

The *Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo* Dance in Dharmasraya as a Space for Social Interaction

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ABSTRACT

Dharmasraya Regency became one of Indonesia's major transmigration destinations during the New Order period, resulting in a multicultural society composed of Javanese, Minangkabau, Batak, Sundanese, and other ethnic communities. Within this diverse social setting, cultural practices have become important media for fostering interaction and social cohesion. One of these cultural practices is the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) performance, which has developed in Nagari Kurnia Koto Salak, Sungai Rumbai District. This study examines how the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) performance functions as a space for social interaction among the multi-ethnic community of Dharmasraya. The research employs Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interaction and adopts a qualitative approach through field observations, in-depth interviews, documentation, and literature review. Data were analyzed descriptively by interpreting the relationships between the performance structure and the social interactions surrounding it. The findings reveal that although the performance preserves the essential characteristics of the Javanese Kuda Kepang tradition, it has undergone adaptation within the multicultural context of Dharmasraya. The performance incorporates distinctive choreographic movements, musical accompaniment, costumes, and performance properties while simultaneously accommodating the participation of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. More importantly, the performance serves not merely as an artistic expression but as a social arena where members of diverse ethnic communities interact, collaborate, negotiate cultural meanings, and strengthen social relationships. Therefore, Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) functions as both a cultural performance and an inclusive medium that promotes social integration and reinforces community cohesion within Dharmasraya's multicultural society.

KEYWORDS

Kuda kepang
Space
Social Interaction
Dharmasraya

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INTRODUCTION

Dharmasraya Regency in West Sumatra was one of Indonesia's major transmigration destinations during the New Order era. The transmigration policy, implemented from the 1970s onward, relocated people from densely populated regions, particularly Java, to less populated areas across Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua, and other islands (Nova, 2016; Lestari, 2017). Rather than settling in uninhabited territories, transmigrants were integrated into areas already occupied by indigenous communities. Consequently, many transmigration settlements evolved into multicultural societies where Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Minangkabau, and other ethnic groups lived side by side. Although such diversity enriches cultural life, it also presents challenges related to social cohesion, identity negotiation, and interethnic relations (Hamdani, 2022).

Nagari Kurnia Koto Salak in Sungai Rumbai District represents one of these multicultural transmigration settlements. The village is inhabited by communities of different ethnic backgrounds, each maintaining distinctive cultural traditions while simultaneously adapting to shared social life (Aeksi et al., 2024). Within this context, cultural activities play an important role in facilitating interaction among community members. Rather than functioning solely as expressions of ethnic identity, artistic practices provide opportunities for communication, cooperation, and the development of collective social experiences across cultural boundaries.

One cultural tradition that has continued to develop in Nagari Kurnia Koto Salak is the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) performance. Kuda Kepang is traditionally recognized as a Javanese folk performance that remains closely associated with communities in Central and East Java. However, the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) group in Dharmasraya demonstrates a distinctive characteristic. Although rooted in Javanese cultural traditions, the group involves performers and supporting members from various ethnic backgrounds, including Minangkabau, Batak, Sundanese, and Javanese communities. Furthermore, several performance elements have adapted to the multicultural environment in which the performance is practiced, reflecting an ongoing process of cultural negotiation and interaction.

Previous studies on performing arts have predominantly emphasized aesthetic forms, artistic symbolism, choreography, or creative expression. While these perspectives remain important, they often pay less attention to the social processes through which artistic practices are produced, maintained, and experienced within communities. Artistic performances are not merely aesthetic products but are also social practices embedded in particular cultural contexts. Understanding an artistic tradition therefore requires examining not only its formal structure but also the social relationships, values, and cultural interactions that shape its production and performance (Rice, 2013).

Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes the broader social functions of artistic practices. Arts education has been shown to foster creativity, critical thinking, and social awareness among students (Ioannidou et al., 2024). Dance education also contributes to emotional development, empathy, and social communication (Liu, 2024), while collaborative artistic activities encourage participation and strengthen interpersonal relationships (Desyandri, 2019). Other studies have demonstrated the therapeutic value of music and dance in supporting emotional regulation, identity formation, and community well-being (Wu, 2023). Rice (2013) further argues that music and performance constitute important sources of social power because they facilitate communication, reinforce collective identity, and promote social integration.

