



MANIFESTATION OF MALAY MUSLIM IDENTITY AT TRADITIONAL JEPIN DANCE IN WEST KALIMANTAN

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Abstract

This study examines how traditional Jepin dance functions as a cultural practice that expresses and sustains Malay Muslim identity in West Kalimantan. Although previous studies have documented Jepin's history, choreography, and preservation, they have paid limited attention to its role in constructing and intergenerationally transmitting Malay Muslim identity. This study used a qualitative ethnographic approach, including in-depth interviews with four senior Jepin maestros from Kubu Raya Regency, Mempawah Regency, Sambas Regency, and Pontianak City, all of whom have actively preserved the tradition since the 1950s. The interview data were complemented by observation and documentation. The findings show that Jepin is more than a traditional performing art; it is a living cultural practice shaped by the historical process of Islamization in West Kalimantan. Islamic values are embedded in song lyrics, performance practices, costumes, and musical traditions, while their meanings are continuously transmitted through families, artistic communities, and cultural performances. Rather than functioning merely as symbolic religious elements, these practices enable Malay communities to express, negotiate, and reproduce their collective Muslim identity across generations. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that Jepin functions not only as an intangible cultural heritage but also as a medium through which religious values, historical memory, and Malay Muslim identity are continuously maintained within contemporary society.

Keywords: jepin dance, malay, muslim, west kalimantan, islamic cultural heritage.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana tari Jepin tradisional berfungsi sebagai praktik budaya yang menjadi sarana bagi identitas Muslim Melayu untuk diekspresikan dan dipertahankan di Kalimantan Barat. Meskipun berbagai penelitian sebelumnya telah mendokumentasikan sejarah, koreografi, dan pelestarian tari Jepin, perhatian terhadap perannya dalam pembentukan dan pewarisan identitas Muslim Melayu antargenerasi masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam dengan empat maestro senior Jepin dari Kabupaten Kubu Raya, Kabupaten Mempawah, Kabupaten Sambas, dan Kota Pontianak yang secara aktif melestarikan tradisi tersebut sejak tahun 1950-an. Data wawancara dilengkapi dengan observasi dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Jepin bukan sekadar seni pertunjukan tradisional, melainkan praktik budaya yang hidup dan terbentuk melalui proses historis Islamisasi di Kalimantan Barat. Nilai-nilai Islam tertanam dalam lirik lagu, praktik pertunjukan, busana, dan tradisi musik, sementara makna-maknanya terus diwariskan melalui keluarga, komunitas seni, dan berbagai pertunjukan budaya. Unsur-unsur tersebut tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai simbol keagamaan, tetapi juga menjadi praktik budaya yang memungkinkan masyarakat Melayu mengekspresikan, menegosiasikan, dan mereproduksi identitas Muslim Melayu secara kolektif lintas generasi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada pengembangan kajian dengan menunjukkan bahwa Jepin tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai warisan budaya takbenda, tetapi juga sebagai media yang secara berkelanjutan mempertahankan nilai-nilai keagamaan, memori historis, dan identitas Muslim Melayu dalam kehidupan masyarakat kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: tari jepin, melayu, muslim, Kalimantan barat, warisan budaya islam

Background

Islam is the largest religion in Indonesia, a Southeast Asian country, with Muslims comprising approximately 87% of the population. The spread of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago occurred through multiple interconnected channels, including trade, education, Sufism,

politics, marriage, and the arts¹. Among these channels, the arts provided an important cultural medium through which Islamic values could

¹ Nurbaiti Nurbaiti, Mundzier Suparta, and Muhammad Azwar, 'Islamic Education and Islamization Channels in Malay Peninsula in 7 Th-8 Th Centuries AD', in *Buletin Al-Turas*, no. 2 (2020), XXVI.



interact with and become embedded in existing local traditions. Particularly in Malay communities, where Islamic performing arts reflect the interaction between Islamic teachings and existing local cultural practices², including musical and performance traditions embedded in religious and community life³.

In West Kalimantan, Arab-Islamic influence became integrated into Malay cultural expressions through trade, cultural exchange, da'wah and performing arts⁴. One of the traditional arts with Islamic nuances is Jepin, which is a dance and music that has become an important medium in spreading moral values, ethics, and Malay Islamic identity⁵. Zapin developed through a process of acculturation in which Arab-derived performance traditions interacted with local coastal cultures and subsequently developed into localized forms of Zapin Melayu⁶. Zapin is a traditional dance genre that is widely practiced across the Malay world, including Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and southern Thailand. Although the dance shares common historical roots associated with Arab-Islamic cultural influence, it has developed different local names and characteristics across regions. In West Kalimantan, the tradition is locally known as Jepin, while in Bangka Belitung it is commonly

referred to as Sepen. Despite these regional variations in terminology, all belong to the broader Malay Zapin tradition, with each community adapting the dance to its own cultural context, repertoire, and performance practices. Throughout this article, the term Jepin refers specifically to the West Kalimantan tradition.

Various studies have shown that Islamization in Indonesia was not merely a process of religious conversion but also a process of cultural adaptation through which Islamic teachings became integrated into local traditions and cultural practices. For example, Hasneni's⁷ studies of Minangkabau cultural practices similarly demonstrate how Islam has been accommodated within existing traditions and how religious cultural expressions can contribute to the maintenance of collective identity. In the Malay community of West Kalimantan, this relationship between Islam and culture is similarly reflected in traditional performing arts, particularly the Jepin dance, which embodies Islamic values while simultaneously expressing and reinforcing Malay Muslim identity.

West Kalimantan is one of the regions in Indonesia where Malay communities have historically played an important role in shaping the province's cultural landscape, particularly in coastal areas and former Malay sultanates. This can be seen from the existence of Islamic-style palaces or kingdoms, with various forms of jepin performances that are unique to each region but equally symbolize honor, modesty and religion. Arabic culture is used for Assyura commemorations, Nifsu Syaban celebrations, Burdah, Nginau, Nuak Ketan, Nyukur Bayi, pilgrimages to tombs, Gambus⁸, Zapin dances, Dana Syarah, and Hadrah dances, which have cultural, religious, character, and artistic values for

² Muhammad Khairul Hafiz and others, 'Unsur Kearifan Tempatan Dalam Seni Persembahan Melayu-Islam: Analisis Dari Perspektif Hukum Islam The Element of Local Wisdom in Islamic Malay Performing Art: An Analysis from Islamic Law Perspective', in *Jurnal Fiqh*, no. 2 (2019), xvi.

