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Form and function of the *dewa sembilan* (nine deities dance) dance in wedding ceremonies

Rensi Febriyentika, Indrayuda Indrayuda^{*)}

Universitas Negeri Padang

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ABSTRACT

This study will provide a basis to know what local factors help to maintain a performing art tradition against cultural decay. The study follows ethnographic qualitative research, which data were collected by conducting participant observation, in-depth interview with 7 individuals selected by purposive and snowball sampling methods (i.e. traditional arts custodian, dancers-trainers, musicians, and community/government figures), and documentary techniques (taking pictures, videos and recording of archival records). Data interpretation was done through three steps: data reduction, data display, and concluding drawing while credibility was guaranteed through triangulating data from different sources and methods. Research results showed that DanceDewa Sembilan performance structure comprises bridal procession, welcoming DancePersembahan, central performance itself, thirteen main physical patterns, six connecting movements, a live traditional music performance, a troupe of nine unmarried female dancers, a specific face paint and costume, and three objects that are regarded as symbols (plates, candles, and robes). It also functions in four ways: (i) religious, (ii) social, (iii) entertainment, and (4) symbolic. Interestingly, unlike how other forms of Sumatran wedding dances have secularized, the core roles of DanceDewa Sembilan haven't gone away from their sacred dimension. The changes have only been superficial (i.e. the length of the performance, the location where it is performed, and some details in costumes). Such steadfastness is maintained because the community follows their customary law and the fact that performing the dance is reserved solely for women who haven't undergone the wedding ceremony yet. Therefore, this study serves as a real life case showing how a wedding dance that carries religious elements can be kept functional despite pressures of modern life and provides a documentation tool for cultural preservation and also a comparative case study for further research in the field of dances of intangible cultural heritage in Sumatra.



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Corresponding Author:

Indrayuda Indrayuda,

yudaindra@fbs.unp.ac.id

Introduction

Cultural identity, a reflection of the character and nature of a nation, can hardly be dissociated from the role of its cultural life. Anthropologically, culture is regarded as the totality of all the things learned and passed down through generations such as ideas, values, norms and human made artifacts. With its rich ethnic diversity and as an archipelagic country, Indonesia's diverse cultural practices are the expressions of indigenous knowledge and lifestyles (Meidiana et al., 2023). Apart from other forms, community culture is strongly reflected in religiously, socially, and artistically significant traditional ceremonies performed by the community themselves (Mubayanah & Amin, 2024). Even within the three fundamental life-cycle

ceremonies of birth, marriage, and death, music, songs, dances and other kinds of performing art continue to play a symbolic communicative role (Nihayati et al., 2025).

Taking a global as well as regional Southeast Asia perspective, traditional performance research has gradually been focusing more on how traditional performance forms handle the stress of modernization, tourism-based commodification, and changes in generations (generations). In Indonesia, the rework of different life cycle and community ritual performances into theatrical staged shows or festival attractions, a recontextualization of the original function through, most often, a minor or major reworking of it, is nationally visible (Apria, 2020). On the same theme in Sumatra, local tension is clearly visible: marriage-related traditional dance is being expected to be an authentic sign of adat but, at the same time, to adapt and fulfill the needs that a modern festive scenario may present.

The people of Kaur Regency, in particular, along with the citizens of Bengkulu Province exemplify a community that has been preserving its adat as a living social life guide. The performance of DanceDewa Sembilan as the last stage in the ceremony sequence of the wedding party is one of the few traditional dances in Kaur's rich and vibrant culture. Local tradition has been passed down through time that dance was inspired by a legend describing nine celestial maidens (or nine guardian spirits) who came from the heavenly places to bath in the Begelung Hill lake; another version connects the name "Dewa Sembilan" with either nine river mouths (muara) joining at Muara Sahung or nine Islamic saints (*Wali Songo*) that the local people consider part of a great movement of Islam in Java and Madura (Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Bengkulu, 2022). The performance is conducted by a group of nine girls who are single and they all move in the same rhythm across on a floor which consists of plates arranged in a "T" shape. The girls perform this dance while lit candles, plates, and a shawl are part of their costumes. The combination visually separates DanceDewa Sembilan with the other traditional performances in this area; for example, DanceAndun and DanceNapa, each of these dances is a kind of cultural ritual that is used in certain moments of life such as, for instance, giving birth or even death.