Despite these contributions, relatively little attention has been given to the role of traditional performing arts as spaces for social interaction within multicultural communities created through transmigration. Existing studies on Kuda Kepang primarily examine its choreography, ritual dimensions, or aesthetic characteristics, whereas its function as a medium through which people from different ethnic backgrounds establish social relationships remains underexplored. This gap is particularly evident in the context of Dharmasraya, where multicultural coexistence has become an integral part of everyday life.

Against this background, this study investigates the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) performance as a space for social interaction within the multicultural community of Dharmasraya. Drawing upon Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interaction, the study seeks to explain how artistic performance facilitates communication, cultural negotiation, and social cohesion among participants and audiences from different ethnic backgrounds.

By examining the social processes embedded in the production and performance of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC), this study contributes to a broader understanding of performing arts as cultural practices that extend beyond aesthetic expression to become important mechanisms for sustaining social integration in multicultural societies.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design within an ethnochoreological framework to examine the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) performance as a cultural practice and a medium of social interaction among the multicultural community of Dharmasraya, West Sumatra. Ethnochoreology was selected because it enables dance to be examined not only as a choreographic form but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon embedded in the everyday lives of its practitioners (Slamet, 2018). Rather than focusing exclusively on movement analysis, this approach considers the relationships between performance, performers, audiences, and the broader cultural context in which the dance is created, practiced, and transmitted. The interpretation of the findings was guided by Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interaction, which provided the analytical framework for understanding how meanings are constructed through interaction during artistic practices and public performances.

Fieldwork was conducted in Nagari Kurnia Koto Salak, Sungai Rumbai District, Dharmasraya Regency, over approximately eleven months during 2024–2025. Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher adopted the role of a participant observer, allowing prolonged engagement with the research setting. This position enabled the researcher to observe rehearsals, public performances, preparation activities, informal community gatherings, and interactions among performers, organizers, audiences, and local residents. Such prolonged participation facilitated a comprehensive understanding of both the artistic structure of the performance and the social relationships that emerged through the performance process.

The study utilized two categories of data: primary and secondary data. Primary data consisted of observations of dance movements, performance structures, musical accompaniment, costumes, properties, rehearsal activities, staging processes, and interactions among participants during artistic activities. These data were complemented by in-depth interviews that explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) as a shared cultural practice. Secondary data were obtained from books, scientific journals, archival materials, government documents, photographs, audiovisual recordings, and other relevant publications concerning Kuda Kepang, transmigration, multicultural communities, and symbolic interaction.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and knowledge of the performance tradition. Key informants included the founder and leader of the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) group, senior performers, musicians, vocalists, ritual specialists (*pawang*), younger members of the performance group, village officials, cultural practitioners, and audience members representing different ethnic backgrounds. The inclusion of participants from Javanese, Minangkabau, Batak, and Sundanese communities allowed the researcher to capture multiple perspectives regarding the social meanings of the performance and its role in facilitating interethnic interaction.

Data collection was conducted using four complementary techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and literature review. Participant observation served as the primary technique for recording the dynamics of rehearsals, performances, audience participation, and everyday interactions surrounding artistic activities. Field notes were systematically compiled to document behavioural patterns,

communication, symbolic expressions, and social relationships observed during the research process. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistency across major research themes. Interview questions focused on the history of the performance group, artistic development, patterns of participation, interethnic relationships, cultural adaptation, and participants' interpretations of the social functions of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC). Documentation included photographs, video recordings, archival documents, organizational records, and administrative data that supported the interpretation of observational and interview findings. A literature review was conducted to establish the theoretical and empirical context of the study and to compare the findings with previous research.

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative analysis process involving data reduction, data organization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Field notes, interview transcripts, and documentary materials were first transcribed and organized according to thematic categories. The data were subsequently coded to identify recurring patterns concerning performance structure, symbolic meaning, interethnic participation, and forms of social interaction. These categories were then interpreted using Herbert Blumer's symbolic interaction theory, particularly the concepts of meaning construction, social interaction, and interpretative processes. Rather than analysing dance solely as an aesthetic object, the analysis focused on how artistic practices functioned as arenas in which cultural meanings were negotiated, collective identities were constructed, and social relationships were maintained among members of different ethnic communities.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed by comparing evidence obtained through observations, interviews, documentation, and literature sources. Source triangulation was also conducted by examining similarities and differences among the perspectives of performers, community leaders, government officials, and audience members. Throughout the analytical process, interpretations were continuously compared with field observations to ensure that the conclusions accurately reflected the social realities of the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) community.

