based on the Dideng oral narrative art employs the Borg & Gall model. Borg & Gall designed a developmental research model aimed at producing a product. The developmental model proposed by Borg & Gall is adapted to suit the needs of creating a Jambi Malay opera [15].

The transformation carried out is not forced, but more of a change-adjustment [16]. The steps of the development procedure can be explained as follows:

The first step is the identification of potential. The identification of potential is the foundation of the development process of a work. The potential possessed by the Dideng oral narrative art includes stories, narrative patterns, music, and movement. These potentials are used as artistic materials to construct the structure of the Jambi Malay opera. The story potential is taken from the legend of Puti Dayang Ayu, the narrative pattern

potential is taken from the way narrators deliver Dideng stories, the musical potential is taken from Dideng songs, and the movement potential is taken from the basic movements of the narrators and the possible movements that arise from the response to the story of Puti Dayang Ayu.

The second step is the design of the work. The Jambi Malay opera is designed by utilizing the rich dramaturgical, musical, and gestural elements of the Dideng art from Rantau Pandan Village. The story structure is rearranged to sharpen the intensity of emotions in the dramatic plot and increase the possibility of staging. The narrator is presented as a narrator who serves to fill the transition between scenes. Characters are constructed with complex characters to increase conflict between characters in an effort to achieve a dramatic climax. The pattern of storytelling is conveyed through song and dialogue. Dance composition is used to fill the transition between scenes and convey the feelings of the characters.

After the product design is realized in the work, the next stage is product revision. Product revision is divided into two parts: evaluation and improvement. Evaluation is an artistic and analytical assessment of the work in progress, conducted by a panel consisting of academic experts in performing arts, Dideng practitioners (tradition bearers), and a limited audience involved in the studio-based public testing. Evaluation aims to identify the shortcomings of the produced work based on criteria such as narrative coherence, performative effectiveness, cultural authenticity, aesthetic integration, and audience reception, so that appropriate solutions can be formulated. Meanwhile, improvement is a follow-up process to the evaluation. Improvements are based on the evaluation that has been carried out to refine structural, performative, and musical aspects of the work. This product revision process is carried out iteratively to enhance quality and minimize shortcomings in the work.

The final step is the stage of public testing of the product. The public testing stage is a trial of the product with a limited audience. This public test is conducted in the form of a closed presentation of the work. The purpose of this stage is to determine the public's response before it is opened widely. This limited public response is the material for evaluation and improvement of the work so that it can be returned to the community. This public test is also intended to determine to what extent the work can entertain or deliver a deep message to the audience.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Opera Text Premise

The premise in the dramatic text of the opera *Elegi Pilu Puti Dayang Ayu* functions as a guiding argument that shapes the development of the plot [17][18]. However, the formulation of this premise does not directly adopt the original moral framework of the Dideng legend of Puti Dayang Ayu as its central idea. This shift reflects a broader theoretical tension in adapting oral myths into contemporary performance, where fixed moral binaries are often reinterpreted to accommodate more complex narrative structures. Rather than reproducing a black-and-white dramatic model, commonly associated with clear moral oppositions and predictable resolutions [19] the opera constructs conflict through ambiguity and paradox. In this context, ambiguity operates as a modern aesthetic strategy, enabling traditional narratives to move beyond rigid moral dichotomies and engage with contemporary sensibilities. The conflict is therefore built upon the intersection of multiple, competing truths that collide at critical moments, positioning each character as both justified and flawed depending on perspective. As a result, the narrative resists definitive moral conclusions, emphasizing instead the complexity of human experience and the instability of truth within the transformation of oral tradition into a modern operatic form.

The premise attached to the legend of Dideng Puti Dayang Ayu is “a broken promise due to differences in social caste.” This premise is conveyed through the character Opak Bujang who breaks his promise to Indouk Puti, which subsequently generates various conflicts between Dang Bujang and Puti Dayang Ayu. The character Opak Bujang functions as the central agent of disruption, leading the narrative toward a tragic resolution. In this structure, the premise tends to position moral causality in a linear and explicit manner, where the source of conflict is clearly attributed to a single character. From a scholarly perspective, such a configuration reflects a black-and-white dramatic model, characterized by fixed moral oppositions and unambiguous ethical judgment. However, this narrative clarity can also be understood as an expression of the communal moral framework of the Rantau Pandan society, where oral traditions function as vehicles for reinforcing shared values, social norms, and ethical boundaries. The clear attribution of wrongdoing to Opak Bujang thus serves not only as a narrative device but also as a cultural mechanism for articulating collective notions of responsibility, social order, and the consequences of violating established norms.