DanceDewa Sembilan has a compelling analytical aspect due to a phenomenon repeatedly noted by community members and confirmed by preliminary field observation: even after decades of modernization the rites and symbolic aspects related to the dance have remained for all practical purposes, unchanged. The dance is mainly reserved for families of higher socio-economic status who decide to have it included among the wedding ceremonies. It is still performed only by young women and unmarried dancers and if the ritual conditions are not fulfilled, it is believed that the ritual blessing would be broken and the plates would be smashed, and so a terrible misfortune would result for both bride and groom. The fact of it still remaining part of the wedding sequence as an honoring of the couple to be married, and of the guests is yet another example of how people are attached to this tradition which they want to maintain even when there is a strong pressure to abandon and adopt modern ways. This resistance to functional erosion in the face of the well-documented tendency of similar Indonesian ritual dances to become mere secular entertainment is the empirical riddle that the present research aims at. Recently a case study of weddings dance in South Sulawesi has shown that community-based ecosystems involving parents, schools and government-led festivals can preserve the authenticity of ritual wedding dances while also being selective in adapting them for contemporary audiences. The Kaur case may therefore represent a regional trend rather than being just an exceptional case.

Present research works focusing on the performance formats of Indonesian cultural dances which are performed at wedding contexts have, inter alia, provided useful insights on movement repertoires, floor patterns, symbols of entertainment or agrarian ones. These include DancePiriang di Ateh Kaco in Padang (Rosyadi, 2022), Kesenian Ronggiang in PAS Barat (Pedri, 2021), DanceCecah Inai in Riau (Apriyanto, 2020) and DancePiring in Tanah Datar (Nofitri, 2015). However, it is only with DanceDewa Sembilan that there is still no research done, and furthermore, none of the studies raises or treats the issue of whether the social functions of such a ritual wedding dance might still resist transformations when the conditions that have altered similar traditions elsewhere are considered. This clearly indicates a missing piece of the research puzzle: ethnographically grounded, functional research on Dewa Sembilan's wedding dance that explains how the dance functions on a spiritual and societal level.

This gap has an abstract aspect too. A typical rite-of-passage theory explains the life-cycle ritual simply as the three elements of separation, transition, and incorporation, but this structure in itself is insufficient to account for differences in ritual performances that either resist or succumb to secularization; contemporary archaeology has pointed out the rite-of-passage models have to come up not only with a tripartite narrative schema but also with the way specific conceptual and material mechanisms which result continuity or change are identified (Wiseman, 2019). Equally, in the field of dance, it has been pointed out that when safeguarding

frameworks for intangible cultural heritage are in operation, they tend to leave the details of the dance, its material and performative aspects (aside from the heritage status alone), as how they are able to sustain their transmission through generations undertheorized (Carr, 2023). DanceDewa Sembilan is a perfect fieldwork example illustrating these mechanisms in action.

After identifying these gaps, this paper proposes two main innovations. Firstly, the researchers carried out the very first thorough and systematic ethnochoreological description of what DanceDewa Sembilan performers look like, how they move, what instruments they play, who they are, what clothes they wear, and other things they bring into use as a stage during a wedding celebration in Muara Sahung nowadays. Second the paper gives an in-depth, comparative analysis of how the dance is a ritualistic, social, entertainment, and symbolic practice that remains intact despite the modernization. Through the discussion, it will enrich the theoretical understanding of cultural resilience and the tension between sacrosanct tradition and modernization in intangible cultural heritage.

This research, therefore, intends to (1) unravel the reasons why DanceDewa Sembilan is performed as it is today; (2) recognize and explain the movement variations named in the dance; (3) justify why the dance is considered as a respectful gesture in the wedding ceremony; and (4) justify why the function of the dance hasn't changed over time. Theoretically, the study enriches the research on dance form and function in socio-cultural settings particularly among customary wedding ceremonies. It also enlarges the scarce academic literature on Bengkulu's traditional dances. Practically, the study will be a resource documentation that can help local communities, cultural institutions, educators, and researchers in preserving and transmitting culture to coming generations.