The final stage involved synthesizing all findings into an integrated interpretation that explains the relationship between the artistic structure of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) and its social function within Dharmasraya's multicultural society. This analytical procedure enabled the study to move beyond descriptive documentation of dance performance toward an explanation of how artistic practice operates as a medium for symbolic interaction, cultural negotiation, and social integration among ethnically diverse communities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Socio-Cultural Context of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC)

Nagari Kurnia Koto Salak is located in Sungai Rumbai District, Dharmasraya Regency, West Sumatra, an area whose demographic composition has been significantly shaped by Indonesia's transmigration program initiated during the New Order era. Since the implementation of the First Five-Year Development Plan (*Pelita I*) in 1969, migrants from Java and other regions have settled alongside indigenous Minangkabau communities, transforming the village into a multicultural settlement. Economically, the community depends primarily on agriculture, oil palm and rubber plantations, and forest resources, while socially it is characterized by continuous interaction among people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The coexistence of Javanese, Minangkabau, Sundanese, Batak, and other ethnic communities has generated a dynamic process of cultural adaptation. Each ethnic group continues to maintain elements of its cultural identity, including language, customs, ritual practices, and artistic traditions, while simultaneously negotiating these identities within the broader social environment of Dharmasraya. Rather than producing cultural segregation, this interaction has encouraged the emergence of hybrid cultural practices in which traditions from different ethnic groups coexist and influence one another. For example, Javanese communities continue to perform traditional rituals while adapting to the social values of Minangkabau society, whereas Sundanese and Batak communities preserve aspects of their own traditions while participating in local communal life. Consequently, cultural diversity has become an important social resource that strengthens community cohesion instead of generating conflict.

Within this multicultural environment, performing arts function as one of the most visible media through which interethnic interaction is established and maintained. Among the various artistic traditions practiced in Nagari Kurnia Koto Salak, the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) performance occupies a particularly significant position. Although Kuda Kepang is historically recognized as a traditional Javanese performance, its development in Dharmasraya demonstrates a process of cultural adaptation that extends beyond its ethnic origins. The performance is no longer practiced exclusively by the Javanese community; instead, it has become a shared cultural activity involving performers, musicians, organizers, and audiences from multiple ethnic backgrounds. As a result, the performance functions not only as a means of preserving cultural heritage but also as a social arena where intercultural communication and collective participation are continuously negotiated.

Traditionally, Kuda Kepang combines choreographed dance, ritual elements, musical performance, and demonstrations of physical endurance. The use of woven bamboo horses (*jaranan*) as the principal property, accompanied by rhythmic percussion and trance-related attractions, remains the defining characteristic of the performance. Similar to Kuda Kepang traditions found in Central and East Java, audiences are generally attracted by the climactic sequences involving acts of physical endurance, including fire-eating, glass-eating, and other trance performances (Ghina Puspita, 2023). Nevertheless, field observations indicate that in Dharmasraya these spectacular attractions represent only one aspect of the performance. Equally important is the role of the performance as a communal gathering that encourages interaction among people from different ethnic communities before, during, and after the event.

Performances are generally staged in open public spaces, such as village fields or spacious courtyards, where large audiences can easily gather and interact. These venues facilitate unrestricted movement for performers while simultaneously creating opportunities for social engagement among spectators. A typical performance lasts approximately two to three hours, during which artistic presentation and social interaction occur simultaneously. Consequently, the performance space functions not merely as a theatrical setting but also as a communal space where social relationships are reinforced through shared cultural experience.

Structure of the Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) Performance

The performance structure of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) follows a sequential dramatic arrangement consisting of an opening, the main performance, and the closing section. Each stage contributes to the gradual development of dramatic intensity while simultaneously organizing interactions among performers, musicians, ritual specialists, and audiences. The performance typically begins with an opening *jaranan* dance performed by five or more dancers carrying woven bamboo horses that symbolize the identity of the tradition. This introductory sequence establishes the visual character of the performance while preparing both performers and audiences for the subsequent ritual and choreographic developments.