Meanwhile, the premise compiled in the text of the opera *Elegi Pilu Puti Dayang Ayu* maintains the original premise, namely “a broken promise due to differences in social caste.” However, the premise is further developed with an additional problem, namely the loss of the role of the uncle towards the nephew. In the sociocultural context of the Rantau Pandan community, the uncle (*mamak*) holds a significant structural role in maintaining the welfare, guidance, and social positioning of the nephew within the extended kinship system. Therefore, the loss of the uncle’s role cannot be understood merely as a narrative device, but as a disruption of a fundamental social mechanism that regulates responsibility, authority, and moral obligation. This disruption intensifies the central theme of broken promises, as the failure of the uncle to fulfill his role reflects a broader breakdown of social trust and kinship-based obligations. The escalation of this problem is intended to make the conflict more complex and dramatic, not only at the individual level but also within the framework of social structure. Thus, the formulation of the premise of the opera text *Elegi Pilu Puti Dayang Ayu* can be explained as follows: “The loss of the uncle’s role towards his nephew, which leads to a broken promise and the emergence of caste conflict,” where tragedy emerges as a consequence of the disintegration of culturally embedded systems of responsibility in Malay society.

### ***3.2. Dramatic Plot of Opera Text***

The next dramatic strategy is to create a disconnected resolution (cliffhanger), which is applied after considering the linear and conclusive structure of the original Dideng legend. In its traditional form, the Dideng narrative tends to resolve conflict through a clear moral closure, where the consequences of actions are explicitly defined. This form of resolution reflects a didactic function within oral tradition, reinforcing communal values and ethical certainty. However, in its transformation into opera, such a fixed resolution is reconsidered in order to respond to contemporary aesthetic demands that privilege ambiguity and interpretative openness. A disconnected resolution (cliffhanger) therefore means that the ending of the story does not explicitly explain the resolution of the conflict or provide a definitive conclusion. This strategy expands the imaginative space of the performance, allowing spectators to actively construct meaning and negotiate possible outcomes. The reason for choosing this strategy is to avoid reducing the narrative to a single authoritative truth in resolving the conflict. Although the ending remains open, implicit indications of possible resolutions are still embedded within the narrative, creating a dialectical space in which multiple interpretations can emerge.

The story of the legend of Dideng Puti Dayang Ayu from Rantau Pandan Village has a prolix plot, which narrates the life of the character Puti Dayang Ayu from before birth to after

death. Although the story structure follows a chronological order, it contains significant temporal leaps, making it difficult to categorize as a strictly linear plot. If divided based on the main topic, the storyline can be organized into several episodes, namely the episode of Puti's Parents' Promise, the episode of Puti's Birth and Matchmaking, the episode of Teenage Puti and Meeting with Dang Bujang, the episode of Puti's Departure and the Opening of the Door to Heaven, the episode of Puti's Apology and Marriage, the episode of Puti's Happy Family and the Birth of Puti's Child, the episode of Puti's Death, and the episode of Puti Transforming into a Bird. Based on this division, it can be concluded that the plot of the legend of Dideng Puti Dayang Ayu is episodic. An episodic plot is a storyline that is divided into units that are thematically or contextually related [20].

This episodic structure can be understood as a reflection of the rhythmic logic of oral storytelling, where narration unfolds through segmented yet interconnected units that allow flexibility in performance. In the context of Dideng, such a structure enables the storyteller to adjust the duration, emphasis, and sequence of episodes depending on the performance situation and audience engagement. This rhythm aligns with the traditional expectations of the audience, who are accustomed to receiving the narrative in fragments that can be expanded, condensed, or selectively emphasized, rather than as a fixed and continuous dramatic progression. Consequently, the episodic form not only shapes the narrative structure but also reinforces a participatory mode of reception, where familiarity with key episodes allows the audience to anticipate, interpret, and emotionally engage with the unfolding story.