³ Ricki Ricki and others, *The Exuxtence of the Jepin Langkah Loncat Tiung Sembilan Dance in Pontianak-The Existence of the Jepin Langkah Loncat Tiung Sembilan Dance in Pontianak*, published online 2024, doi:10.28418/j-psh.v15i1.76351.

⁴ Alpi Wahyu Tiningsih, 'Bentuk Revitalisasi Jepin Cangkah Pedang Sebagai Warisan Melayu Kota Pontianak', *Nagri Pustaka*, 1.2 (2023), pp. 59–63.

⁵ Robby Hidajat and others, 'Tafsir Tari Zapin Arab Dan Melayu Dalam Masyarakat Melayu', *Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences (JEHSS)*, 4.2 (2021), pp. 1266–73, doi:10.34007/jehss.v4i2.935.

⁶ Hidajat, R., I. E. Ismail, M. 'A. Hasyimy, and S. Jamnongsarn, 'Expression of Culture Diversity Through Creation of Zapin Nusantara Berlenggang Dance', *Mudra Jurnal Seni Budaya*, 39.4 (2024), 529–538. DOI: 10.31091/mudra.v39i4.2247.

⁷ Hasneni, 'Tradisi Lokal Pagang Gadai Dalam Masyarakat Minangkabau', *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies*, 1.1 (2015), pp. 69–81.

⁸ R. Z. Raja Mohd Yusof, 'The Origins of the Gambus ('Üd) in Malaysia: A Two-Channel Hypothesis of Ottoman Cultural Exchange and Hadrami Diaspora.', *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 14.1 (2025), pp. 41–57.



the Malay community⁹. Jepin serves as an entertainment dance, a symbol of the dissemination of religious and traditional values, education, and demonstrates its relevance in contemporary society. Zapin is preserved through non-formal education via traditional art studios, public performances, and cultural festivals; preservation also occurs through informal and formal education settings¹⁰. Among these traditions, Jepin occupies a distinctive position as a traditional performing art that combines entertainment, education, and the transmission of Islamic and Malay cultural values. Previous studies show that Jepin is preserved through families, community art studios, schools, public performances, and cultural festivals, helping the tradition remain relevant in contemporary Malay society. Although rooted in the broader Malay Zapin tradition, Jepin in West Kalimantan has evolved distinctive choreographic forms, musical practices, and cultural meanings that differentiate it from Zapin traditions practiced in Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and other Malay regions. Despite these distinctive characteristics, international scholarship has yet to fully explore Jepin as a cultural practice through which Malay Muslim identity is expressed and sustained.

In West Kalimantan, Malay identity has historically developed in close relationship with Islam. ¹¹Notes that the history of Islam's arrival in West Kalimantan not only brought about changes in the community's belief system but also shaped the development of Malay cultural identity through the roles of religious scholars, the kingdom¹², and social interactions that took place

in coastal areas. The presence of Islamic figures such as Habib Husein Al-Qadri demonstrates that the process of Islamization in West Kalimantan contributed to the formation of Malay identity, which is still reflected in various traditions, arts, and cultural practices of the community to this day¹³ Islam is not only understood as the religion embraced by the Malay people but also serves as the foundation for the values, norms, and cultural practices that shape their social life. In Malay society, religious values often form the foundation of various cultural and social practices. A study of the merasi tradition among the Malay people in Riau shows that religious understanding is a key consideration in determining compatibility between prospective spouses before marriage; thus, the relationship between Islam and Malay culture is adaptive and mutually reinforcing in the community's social life. Various studies indicate that Malay identity formed alongside Islamization, which developed through trade, cultural interaction, and the presence of Malay kingdoms in the West Kalimantan region. The close relationship between Islam and Malay culture is reflected in various forms of cultural expression, such as customs, language, rituals, and traditional arts passed down from generation to generation¹⁴. Thus, traditional performing arts serve not only as entertainment but also as an expression of the Malay people's ethnic and religious identity.

Traditional arts like Jepin are important cultural expressions because they preserve collective memory, values, and identity. Jepin is an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) that has grown and thrived from generation to generation and continues to be developed by its community of bearers. ICH is a living cultural practice transmitted across generations and continually

⁹ Kusuma & Aman, 'Budaya Keagamaan Arab Melayu Seberang Kota Jambi Religious Culture Arab Melayu Seberang Of Jambi City', *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, 19.1 (2021), pp. 239–68, doi:10.31291/jlk.v19i1.899.

¹⁰ Nike Suryani and others, 'Empowering Cultural Identity through Non-Formal Education: A Qualitative Study of Zapin Pecah Dua Belas Dance-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)', in *Jurnal Eduscience (JES)*, no. 5 (2025), XII.

¹¹ Tomi, *Asal Muasal Orang Melayu Pontianak* (Toms Book, 2015).

¹² Arum Kurniasih, Dwi Oktariani, and Aline Rizky Oktaviari Satrianingsih, 'Rekonstruksi Tari Jepin Langkah Jarom Mesen Di Kabupaten Kubu Raya', *Magelaran: Jurnal*

Pendidikan Seni, 7.2 (2024), pp. 477–84, doi:10.35568/magelaran.v7i2.4609.

¹³ Tomi, *Jepsi: Jepin Silat Masyarakat Melayu Kabupaten Sanggau* (Toms Book Publishing, 2016).