Figure 1. Movement *jaranan* Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC)

The overall structure of the performance is constructed through the integration of several artistic components, including movement, music, costume, stage setting, properties, and audience participation. These elements function interdependently to create a coherent performance system rather than operating as isolated artistic components. The choreography incorporates coordinated movements of the head, torso, arms, and legs. Head movements include turns to the right, left, front, and downward, accompanied by rapid snapping gestures, while arm movements feature clenched fists and *kebyak jaranan*. Lower-body movements consist of *mendhak*, *napak*, *gejuk*, *junjungan kanan*, *geyol*, and *ndegdeg*, producing dynamic variations that alternate between vigorous, energetic, and restrained expressions (Jazilah & Indriyanto, 2019). Collectively, these choreographic patterns establish the distinctive kinetic identity of the Turonggo Budoyo performance.

The choreography develops further through the introduction of the *celeng* (wild boar) and *barongan* sequences. During the *celeng* section, dancers adopt a low, forward-leaning posture while manipulating the boar property with coordinated body movements that emphasize strength and animalistic character. The subsequent *rampak barongan* sequence introduces circular floor patterns performed collectively with the *barongan* property, creating a strong sense of spatial coordination and ensemble movement. These choreographic transitions contribute not only to the dramatic progression of the performance but also to the collective synchronization that characterizes group participation throughout the presentation.

Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) as a Space for Social Interaction

The development of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) cannot be separated from the multicultural social landscape of Dharmasraya, where Javanese, Minangkabau, Batak, Sundanese, and other ethnic communities have coexisted since the implementation of the transmigration program. Within such a heterogeneous environment, artistic practices extend beyond aesthetic expression and become important mechanisms through which individuals from different cultural backgrounds establish social relationships, negotiate shared meanings, and construct collective identities. Rather than functioning solely as a traditional Javanese performance, Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) has evolved into a shared cultural arena that accommodates intercultural participation and facilitates social cohesion within the community.

This finding can be interpreted through Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes that human action is based on meanings constructed through social interaction and continuously modified through interpretative processes (Blumer, 2013). Meaning, therefore, is neither fixed nor inherent within cultural objects but emerges through repeated interactions among individuals participating in particular social contexts. Abels (2020) further argues that symbolic interaction is inherently dynamic because meanings are constantly negotiated through communication, while Carter and Fuller (2015) emphasize that interpretation allows individuals to redefine symbols according to their lived experiences. These theoretical perspectives provide an appropriate framework for understanding how Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) functions not merely as a performance tradition but as a medium through which multicultural communities construct shared social meanings.

From an ethnochoreological perspective, the performance represents an integrated artistic system consisting of dancers, musicians, ritual specialists, costumes, properties, performance space, and audiences. These elements do not operate independently but interact continuously throughout rehearsals and performances to produce a coherent artistic experience. Consequently, the social significance of the performance does not arise from a single component but from the dynamic relationships established among all participants. The interactional processes embedded within these relationships can be understood through Blumer's three interconnected principles of symbolic interactionism: the construction of meaning, social interaction, and interpretative processes.

1. Construction of Meaning

The first principle concerns the construction of meaning through symbolic interaction. Within Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC), meaning is generated through the reciprocal relationship between movement, music, costumes, and performance properties. Rather than functioning independently, these artistic components continually respond to one another throughout rehearsals and public performances.

As explained by Mr. Erman, the founder of the performance group, "*music does not dominate the movement, nor is the movement entirely dependent upon a fixed musical pattern; instead, both continuously adapt to each other throughout rehearsals and performances*" (personal communication, August 15, 2025). This statement demonstrates that choreographic movement and musical accompaniment are produced through collaborative negotiation rather than unilateral artistic control. Such interaction becomes particularly significant because performers originate from different ethnic backgrounds and therefore contribute diverse cultural experiences to the creative process.

The symbolic meanings embodied in costumes and performance properties further

reinforce this collective negotiation. The woven bamboo horse (*jaranan*), costumes, and supporting properties do not merely function as visual ornaments but actively shape performers' bodily movements, spatial orientation, and artistic expression. Likewise, relatively uniform costumes minimize visible ethnic distinctions, encouraging performers to identify themselves primarily as members of the Kuda Kepang community rather than representatives of particular ethnic groups. Consequently, artistic symbols become social symbols that cultivate a shared sense of belonging among participants.

2. Social Interaction

The second principle emphasizes social interaction as the process through which symbolic meanings are collectively produced and maintained. In Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC), interaction extends beyond communication among performers to include musicians, ritual specialists, organizers, audiences, and local residents. The performance space therefore functions not merely as a physical venue but as a social arena in which multiple forms of interaction occur simultaneously.