Although adopting the original story, the plot of the opera text *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu* does not use an episodic plot format. This dramatic strategy was chosen because an episodic structure can constrain sustained character development, produce segmented narrative progression, and make it challenging to build cumulative tension toward a climactic resolution within a contemporary theatrical framework. In this context, "rationality" does not refer to the intrinsic value of the oral tradition, but to the degree of causal coherence and continuity required in modern dramaturgy, where events are structured through clear cause-and-effect relationships to support dramatic escalation. The episodes in the legend are therefore selectively adapted to strengthen causal connections and narrative continuity, rather than being evaluated as inherently less coherent. In addition, the episodic structure presents practical challenges in staging, as it may require multiple transitions, montage sequences, and shifts in spatial-temporal settings that complicate theatrical realization. Based on this consideration, the decision to move away from a purely episodic format reflects a dramaturgical strategy to achieve narrative cohesion, performative efficiency, and sustained audience engagement within the operatic form.

The plot chosen in compiling the opera text *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu* is a linear plot. A linear plot is a plot that has a strong causal relationship between each scene, where events are arranged continuously and progress logically and chronologically [21]. A linear plot is able to realize events that have strong narrative coherence; in addition, character development and tension intensity can be arranged dynamically and dramatically. To maintain logic in plotting, drastic time jumps and certain supernatural episodes are selectively adapted or omitted. The scenes chosen emphasize causal continuity and emotional intensity. To connect several selected scenes, new scenes are created that function as narrative bridges, such as the "Family Deliberation Scene," which establishes the social pressure behind the arranged marriage, and the "Uncle's Dilemma Scene," which foregrounds the weakening of kinship responsibility that leads to the broken promise. These additional scenes serve to weave together events, strengthen character motivation, and increase emotional intensity within the linear structure.



**Figure 1.** Meeting Scene of Puti and Bujang  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

### ***3.3. Opera Text Format***

The composition of the opera text *Elegy Pilu Puti Dayang Ayu* went through a conversion process from a drama script to a libretto. The drama script consists of the main text (*haupttext*) and the side text (*nebentext*). The main text contains dialogues that describe the storyline and character development of the characters. The main text consists of dialogues or monologues that have emotional weight that can bring the plot to the climax and form the narrative structure of the drama [22]. Meanwhile, the side text contains performance instructions consisting of descriptions of acting business and stage visuals. Although the side text is not spoken by the actor, the side text has a vital role in building the atmosphere and emotions of the event [23]. The main text and side text in the drama script are written in detail and completely, so that the intensity of emotion, character development and stage visualization can be depicted explicitly. The consequence is that the main text and side text are arranged in dialogues and performance instructions that are definitive. Of course, this is in contrast to the characteristics of opera texts which are more concise because the atmosphere is built by the power of music. The characteristics of the libretto are the use of minimal words and describing events not through verbal language, but musical language [24]. Therefore, the conversion process from drama script to opera text is through text pruning and condensing. The conversion process from drama text to opera text also goes through the process of changing the language style. Drama text composed in a realistic language style does not have a rhythmic structure, making it difficult to musicalize. Therefore, the realistic language style is converted to a poetic language style which is a typical language style of opera text. Opera text uses poetic language that contains rhythmic patterns in each verse [25]. Therefore, the conversion process from drama text to opera text shifts the clear realistic diction to convey the message to poetic diction that uses metaphors in conveying the message. In addition, the poetic diction used uses a rhyme pattern that has the same ending to make it easier to sing.

The conversion from a realistic style of language to a poetic style of language is illustrated in the following text excerpt:

**Table 1.** The Conversion from a Style of Language  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

Teks Drama	Teks Opera
<p><i>Denga, diek. Abang nak merantau, nyari rezeki di tempat orang. Niat abang bukan nak ninggal adiek seorang diri. Tapi supaya lebih baik idup awak beduo.</i></p> <p>Translation: Listen, little sister. I want to go abroad, I want to seek fortune in other people's places. My intention is not to leave you alone, but to make our lives better.</p>	<p><i>Denga, diek. Dedo biduk yang dak belayar. Dedo bejantan yang besarang. Abang nak merantau.</i></p> <p>Translation: Listen, little sister. No boat is not sailing, no male is not nesting. Brother wants to go wandering.</p>