¹⁴ Nadia Puspitasari, Henny Sanulita, and Imma Fretisari, 'Struktur Penyajian Tari Jepin Cangkah Pedang Dalam Seni Tari Melayu Di Kota Pontianak', *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa*, 6.9 (2017).



recreated by its community of bearers, serving as a source of identity and cultural continuity¹⁵. The traditional dances Jepin Langkah Penghibur Pengantin (2020), Jepin Tembung Pendek (2022), and Jepin Langkah Jarom Mesen (2025) were officially designated as Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. Unlike tangible cultural heritage, the value of ICH cannot be reduced to mere documentation or archiving; rather, it must be understood as an effort to maintain the continuity of cultural practices within real social life. In preservation efforts, ICH practices often undergo various forms of representation and institutionalization that can alter how the broader public understands, practices, and perceives these traditions. Traditional performing arts serve as markers of collective identity and social cohesion within their communities.

Jepin is one of the most prominent traditional arts among Malay communities in West Kalimantan. Jepin has historical ties to Arab traders and Islamic influence. This dance draws on Malay art, Islam, and local culture, relying on the harmony of foot movements with stringed musical instruments, as well as body and hand movements that enhance the dance's aesthetic appeal. Safitri¹⁶ notes that the "Jepin Langkah Penibong" in Mempawah embodies the philosophy of Malay society, in which the dance is not merely a form of entertainment but is deeply rooted in the social and religious rituals of the Malay people. It points out that the "Jepin Langkah" and "Jepin Ekstrak" dances were originally used as a medium for Islamic preaching. Da'wah serves not only as a medium for conveying Islamic teachings but also as a means of communication that connects religious values with the realities of community life¹⁷. This is reflected in Malay art

forms, which embody Islamic values disseminated through the arts. The gambus, an instrument of Arab-Islamic influence, accompanies "Jepin Rotan" and "Jepin Tali Bui" in West Kalimantan, particularly in coastal areas among the Malay community¹⁸. Deni's argues that the gambus tradition represents a hybrid cultural heritage in the Malay world. While the Zapin performance tradition was transmitted through Hadrami diaspora networks, the gambus instrument itself is structurally rooted in the Ottoman-Arabic 'ūd tradition before becoming localized within Malay musical culture. None of these findings have specifically explored Jepin as a Muslim Malay identity through the history of Islamization, religious symbols, poetry, the gambus, traditional attire, and the cultural significance that remains alive within Malay society.

The Islamic values present in Jepin art are passed down through traditional performance practices and intergenerational transmission within the Malay community. Dance traditions as ICH can evolve without losing their essence through the negotiation of values, context, and social function. Thus, the sustainability of ICH depends on cultural practices' capacity to adapt without losing their essential values and core meanings²⁰. Jepin is a living tradition within the Malay community, passed down across generations²¹. Concerns remain about adapting its original form into educational materials while ensuring that this cultural product, preserved by ancestors through generations, remains intact. Like many other traditional arts, Jepin also faces

Communication in East Aceh', *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies*, 11.1 (2025), pp. 13–18.

¹⁸ Octaviandri Octaviandri, Ismunandar Ismunandar, and Asfar Muniir, 'Analisis Pola Tabuhan Beruas Pada Musik Iringan Jepin Tembung Panjang Di Kota Pontianak', *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa*, 8.3 (2019).

¹⁹ Deni Slamet and others, *Struktur Gerak Tari Jepin Langkah Gersik Pantai Kota Pontianak Kalimantan Barat* (n.d.).

²⁰ D. Slamet, K. Kunci, S. Gerak, and T. Jepin Langkah Gersik Pantai, 'Struktur Gerak Tari Jepin Langkah Gersik Pantai Kota Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat'.

²¹ D. Oktariani, 'Penanaman Karakter Percaya Diri Mahasiswa PAUD melalui Pementasan Tari di Ruang Publik', *Jurnal Riset Golden Age PAUD UHO*, 7.1 (2024), 11–18, <https://rgap.uho.ac.id/index.php/journal>

¹⁵ Iris Kico and others, 'Digitization and Visualization of Folk Dances in Cultural Heritage: A Review', *Inventions*, 3.4 (2018), doi:10.3390/inventions3040072.

¹⁶ Shara Safitri and others, *Struktur Penyajian Tari Jepin Rotan Di Pontianak* (n.d.).

¹⁷ B. ., Abdullah, A. ., & Sukiman, S. Bahtiar, 'Islamic Moderation in Context: Ulama and Religious



challenges from declining participation and changing cultural preferences among younger generations.

Previous studies on Jepin have primarily examined the tradition from the perspectives of choreography, history, aesthetics, preservation, and arts education. Historical studies have documented the development of regional Jepin traditions, such as Jepin Lembut²² in Sambas and Jepin Sengarong in Sanggau, emphasizing their origins and historical development (Halim; Nopriyanti). Other studies have explored the presentation structure, choreography, musical accompaniment, and performance elements of various Jepin repertoires, including Jepin Rotan, Jepin Tali Bintang²³, Jepin Cangkah Pedang²⁴, and Jepin Langkah Penibong²⁵. More recent research has focused on cultural preservation through regeneration, reconstruction, revitalization, and multimedia-based learning, highlighting efforts to sustain Jepin as an important form of Malay cultural heritage²⁶. Collectively, these studies have significantly enriched our understanding of Jepin as a traditional performing art by documenting its historical development, artistic characteristics, and preservation strategies. However, limited attention has been given to examining Jepin as a cultural practice through which Malay Muslim identity is historically constructed, culturally expressed, and continuously sustained. In particular, the relationships among the process of Islamization,

Islamic symbolism embedded in performance, and the formation of Malay Muslim identity remain insufficiently explored.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores how traditional Jepin dance functions as a manifestation of Malay Muslim identity in West Kalimantan by examining its historical roots, Islamic elements, cultural meanings, and contemporary significance within Malay communities. Accordingly, this study asks: How does traditional Jepin dance function as a manifestation of Malay Muslim identity in West Kalimantan?