The organization of dancers, musicians, performance properties, and audiences reflects this interactional structure. Open performance spaces enable continuous communication between performers and spectators before, during, and after the performance. Audience members respond directly to choreographic sequences, musical rhythms, and ritual episodes, while performers continuously adjust their expressions and movements according to audience responses. Such reciprocal engagement transforms the performance into a participatory cultural event rather than a one-directional artistic presentation.

Moreover, the sequential structure of the performance—from the opening section through the climactic episodes to the conclusion—provides an organizational framework that coordinates interactions among all participants. Each performance stage creates opportunities for cooperation, communication, and collective participation regardless of ethnic background. Within this context, cultural diversity does not function as a source of separation but as a foundation for collaborative artistic practice. The performance space therefore becomes an arena where intercultural encounters are normalized through repeated artistic interaction.

3. Interpretative Processes

Blumer's third principle concerns interpretative processes through which individuals continuously redefine the meanings they attribute to symbols and social experiences. Field observations indicate that Kuda Kepang performances are regularly presented during important communal events, including weddings, circumcision ceremonies, Independence Day celebrations, and *bersih dusun* rituals. According to the ritual specialist (*pawang*), these occasions involve extensive community participation extending from preparation and rehearsal to the completion of the performance (personal communication, June 20, 2025).

Participation in these activities enables community members to acquire more than technical performance skills. Through repeated involvement, performers gradually internalize the aesthetic values, ritual meanings, and social norms embodied within the tradition. Simultaneously, audiences develop interpretative understandings of the performance through direct sensory engagement with movement, music, rhythm, and collective atmosphere. Consequently, the performance becomes a lived cultural experience through which participants continuously reinterpret their relationships with other community members.

This interpretative process ultimately contributes to the construction of collective

identity. Continuous participation transforms Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) from an inherited Javanese cultural tradition into a shared cultural practice embraced by a multicultural society. The performance therefore functions not only as artistic heritage but also as a mechanism through which values of cooperation, mutual respect, and social solidarity are reproduced across ethnic boundaries. Through sustained interaction, artistic symbols are transformed into shared social meanings that strengthen community cohesion and reinforce the collective identity of Dharmasraya's multicultural society.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) functions not merely as a traditional Javanese performing art but as an important social institution that facilitates interaction among the multicultural communities of Dharmasraya. Situated within a transmigration settlement where Javanese, Minangkabau, Batak, Sundanese, and other ethnic groups coexist, the performance has evolved beyond its original cultural context to become a shared cultural practice that accommodates participation across ethnic boundaries. The findings reveal that the artistic elements of the performance—including choreography, music, costumes, properties, performance space, and organizational structure—operate collectively to create opportunities for communication, cooperation, and cultural negotiation among performers and audiences from diverse backgrounds.

Interpreted through Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism, the study shows that the social significance of Kuda Kepang Turonggo Budoyo (PDC) lies not solely in its aesthetic qualities but in the symbolic meanings continuously constructed through interaction. The performance provides a setting in which participants collectively negotiate meanings, reinterpret cultural symbols, and develop a shared sense of belonging despite their different ethnic identities. Rather than reinforcing ethnic boundaries, the performance transforms cultural diversity into a source of collaboration and collective identity, illustrating how traditional performing arts can function as effective mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion within multicultural societies.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of ethnochoreological research by demonstrating that dance should be understood not only as a choreographic or aesthetic phenomenon but also as a dynamic social process through which cultural meanings are produced, negotiated, and reproduced. The integration of an ethnochoreological perspective with symbolic interactionism extends current discussions on performing arts by highlighting the role of artistic practice in shaping intercultural relationships and collective identities.

Practically, the findings suggest that community-based performing arts possess considerable potential as cultural resources for fostering social integration in ethnically diverse regions. Consequently, cultural preservation initiatives should not be limited to safeguarding artistic forms alone but should also strengthen the social spaces through which artistic practices encourage intercultural dialogue, community participation, and mutual understanding.

This study is limited to a single Kuda Kepang community in Dharmasraya. Future research may compare similar performance traditions in other transmigration regions or examine different traditional performing arts to further explore how artistic practices contribute to intercultural communication, identity formation, and social integration in multicultural societies.

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