The poetic language style in the opera text Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu utilizes dideng texts, pantun and Jambi Malay proverbs as well as seloko (Jambi oral literature). This local wisdom is revised according to the needs of the dramatic text. The reason for this utilization is to revitalize cultural wealth, strengthen local characteristics and create new patterns in writing opera texts. A depiction of efforts to utilize local wisdom in Jambi, especially Bungo Regency, can be seen from an excerpt from the opera text Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu, as follows:

**Table 2.** Dideng Text  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

Opera Text	Original Text
<p><i>Dideng, Dang Bujang dideng Nan la gedang dindeng Tumbuh jadi janton dindeng Janton nan pekaso dideng</i></p> <p>Translation: Dideng, Dang Bujang Dideng Who has grown Dideng Grown to be A man Dideng A man Who is strong Dideng</p>	<p><i>Dideng, Kalulah ado dideng Ameh dikandung dideng Idak mensanak dideng jadi ughang lain dideng</i></p> <p>Translation: Dideng, If there is Dideng Gold contained Dideng Would not become Family Dideng Become other people Dideng</p>

**Table 3.** Malay Proverb  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

Opera Text	Original Text
<p><i>Janganlah abang beharap ujan dari langit. Kalu air di tempayan abang tumpahkan.</i></p> <p>Translation: Don't hope for rain from the sky, if you spill the water in your jar.</p>	<p>Hoping for rain to fall from the sky, while the water in the jar is spilled.</p>

**Table 4. Seloko**  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

Opera Text	Original Text
<p><i>Ampun beribu kali ampun Rajo. Hamba hanyo pemudo biaso. Namo hamba Dang Bujang. Sudah sepatutnyo hamba menolong, Rajo. Karno rajo, sangat hamba muliokan. bak kayu gedang di tengah padang daunnya rimbun tempat hamba beteduh dahannyo kuat tempat hamba begantung gedangnyo batang tempat hamba besandar Akar bejulu tempat hamba duduk besilo</i></p> <p>Translation: For mercy a thousand times, King Servant is just an ordinary young man. The name of the servant is Dang Bujang. It is fitting for the servant to help the King. Because the king really honors me. Like a big log in the middle of a field. The leaves are dense where I can take shelter. The branches are strong on which I can hang. The trunk is large for the slave to lean on.</p>	<p><i>Bak kayu gedang di tengah padang Daunnya rimbun tempat kito beteduh Dahannyo kuat tempat kito begantung Gedangnyo batang tempat kito besandar Akar bejulu tempat kito duduk besilo</i></p> <p>Translation: Like a big log in the middle of a field. The leaves are dense where we take shelter. The branches are strong on which we depend. The trunk that we lean on is big.</p>

An endeavor to discover novel patterns in the writing of the opera text, *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu*, has been made by adopting the distinctive patterns of Jambi's seloko and combining them with the characteristic patterns of the dideng art. The pattern of Jambi's seloko is a reciprocal exchange of pantuns, while the pattern of the dideng art is singing pantuns. There is a similarity between the distinctive patterns of both, which is the utilization of pantuns as a medium of expression. To utilize these distinctive patterns and combine seloko and dideng, the characters' dialogues are constructed through a pattern of reciprocal sung pantuns. This pattern is consistently used to begin and end conversations. The following is an excerpt from the reciprocal sung pantun dialogue in the opera text, *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu*:

***OPAK BUJANG***

*Dideng dengar adiek  
Tinggalah dusun  
Tinggallah laman  
Serto tepian mandi  
Dideng dengarkan adiek*

***INDOUK PUTI***

*Izin jugo Dideng  
Dideng pegilah abang  
Pegi memao Dideng  
Untung nan malang dideng  
Pegi mengundo itikat baik*

The languages employed in the opera text, *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu*, primarily consist of Rantau Pandan language and Jambi Malay. Indonesian is used as an intercalary language for words that lack equivalents in both Rantau Pandan and Jambi Malay. Rantau Pandan language was chosen as the primary language due to the village of Rantau Pandan being the birthplace of the dideng art and the legend of Puti Dayang Ayu. However, the limited comprehensibility of Rantau Pandan language results in the opera text being inaccessible and distant to a general audience. Consequently, Jambi Malay is utilized to ensure the opera text is

universally understandable, particularly within the Jambi Province. Nevertheless, the Rantau Pandan dialect is retained as much as possible.