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore how traditional Jepin Dance represents Malay Muslim identity in West Kalimantan. Ethnography was chosen to understand Jepin as a living cultural practice embedded in the social, religious, and cultural life of the Malay community²⁷. Fieldwork was conducted between 2025 and 2026 in four regions of West Kalimantan: Pontianak City, Kubu Raya Regency, Mempawah Regency, and Sambas Regency. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included four senior Jepin masters aged over 60 years, recognized as successors and custodians of traditional Jepin in their respective regions, and four active artists who had learned directly from these masters, representing both dancers and musicians. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews explored the historical development of Jepin, its Islamic values and cultural meanings, and how Malay Muslim identity is transmitted across generations. Observations of rehearsals, performances, and cultural activities documented movements, musical accompaniment, costumes, and performance practices, while books, archival materials, photographs, and previous studies complemented the field data.

²² Halim, I., *Sejarah Tari Jepin Lembut di Desa Sekura Kecamatan Teluk Keramat Kabupaten Sambas* (Pontianak: Universitas Tanjungpura, 2019).

²³ Ismunandar, I., 'Struktur Penyajian Tari Jepin Rotan Pontianak', *Aksara: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Nonformal*, 8.2 (2022). DOI: 10.37905/aksara.8.2.1177-1192.2022.

²⁴ Alpi Wahyu Tiningsih, 'Bentuk Revitalisasi Jepin Cangkah Pedang Sebagai Warisan Melayu Kota Pontianak'.

²⁵ Hidajat, R., S. Suyono, J. Sayono, M. 'Afaf Hasyimy, D. R. Syahputri, S. A. Iskandar, I. E. bin Ismail, and N. B. Mohd Isa, 'Tafsir Tari Zapin Arab dan Melayu dalam Masyarakat Melayu', *Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences (JEHSS)*, 4.2 (2021), 1266–1273. DOI: 10.34007/jehss.v4i2.935.

²⁶ Oktariani, D., 'Regenerasi Tari Jepin Tembung Panjang di Kota Pontianak', *Wacana: Jurnal Bahasa, Seni, dan Pengajaran*, 8.1 (2024), 88–102. DOI: 10.29407/jbsp.v8i1.22306.

²⁷ J. W. ., & Poth, C. N. Creswell, J. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (sage publication, 2018).



The researcher analyzed all interview, observation, and documentary data thematically²⁸. by identifying recurring patterns and organizing them into themes related to the historical roots of Jepin, Islamic elements, Malay Muslim identity, and cultural transmission. As an active Jepin artist and practitioner in West Kalimantan, the researcher occupied an insider position that facilitated access to the community and understanding of local cultural meanings. Consistent with the interpretive and naturalistic character of ethnographic research, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by comparing participants' narratives with observational findings and documentary evidence. This process also enabled triangulation across data sources to strengthen the credibility of the interpretations and reduce the influence of the researcher's prior assumptions²⁹.

Historical Roots of Traditional Jepin in West Kalimantan

The history of the Jepin dance in West Kalimantan is closely associated with the spread of Islam along the province's coastal regions. Previous studies generally suggest that Jepin developed through the cultural interaction between Arab and Malay communities, facilitated by maritime trade, religious dissemination, and long-term cultural exchange. Several scholars have argued that Arab merchants not only traded goods such as *songkok* (traditional caps) but also introduced artistic traditions and Islamic teachings that local Malay communities gradually embraced and adapted. Consequently, Arab traders contributed not only to economic exchange but also to the transmission of cultural and religious values, with the arts, including Jepin, serving as one medium through which Islam was disseminated in West Kalimantan. However, rather than attributing the origin of Jepin to a

single transmission route through Arab traders, this study recognizes that its historical development was shaped by multiple interconnected processes involving maritime trade, the expansion of Islam, the influence of Malay sultanates, and the adaptation of local Malay cultural traditions. Accordingly, the historical interpretations presented in this study are based on the triangulation of published literature and the oral narratives of senior Jepin maestros collected during fieldwork. One of the media used in the spread of Islam was the arts, including the Jepin dance, which flourished in various Malay communities across West Kalimantan³⁰.

In one of the verses of the *Jepin Langkah Simpang* song composed by Yusuf Dahyani, a senior Jepin maestro and participant in this study. This historical memory is also expressed through Jepin song lyrics. Dahyani (P1)³¹, a senior Jepin maestro and participant in this study, recalled a verse from *Jepin Langkah Simpang*: "*Tari Jepin, Tari Jepin, berasal dari Arab, telah berwujud, telah berwujud berabad-abad, di daerah, di daerah, Kalimantan Barat*" ["Jepin dance, Jepin dance, originating from Arabia, has long been established for centuries in the region of West Kalimantan"].¹

Rather than treating these lyrics as direct historical evidence, this study interprets them as cultural memory and a contemporary heritage narrative through which practitioners understand and narrate Jepin's historical development. During the interview, Yusuf Dahyani explained that the lyrics were composed to reflect Malay Jepin practitioners' collective understanding of the historical relationship between Arab-Islamic influences and the development of Jepin in West Kalimantan. The title *Jepin Bismillah*, which is widely known in West Kalimantan, likewise reflects the close association between Jepin and Islamic values. Yusuf Dahyani further explained that Jepin performances traditionally begin with

²⁸ Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications

²⁹ Arivan Mahendra and others, 'Metode Etnografi Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif', *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*, 10.17 (2024), pp. 159–70, doi:10.5281/zenodo.13853562.

³⁰ Lili Yunita and others, *Studi Komparatif Tari Jepin Lembut Desa Sekura Dan Desa Mensere Kabupaten Sambas* (n.d.).

³¹ Interview with P1, senior Jepin maestro, Pontianak, (01/09/2025).



the recitation of *Bismillah* to seek Allah's blessing before dancing, showing how Islamic beliefs remain embedded in contemporary Jepin performance practices.