The percentage of languages used in the opera text, *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu*, can be explained as follows:

**Table 5.** The Percentage of a Languages  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

NO	LANGUAGE	PERCENTAGE
1	Rantau Pandan	30%
2	Jambi Malay	65%
3	Indonesian	5%

The conversion of an episodic plot to a linear one results in narrative leaps with tenuous causal connections, as the interconnections between fragments are lost. Additionally, a linear plot cannot accommodate significant temporal shifts, whereas the *Dideng Puti Dayang Ayu* narrative inherently involves substantial time jumps. Consequently, the dramatic strategy employed is the utilization of a narrator character. This narrative device is capable of interlinking each fragment that undergoes a drastic temporal shift. The narrator serves not only as a connective element but also as a conduit for conveying thematic messages, enhancing the narrative's overall communicability.

***NARATOR***

*Dideng*

*Aghi-aghi, bulan ke bulan dideng*

*Keduo anaknyo dideng*

*Lah gedang dideng*

*Lah dewasa dideng*

*Zaman la beganti musim la berubah*

*Duo beradik la hidup terpisah*

*Nan Abang idup kayo rayo*

*Nan Adiek idup menderito*

*Abang ado anak jantan, Dang Bujang namonyo*

*Adiek ado anak betino, Puti Dayang Ayu namonyo.*

*Keduo anaknyo seharusnya dijodohkan sejak lamo.*

*Tapi kadang manusio sering lupu.*

*Translation:*

***NARRATOR***

*Dideng,*

*Days, month to month dideng*

*The two children dideng*

*Have grown up dideng*

*Have grown up dideng*

*Times have changed, seasons have changed*

*The two siblings have lived separately*

*The older brother lives in wealth*

*While the younger brother lives in misery*

*The older brother has a son, his name is Dang Bujang.*

*The younger brother has a daughter, her name is Puti Dayang Ayu.*

*The two children should have been matched a long time ago.*

*But sometimes humans often forget.*

Overall, the transformation of the drama script into the opera text *Elegi Pilu Puti Dayang Ayu* should not be understood merely as a technical process of adaptation, but as a critical negotiation between oral tradition and contemporary performance practice. The integration of dideng texts, pantun, and seloko reflects a form of indigenous dramaturgy in which local expressive systems actively shape the structure and meaning of the performance, rather than functioning as ornamental elements. At the same time, this process demonstrates a form of hybridity, where the principles of oral storytelling are recontextualized within an operatic framework, producing a new performative language that mediates between tradition and modernity. Within this context, the presence of the narrator becomes a crucial element, not only as a structural device that connects fragmented temporalities, but also as a cultural mediator that translates oral narrative logic into a form compatible with contemporary dramaturgy. Through this approach, the opera text emerges as both an artistic product and an analytical site, revealing how the transformation of Dideng articulates broader questions of cultural continuity, aesthetic adaptation, and the repositioning of local traditions within global performance discourse.

Musical structure in the opera *Elegi Pilu Dayang Ayu* is not treated as a fixed formal system, but as a dynamic configuration shaped by the interaction between sonic elements melody, harmony, rhythm, and form, and the dramaturgical demands of the libretto. Rather than adhering to conventional operatic forms, the musical structure in each scene is constructed in response to the dialogic nature of the text, indicating that the libretto functions as a primary generative force in determining compositional decisions. In this context, melodic construction plays a central role, where motifs derived from the Dideng oral tradition are developed to establish musical identity while simultaneously supporting narrative intelligibility. These motifs are not merely aesthetic references but function as structural units that guide formal division and thematic continuity.

The following notation (Figure 1) illustrates the application of aria style in the second scene of repertoire No. 3 entitled *Perjodohan*, featuring a duet between Indouk Puti and Puti Dayang Ayu. In contrast to recitative passages, the aria section demonstrates a more sustained melodic contour and heightened emotional expression, allowing the characters' internal states to be articulated through expanded musical phrasing. The duet structure further reinforces relational dynamics between characters, where melodic interplay becomes a medium for expressing emotional tension and narrative development.

The figure displays musical notation for two systems. The first system, starting at measure 14, features a voice part for Indouk Puti and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Di deng Nga neng lah pan tun di deng Ngan te bu ang di deng". The second system, starting at measure 17, features a voice part for Puti Dayang Ayu and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Me nem bang ju go di deng Ting gal lah du sun di deng". Both systems include melodic lines with triplets and piano accompaniment with chords and triplets.

Figure 2. Repertoire No. 3 *Perjodohan*, Measures 14-18  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

In addition to aria, the opera employs recitative style, particularly in sections requiring narrative acceleration and textual clarity. As shown in Figure 2, the recitative passage from repertoire No. 2 entitled *Ikrar Janji* is characterized by rhythmically flexible vocal lines and syllabic text setting, allowing the delivery to approximate speech patterns. This approach enables efficient narrative progression while maintaining musical continuity. The contrast between aria and recitative in this opera reflects a deliberate dramaturgical strategy, where musical texture shifts according to the functional needs of the narrative, aria for emotional expansion and recitative for narrative transmission.

Figure 3. Repertoire No. 2 *Ikrar Janji*, Measures 112-117  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

The overall musical form emerges from the interaction of these structural elements and is closely aligned with the textual organization of the libretto. This alignment results in flexible formal divisions that do not always correspond to conventional musical proportions, as the duration and tonal centers are adapted to the pacing of the narrative rather than predetermined formal schemes. Consequently, key changes and sectional divisions tend to be shorter and more fluid, reflecting the influence of oral narrative structures embedded in the Dideng tradition. The following figures present schematic representations of the formal divisions and tonal organization across the opera's repertoire, demonstrating how musical form is constructed through the negotiation between traditional narrative logic and contemporary compositional practice.

### 3.4. Atmosphere of Opera Text

The operatic atmosphere is the ambiance evoked on stage, derived from the emotions inherent in the dramatic text and realized through audio and visual elements. The atmosphere of the opera *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu* is constructed based on the genre of the original story. The Dideng legend of Puti Dayang Ayu is characterized by a plot replete with conflict and suffering, culminating in a tragic ending. Based on this genre classification, the Dideng legend can be categorized as a tragedy. Tragedy is a dramatic genre that explores profound emotions arising from the downfall of a protagonist fraught with regret. Tragic conflicts are often built upon the tension between moral and existential dilemmas.

Aligned with its source material, the opera *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu* adheres to the tragic genre. The atmosphere of tragedy is inherently imbued with sorrow throughout the narrative. Consequently, the opera's atmosphere is centered on depicting the sorrow of the character Puti Dayang Ayu. The emotion of sorrow is maximally explored through the power

of dialogue. To further enhance this atmosphere of profound sadness, the primary text is structured as a monologue delivered by Puti Dayang Ayu, characterized by high emotional intensity. To create a particularly poignant atmosphere, the climactic scene is specifically designed as a monologue for Puti Dayang Ayu. The following is an excerpt from Puti Dayang Ayu's monologue in the climactic scene:

*PUTI DAYANG AYU*

*Dideng,  
Kaluah ado emeh dikandung dideng  
Mengato kasih dideng  
Dideng,  
Kalu idak ado emeh dideng  
Mensanak jadi ughang lain dideng*

*Dideng,  
Baik nian pegi ke telun dideng  
Pegi ke dempa lubouk mayan dideng  
Dideng,  
Baik nian kau jadi kiyun dideng  
Pulang palipa nan kau nian dideng*

*Dideng ngan mendaki bukit sekedu  
ngan menughun di paseir meghang  
Ngan menaghih betudoung baju  
Mengenang nasib nan ilang sughang*

*Tuan Bujang la kawin dengannyo  
Samo Dayang Ameh yang ughang kayo  
Apola Dayang Ayu yang dak bepunyo*

*Nasi ditelan raso api  
Ayik diminum raso duri  
Begitu nian raso sedih hati*

*Dideng,  
Tinggalah dusun dideng  
Tinggalah laman dideng  
Tinggalah serto tepian mandi dideng*