Jepin developed in West Kalimantan alongside the rise of Malay kingdoms and sultanates, which established Islam as a key foundation of social and cultural life within Malay communities. The existence of Islamic sultanates and religious institutions, including the Sambas Sultanate and the Sambas Royal Mosque, reflects the broader process of Islamization that shaped the cultural landscape of West Kalimantan³². In this historical context, several published studies explain that Arab communities introduced the performing art known as Zapin, which later developed within the Kadriah Palace in Pontianak before gradually spreading to the wider Malay community. As the tradition became localized, the term *Zapin* was adopted into the local Malay language as *Jepin*, while its choreography, themes, and performance practices increasingly reflected the social and cultural life of Malay communities in West Kalimantan. As a region with numerous Malay settlements, West Kalimantan gave rise to various forms of Jepin dance that evolved with the social and cultural characteristics of each region. Jepin Langkah Penibong has been preserved for generations among the coastal Malay community in Mempawah Regency³³. In Sambas Regency, the "Jepin Lembut" dance developed and is closely linked to the history of Islam's arrival via Arab trade routes along the coast³⁴. Meanwhile, in Sanggau Regency, the Jepin Sengarong dance has developed; it is believed to

have been known since the reign of Gusti Muhammad Tahir I in the late 18th century³⁵. The diverse forms of Jepin demonstrate that this tradition has long been alive and deeply rooted in the lives of the Malay people of West Kalimantan. These various findings further reinforce the notion that Jepin and Islam are intertwined within a cultural framework shaped by Arab cultural influences.

Interviews with senior Jepin maestros from Pontianak (P1)³⁶, Kubu Raya (P2)³⁷, Mempawah (P3)³⁸, and Sambas (P4)³⁹ reveal related but distinct oral narratives concerning the historical development of Jepin in West Kalimantan. P1 recalled that Arab traders who sold *songkok* also brought Jepin dance steps and taught them to local communities. P2 similarly traced this narrative through his parents, who were Jepin practitioners and had learned that the tradition was introduced by Arab traders. P3 emphasized a different aspect of transmission, recalling that he learned Jepin from his teacher and that Arabic lyrics were commonly used at the time. P4 associated Jepin with the close relationship between Malay culture and Islam, noting that Jepin performances in the past were frequently accompanied by music with Arabic nuances. Provide oral accounts that are broadly consistent with published historical narratives concerning the development of Jepin in West Kalimantan. The maestros consistently explained that Jepin was introduced by Arab communities who came to West Kalimantan through trade and the spread of Islam, bringing commodities such as *songkok* (traditional caps), sarongs, and various other goods alongside artistic traditions and religious values. According to P1, these interactions marked the beginning of the development of

³² Muhamad RI Murtadlo Puslitbang Lektur dan Khazanah Keagamaan Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama, *Masjid Kraton Sambas Dalam Konstelasi Pembaharuan Islam Di Kalimantan Barat* (n.d.).

³³ Program Studi Pendidikan Seni Tari Dan Musik Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Seni Fakultas Keguruan Dan, *Bentuk Penyajian Tari Jepin Langkah Penibong Kabupaten Mempawah Kalimantan Barat Artikel Penelitian Deki Prasetya Ardiansyah NIM F06110040* (2017).

³⁴ I. Halim, A. M. Program, S. Pendidikan, S. Tari, D. M. FKIP, and U. Pontianak, 'Sejarah Tari Jepin Lembut di Desa Sekura Kecamatan Teluk Keramat Kabupaten Sambas' (2019).

³⁵ Nita Nopriyanti and others, *Analisis Sejarah Tari Jepin Sengarong Di Kabupaten Sanggau Kalimantan Barat* (n.d.).

³⁶ Interview with P1, senior Jepin maestro, Pontianak, [01/09/2025].

³⁷ Interview with P2, senior Jepin maestro, Kubu Raya, [10/11], 2026.

³⁸ Interview with P3, senior Jepin maestro, Mempawah, [01/03], 2026.

³⁹ Interview with P4, senior Jepin maestro, Sambas, [1/04], 2026.



Jepin within Malay communities, while P3 emphasized that knowledge of Jepin was transmitted from one generation to the next through families, local communities, and artistic circles from one village to another. Similarly, P2 and P4 described how they first learned Jepin from their parents and senior practitioners who had long been involved in traditional Malay performing arts. These oral narratives suggest that, within the collective memory of the maestros, Jepin is understood not merely as a traditional performing art but as a living cultural heritage reflecting the long historical interaction between Islam, Arab communities, and the Malay people of West Kalimantan.

Islamic Elements in Traditional Jepin

Malay identity emerged through the interaction between Malay culture and Islam. Islam not only became the religion of the Malay people but also shaped the sultanate system, education, and the arts. Therefore, the Jepin dance is understood as an expression of Malay culture rooted in Islamic traditions. Islamic values in Zapin are embedded in its cultural meanings and performance practices, reflecting the close relationship between religious teachings and Malay cultural traditions⁴⁰. Various studies indicate that the Jepin dance serves not only as a performing art but also fulfills social, cultural, educational, and religious functions in the lives of the Malay community in West Kalimantan. Langkah Penibong Jepin dance is not merely a form of entertainment but rather an integral part of various social and religious rituals of the Malay community. Jepin⁴¹ in the coastal regions of West Kalimantan continues to preserve their cultural functions through the use of gambus music and Malay values in their performances. Furthermore, during its early development, Jepin was used as a

medium for Islamic da'wah to convey religious teachings to the community through an artistic approach that was easily accepted⁴². Research on the preservation of Jepin also indicates that this art form continues to be passed down through families, art studios, and educational activities, thereby serving as a medium for the transmission of culture and the identity of the Malay community across generations⁴³. Interviews with senior Jepin maestros from Pontianak (P1), Kubu Raya (P2), Mempawah (P3), and Sambas (P4) provide oral narratives that are broadly consistent with published historical accounts regarding the development of Jepin in West Kalimantan. Across all four regions, the maestros associated the emergence of Jepin with the arrival of Arab communities through trade and the spread of Islam. However, each maestro emphasized different aspects of this historical process according to their local experiences and traditions.

P1 (Pontianak) explained that Jepin developed in Tanjung Bunga, Teluk Pakedai through interactions with Arab traders who introduced commodities such as *songkok* alongside artistic traditions. He learned Jepin from his father, who had previously studied with Arab artists, and emphasized that Jepin functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for *da'wah*. According to P1, the Pontianak tradition is distinguished by more dynamic choreographic innovations while remaining part of the shared Malay Jepin tradition of West Kalimantan.