The monologue in this section functions not only as a narrative articulation of Puti Dayang Ayu's emotional state, but also as a performative expression of embodied grief within the Dideng tradition. The repeated invocation of "Dideng" operates as an affective anchor that intensifies the emotional rhythm of lamentation, reinforcing the oral character of the performance. The metaphoric expression "Nasi ditelan raso api, ayik diminum raso duri" (rice swallowed tastes like fire, water drunk tastes like thorns) is particularly significant in constructing the atmosphere of sorrow. Rather than describing sadness directly, the monologue translates emotional pain into bodily sensory distortion, where basic acts of survival such as eating and drinking become painful experiences. This sensory inversion deepens the tragic affect by transforming everyday sustenance into symbols of suffering, thereby amplifying the poignant atmosphere of loss, abandonment, and emotional disintegration experienced by the character. Through this metaphor, grief is not only narrated but also embodied, allowing the audience to perceive sorrow as a physical and visceral condition within the operatic performance.



Figure 4. Monologue of Puti Dayang Ayu  
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

The creation of atmosphere in the opera *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu* is also influenced by its cultural context. Cultural elements significantly shape the ambiance of a dramatic event. However, their integration into operatic form also generates dramaturgical tensions, particularly in negotiating how distinct cultural practices are translated into a unified performance structure. Moreover, cultural background provides explicit contextual information. The narrative's power to create emotional resonance can be realized through cultural practices embedded within the dramatic text. Emotional depth is cultivated through the interaction and application of cultural practices, yet this interaction also requires careful dramaturgical arrangement to ensure coherence between contrasting expressive systems. The opera *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu* is set within the cultural context of Jambi Malay society, specifically that of the Rantau Pandan village. Elements of Jambi Malay culture serve as artistic material incorporated into the opera's text through both main and subsidiary texts. Cultural elements utilized include the tauh dance, penyundo martial arts, and the kris-giving ceremony. Among these, the integration of penyundo (martial arts) presents a specific dramaturgical challenge, as it introduces a physical vocabulary of conflict that must be reconciled with operatic aesthetics of stylization and narrative clarity. Rather than functioning solely as spectacle, penyundo is recontextualized as a choreographic representation of moral struggle, where its movements reflect values of discipline, restraint, and honor embedded in Jambi Malay cultural ethics. The tauh dance is employed as the foundational movement in creating the dance sequence for the wedding scene between Dang Bujang and Puti Dayang Emas. This dance serves dual explicit and implicit functions. Explicitly, it functions as a welcoming dance for the bride and groom within the celebratory context of a wedding. Implicitly, the dynamic and fast-paced movements of the dance convey an impression of happiness, supporting the joyful atmosphere of the scene.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The research and development of the Dideng oral tradition from Rantau Pandan Village into the Jambi Malay Opera titled *Elegi Puti Dayang Ayu* demonstrates a process of cultural revitalization in which traditional narrative material is reconfigured to respond to

contemporary aesthetic and dramaturgical demands. The linearization of the plot does not merely function as a structural adjustment, but also serves as a bridge between the episodic logic of oral storytelling and the causal coherence required in modern stage dramaturgy, thereby enabling a transition from performative narration to structured theatrical logic. The opera's premise, centered on the breakdown of an uncle's responsibility toward his nephew, can be further understood through the lens of Malay kinship structure (avunculate), where the uncle holds a critical role in social, moral, and familial regulation; its disruption thus becomes a culturally grounded foundation for the emergence of tragedy.

At the same time, the transformation process reveals an inherent tension between the preservation of traditional authenticity and the demands of operatic modernization. While poetic language, bilingual expression, and the use of a narrator function as strategies to maintain cultural rootedness, they also involve selective reinterpretation of oral forms, indicating that revitalization necessarily involves negotiation rather than reproduction. The inclusion of a narrator further mediates this tension by functioning as a bridge between fragmented oral episodes and linear theatrical structure.

From a broader perspective, the findings of this study contribute to global discussions on intangible cultural heritage revitalization by demonstrating how local narrative systems can be reconfigured within contemporary performance frameworks without fully detaching from their cultural origins. However, the study is limited to a prototype-based creative development process and does not yet fully account for audience reception, particularly within the original Rantau Pandan community. Future research may therefore explore the pedagogical implications of this operatic form, its reception among local cultural bearers, and its potential role in cultural transmission and education.

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