P2 (Kubu Raya) similarly associated the origin of Jepin with Arab influences and explained that he learned the tradition from teachers whose artistic lineage traced back to Arab practitioners. He emphasized that Islamic values are conveyed primarily through song lyrics praising the Prophet Muhammad and through reciting *Bismillah* before

⁴⁰ Chanifudin, 'Makna Dan Nilai Budaya Melayu Studi Kasus Pada Tari Zapin Melayu', *Jurnal Tamaddun*, 11.1 (2023), pp. 14–35.

⁴¹ I. Ismunandar, 'Struktur Penyajian Tari Jepin Rotan Pontianak', *Aksara: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Nonformal*, 8.2 (2022). DOI: 10.37905/aksara.8.2.1177-1192.2022.

⁴² Dwi Oktariani, 'Regenerasi Tari Jepin Tembung Panjang Di Kota Pontianak', *Wacana: Jurnal Bahasa, Seni, dan Pengajaran*, 8.1 (2024), pp. 88–102, doi:10.29407/jbsp.v8i1.22306.

⁴³ D. Oktariani, 'Regenerasi Tari Jepin Tembung Panjang di Kota Pontianak', *Wacana: Jurnal Bahasa, Seni, dan Pengajaran*, 8.1 (2024), pp. 88–102. DOI: 10.29407/jbsp.v8i1.22306.



performances. Unlike other regions, P2 noted that the dispersed geographical distribution of Malay settlements in Kubu Raya has made it difficult to identify the earliest villages that preserved Jepin, while many performers became more widely recognized after performing in nearby Pontianak.

For P3 (Mempawah), the historical narrative emphasized local transmission rather than direct Arab contact. He explained that the tradition was introduced by Daeng Bacok from the Riau Archipelago and later developed by Usman Muhammad Ali in Mempawah. According to P3, although Jepin ultimately reflects the interaction between Arab cultural influences and the traditions of coastal Malay communities, its preservation has depended largely on hereditary transmission within village communities. He also expressed concern that the absence of younger successors has become one of the greatest challenges to sustaining the tradition.

Meanwhile, P4 (Sambas) likewise connected the development of Jepin with Arab traders but highlighted *Jepin Lembut* as a distinctive cultural identity of Sambas. He explained that the tradition continues to be maintained through regular performances, workshops, and training programs for teachers and artists. P4 further emphasized that the recitation of *Bismillah* before performances symbolizes a prayer for Allah's blessing, illustrating the continuing integration of Islamic values into contemporary Jepin practice.

Taken together, these narratives indicate that although the historical accounts differ in their regional emphasis and transmission pathways, the four maestros consistently understand Jepin as a living cultural heritage through which Islamic values, Malay traditions, and collective historical memory continue to be preserved and transmitted across generations.

Traditional Jepin dance performances incorporate various supporting elements, including movement, makeup and costumes, themes, floor patterns, the stage, props, accompanying music, and lighting. Traditional Jepin is the product of cultural acculturation between Arab-Islamic traditions and local Malay

culture⁴⁴. In the Jepin dance of West Kalimantan, there are several dances that begin with an opening they call the "Langkah Bismillah." "The verses used are also deeply meaningful, praising the greatness of Allah SWT and the exemplary character of the Prophet Muhammad SAW; there are also shalawat," (P1). One of the Malay Jepin dances originating from Pontianak is the "Langkah Bismillah" Jepin. "Langkah Bismillah" Jepin Dance in the Siantan area of Pontianak derives its name from the fact that the first verse always sung before the dance begins is the phrase "Bismillah"⁴⁵. This tradition indicates that Jepin performances begin by seeking blessings from Allah before the artistic activity takes. Malay identity was formed through the encounter between Malay culture and Islam⁴⁶.

The lyrics of *Jepin Tali Bintang*, a variant of traditional Jepin that developed in Pontianak City and Kubu Raya Regency, include the line "Dengan Bismillah kami awalkan" ("*With Bismillah we begin*"), reflecting the belief that every activity should begin by invoking the name of Allah. The dance likewise conveys Islamic teachings by encouraging performers and audiences to remember Allah in their daily lives. Similarly, the verses of *Jepin Bismillah* contain Islamic expressions and supplications, including "Ya Allah, Rabb al-'Alamin," "Muhammad Rasulullah," "Ya Allah, Rabb al-Haqiqah," "Ya Allah, Malik al-Rahmah," "La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasulullah," and "Allahumma salli 'ala Muhammad," together with prayers for blessings, safety, and praise to Allah. These lyrics demonstrate that Islamic elements in Jepin are expressed not only symbolically through movement and performance but also explicitly

⁴⁴ Robby Hidayat Robby and others, 'Expression of Culture Diversity Through Creation of Zapin Nusantara Berlelgang Dance', *Mudra Jurnal Seni Budaya*, 39.4 (2024), pp. 529–38, doi:10.31091/mudra.v39i4.2247.

⁴⁵ Ffilia Sarianti and Regaria Tindarika, *Struktur Gerak Tari Jepin Langkah Bismillah Di Kelurahan Siantan Hilir Kecamatan Pontianak Utara* (n.d.).

⁴⁶ P. A. N. Pangestu and S. Sukarman, "Tradisi Upacara Adat Karo di Desa Tosari Kecamatan Tosari Kabupaten Pasuruan", *JOB (Jurnal Online Baradha)*, 18.3 (2022). DOI: 10.26740/job.v18n3.p1157-1176.



through verbal recitations embedded within the songs. The title *Jepin Langkah Bismillah* itself further emphasizes the practice of invoking Allah's name before performing, reflecting the close relationship between Malay artistic traditions and Islamic values. In addition, several traditional Jepin repertoires include prayers for safety, blessings for the bride and groom, hopes for entering Paradise, acts of worship, *salawat*, and the declaration of faith (*kalimat tauhid*) (P1 & P3).

The makeup and costumes used in traditional Malay Jepin dance in West Kalimantan consist of the “baju telok belanga” for men and the “baju kurong” for women; these garments do not cling to the body's contours and feature side seams on both sides to prevent them from being too tight⁴⁷. This serves to cover the body's private parts, symbolizing Islamic practice. Similarly, for headwear, some women wear a headscarf or shawl. Men wear a songkok or peci, which is also commonly worn during prayer. Male dancers also wear Malay-patterned fabrics, such as insang patterns, Sambas songket, and other fabrics featuring West Kalimantan Malay motifs, to cover the area from the waist to the knees. Women also use fabric as lower-body coverings and shawls. Thus, various Islamic elements are present in the dance's name, lyrics, themes, costumes, performance functions, and inherited values, making Islam an intrinsic part of the Jepin cultural structure, not merely its historical backdrop. Zapin evolved into Zapin Melayu; the dance became an Islamic expression of Malay culture⁴⁸.

Traditional Jepin as a Manifestation of Malay Muslim Identity

Traditional Jepin is not merely a traditional performance passed down by the Malay community, but a cultural expression through which Malay Muslims in West Kalimantan express, negotiate, and sustain their

religious and ethnic identity across generations. . Various studies indicate that Malay identity in West Kalimantan is inseparable from the process of Islamization that took place through trade, da'wah, and the development of Malay kingdoms. In this context, Islam is not only the religion embraced by the Malay community but also serves as the foundation for the values, norms, and cultural practices that shape their social life. Jepin Bismillah dance is a form of Malay cultural expression that blends local traditions with Islamic teachings; thus, this art form represents not only the Malay ethnic identity but also the Islamic identity of its practitioners.

These identities are manifested through various elements of the performance that carry both religious and cultural significance. The use of the phrase *Bismillah* to open the performance, verses praising Allah SWT, prayers for the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the incorporation of the gambus musical tradition, and Malay attire that covers the *aurat* reflect the close relationship between Islamic values and Malay cultural traditions in Jepin performances. Rather than replacing local customs, Islamic values became embedded within Malay cultural expressions, including traditional performing arts. Islamization in Malay society operates through a dialogical process in which Islamic norms and local cultural symbols are continuously reinterpreted, enabling traditions to preserve both cultural continuity and religious legitimacy⁴⁹. This process is reflected in Jepin, where Islamic values are expressed through Malay artistic traditions without diminishing their local cultural character. Therefore, the Islamic elements in the Jepin dance serve not only as religious symbols but also as cultural markers that distinguish Jepin as a performing art unique to the Muslim Malay community. Jepin originally functioned as a medium for Islamic preaching through song lyrics containing the history and exemplary values of the Prophet. At the same

⁴⁷ T. Taslima, D. Oktariani, and I. Ismunandar, ‘Radat Ya Allah Ya Tuhan Kami Dance Revitalization in the Tempatan Village’, *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi Dan Humaniora*, 15.1 (2024), pp. 34–48, doi:10.26418/j-psh.v15i1.68490.

⁴⁸ Robby and others, ‘Expression of Culture Diversity Through Creation of Zapin Nusantara Berlenggang Dance’.

⁴⁹ Rina Rehayati and M. Ridwan Hasbi, *Beyond the Sacred 'Peralihan' Ritual: Local Beliefs and Spiritual Negotiations in Malay-Islamic Culture*, published online 2025, doi:10.14421/esensia.v26i2.6997.



time, its group performance cultivates cooperation, togetherness, discipline, and mutual respect, reinforcing Malay Muslim identity through shared cultural practice⁵⁰.

Interviews with senior Jepin maestros from Pontianak (P1), Kubu Raya (P2), Mempawah (P3), and Sambas (P4) revealed both shared and region-specific understandings of Jepin as a manifestation of Malay Muslim identity. Across all four locations, the maestros consistently described Jepin as an ancestral heritage closely associated with the spread of Islam, the continuity of Malay traditions, and the transmission of religious values across generations. P1 highlighted the role of Arab traders and the development of more dynamic choreographic forms in Pontianak, whereas P2 emphasized the religious meanings embedded in song lyrics and the recitation of *Bismillah* before performances. In Mempawah, P3 focused on hereditary transmission within village communities and expressed concern over the decline of younger successors. Meanwhile, P4 regarded *Jepin Lembut* as a distinctive cultural identity of Sambas that continues to be preserved through performances, workshops, and community-based cultural activities. These regional perspectives indicate that while Jepin shares a common foundation as a Malay Muslim cultural tradition, its historical narratives, modes of transmission, and local meanings continue to evolve according to the social and cultural context of each community.

Sustaining Malay Muslim Cultural Heritage through Jepin Traditional

The cultural heritage of the Jepin Dance has endured to this day thanks to an ongoing process of transmission within families, communities, and Malay society. Interviews with the masters reveal that most of their knowledge of the Jepin Dance was acquired at a young age from their parents,

family members, and local artistic figures in their communities. The spread of Islam in West Kalimantan occurred through cultural exchange, trade, and a network of Islamic kingdoms established by the Hadramaut diaspora⁵¹. This process accelerated the integration of Islamic values into various cultural practices of the Malay community, including traditional performing arts. This learning process takes place informally through hands-on practice, observation, and participation in various traditional ceremonies and community performances. From their teachers, they learn dance and music techniques; they develop the Jepin dances taught to them, incorporating floor patterns and adding musical instruments that enhance Jepin dance performances. Not only is the gambus used as a melodic instrument, but the violin is also incorporated to enrich the melodic accompaniment of the Jepin dance, even though the violin originates from Europe rather than the Arab world. The participating maestros explained that such adaptations are acceptable as long as they do not alter the fundamental characteristics of Jepin, including its Malay movement patterns, Islamic values, and cultural functions within the community. This pattern of transmission indicates that the continuity of the Jepin dance does not depend on written documentation, but rather on the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. This finding aligns with the concept of intangible cultural heritage, namely that living cultural heritage is sustained through a continuous process of transmission and recreation by its supporting communities.

In addition to families, the preservation of the Jepin Dance also takes place through art studios, schools, and various cultural activities organized by the community and local governments. Interviews with the participating maestros revealed that they actively transmit Jepin through community art studios, school

⁵⁰ Y. A. I. J., Masunah, J. J., & Kasmahidayat, Y. Dewi, J.). Social Interaction Values in the Jepin Tembung Pendek Dance in Pontianak City. ', *Proceedings of the International Conference on Arts and Design Education (ICADE 2022) (ASSEHR)*, 771 (2022), pp. 64–69.

⁵¹ Patmawati Patmawati and Fitri Kusumayanti, 'Kaum Al Hadramaut Dan Penyebaran Islam Di Kalimantan Barat', *Jurnal Pendidikan, Kebudayaan Dan Keislaman*, 2.1 (2023), pp. 49–65, doi:10.24260/jpkk.v2i1.1366.



extracurricular activities, cultural festivals, and traditional performances in their respective regions. Teaching the Jepin Dance in schools and art studios is a key strategy for ensuring the tradition's continuity according to the participating maestros, without altering its original form as a cultural heritage of the Malay community⁵². The community's active involvement in community-based education plays a crucial role in strengthening the sustainability of cultural heritage and the cultural identity of the younger generation⁵³. Thus, the preservation process is not only focused on maintaining the dance's form but also on transmitting the Islamic values, ethics, and cultural identity embedded within it to future generations. The transmission of traditional Jepin dance has primarily emphasized technical aspects such as movement, music, costumes, make-up, and floor patterns, while contextual knowledge, including its history, functions, meanings, and cultural values, has been less understood by younger generations⁵⁴. Based on these findings, the development of reference books may serve as one possible strategy for strengthening Malay cultural literacy and supporting the transmission of contextual knowledge alongside practical dance instruction.

Nevertheless, the masters also acknowledge that preserving the Jepin Dance faces various challenges due to social change, modernization, and shifting interests among the younger generation toward traditional arts. Several participating maestros (particularly P3 and P4) observed that increasing interest in popular culture and digital media has reduced young

people's participation in traditional arts and created fewer opportunities for Jepin performances within their local communities. Some of the masters also noted that their own children were reluctant to follow in their footsteps as Jepin artists, opting instead for other careers. These narratives should be understood as reflecting the experiences of the participating maestros rather than representing all Malay communities in West Kalimantan. Nevertheless, the masters emphasize that the Jepin Dance retains a vital role in the lives of the Malay community, as it is viewed as a symbol of cultural and religious identity that is inseparable from the community's history. Therefore, the sustainability of the Jepin Dance requires not only the recruitment of new dancers but also a shared commitment among families, communities, educational institutions, and the government to preserve this living cultural practice. In this way, the Jepin Dance continues to serve as a medium for passing down Islamic values and Malay culture while strengthening the identity of the Muslim Malay community in West Kalimantan.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that traditional Jepin dance is more than a form of performing art; it is a cultural practice through which Malay Muslim communities in West Kalimantan construct, express, and sustain their religious and ethnic identity. The historical interaction between Arab-Islamic traditions and local Malay culture has shaped Jepin into a distinctive performance tradition in which Islamic values are embedded in song lyrics, musical accompaniment, costumes, and performance practices. Rather than functioning solely as cultural heritage, Jepin continues to serve as a living medium through which historical memory, religious values, and collective identity are transmitted across generations.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of traditional performing arts by demonstrating that Jepin should be viewed not merely as a cultural marker of Malay Muslim

⁵² Dwi Oktariani, 'Pelatihan Tari Jepin Langkah Simpang Pada Siswa SMKN 1 Sukadana', *Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Nusantara*, 5.1 (2024), doi:10.55338/jpkmn.v5i1.2934.

⁵³ Wibowo Wicaksono and others, 'Pencarian Rute Terdekat Sanggar Tari Menggunakan Algoritma Floyd Wharshall Di Wilayah Solo Dan Semarang', *Dinamik*, 24.2 (2019), doi:10.35315/dinamik.v24i2.7768.

⁵⁴ Silvananda Dwi Varadibtya, Ismunandar Ismunandar, and Winda Istiandini, 'Makna Properti Tari Jepin Tali Bintang Di Desa Kalimas Kecamatan Sungai Kakap Kabupaten Kubu Raya', *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa (JPPK)*, 11.6 (2022), doi:10.26418/jppk.v11i6.55822.



identity but as a cultural practice through which that identity is continuously enacted, negotiated, and sustained. This perspective extends previous studies that have primarily emphasized the historical, choreographic, and preservation aspects of Jepin by highlighting its role in the ongoing construction of religious and ethnic identity. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of preserving not only the artistic form of Jepin but also the historical knowledge, Islamic values, and cultural meanings embedded within its performance traditions through community-based transmission and educational initiatives.

This study is limited to senior Jepin maestros and active artists in four regions of West Kalimantan; therefore, the findings should not be interpreted as representing all Zapin or Jepin traditions across the Malay world. Future research may undertake comparative studies involving other Malay regions, such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, southern Thailand, and other parts of Indonesia, to further examine how different Zapin traditions negotiate the relationship between Islam, culture, and Malay identity in diverse historical and social contexts.

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Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

The first author was responsible for study conceptualisation and design, literature review, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, manuscript drafting, critical revision, and final approval of the submitted version. The second author contributed to field data collection and assisted in coding the interview data collected from the participating artists. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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Declaration of Interests Statement

The data generated and analysed during this study consist primarily of interview transcripts, field observation records, and research documentation. Due to participant confidentiality and ethical considerations, the interview transcripts and other identifiable research materials are not publicly available. Relevant non-identifiable data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to confidentiality and ethical considerations.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely to assist in locating links to potentially relevant references. All references were independently accessed, reviewed, and verified by the authors before being cited in the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and content of the final publication.

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Interview

- Participant 1 (P1), senior Jepin maestro, interview by Dwi Oktariani, Pontianak, 1 September 2025.
- Participant 2 (P2), senior Jepin maestro, interview by Dwi Oktariani, Kubu Raya, 10 November 2026.
- Participant 3 (P3), senior Jepin maestro, interview by Dwi Oktariani, Mempawah, 1 March 2026.
- Participant 4 (P4), senior Jepin maestro, interview by Dwi Oktariani, Sambas, 1 April 2026.