Literature Review

According to these authors, dance is often viewed as a human body's rhythmic and beautiful moving in space and time, which is influenced by a state of being and which aims at expressing different cultural values to audiences (Sumaryono, 2017; Indrayuda, 2012; Jazuli, 2008). If such performance becomes a feature of a community that is continuously developed over a long period of time with reference to the past, it is considered traditional dance (Soedarsono, 1977). In most cases, traditional dance expresses not only beauty and pleasure but also customary, religious, and even community aspects. Such dances, in general, are passed in the form of oral teachings within a community rather than through a set of formal moves invented by a choreographer (Nerosti, 2019; Adnyana et al., 2020). Against such a backdrop, the most striking feature is that DanceDewa Sembilan in Kaur combines Soedarsono's (1977) view of the continuous traditional patterning with an uncommonly rigorous requirement that the dancers be unmarried females, which is often only a marginal consideration when discussing other regional dances in the literature. Hence, in effect, these criteria can be seen as ways of preserving a culture, not merely conventions in performance.

Many researchers argue that the form of a performance mainly refers to the integrated arrangement or configuration of elements, dance moves, costume, music, and story, by which the choreographer's vision is communicated to the audience (Indrayuda, 2013; Hadi in Khalid, 2019; Murgianto in Rahmawati, 2021; Sedyawati in Rahmawati, 2021). Combining all these ideas, the performance form is not just a list of ingredients but more like a communicative structure: each ingredient (dance movement, dance space, music, dancer, costume, stage prop, and venue) at the same time acts as an aesthetic device and also provides a channel for transmitting adat meanings to an audience. This combined perspective shapes the analytical categories for the Discussion of Findings section in this paper, movements, dance space, music, performers, make-up and costumes, stage props, the performance venue, as elements selected because they are relevant to the research question on DanceDewa Sembilan and should not be mistaken for a general checklist.

Referring to Koentjaraningrat, a human's passage to marriage is not only the change of one's status but also that of the family. A wedding, in that sense, is, on the one hand, a change of social status for a person and, on the other hand, a social gathering of two extended families and the local community. These events normally are full of traditional symbols, ritual stages, and artistic expressions. Adat ceremonies in the region of Bengkulu, through annual Tabot ceremonies and local performing arts such as Andun, Napa, Dewa Sembilan, are cultural expressions showcasing the belief systems and values of communities which still follow traditional ways (Wahyudi, 2021). By comparing and contrasting these accounts, one may say that the performance of a sacred or spiritual dance that is embedded in the context of the marriage is not done merely for entertainment purposes nor at all, but that the dance has an integral part in the ritual and, therefore, explains why the participants of this community regard that the sequence and occurrence of the DanceDewa Sembilan is in fact as a non-negotiable adat provisions not as an optional stage choice.

Being intangible, cultural heritage is in bodies, gestures, and social occasions rather than physical artifacts; therefore, its transmission is dependent upon sustained face-to-face practice between culture-bearers and successive performers; research on indigenous language, dance, and music transmission in Southern Africa demonstrates that transmission is strongest in environments where performance, language, and belief are tightly integrated rather than each safeguarded as separable inventory items (Gwerevende and Mthombeni, 2023).

Similar ethnochoreological accounts include Rosyadi's (2022) study of DancePirang di Ateh Kaco in Padang, Pedri's (2021) documentation of Ronggiang in Pasaman Barat, Apriyanto's (2020) description of DanceCecar Inai in Riau, and Nofitri's (2015) research on DancePiring in Tanah Datar. The common features found there are documentation of different floor formations (straight/curved lines, trapezoidal/rounded arrangements), movement vocabularies inspired through daily or agricultural activities, and an entertaining aspect within the celebration of ceremonies as a form of wedding. Contrasting these, DanceDewa Sembilan has two differences: firstly, the movement is clearly religious or ritual (for instance, the sembah is the opening bow performed which is a gesture of respect) and secondly a sacred prohibition restricts performance rather than allowing the community or participants to choose freely. Such a comparison supports the claim that DanceDewa Sembilan is in fact a different location on the rituals/entertainment scale compared to the other dances that have been studied. The same is true for all of the mentioned dances that the challenge of documenting the forms of performance within a wedding environment is the common one.

Method

Research Design

This research made use of a qualitative method and an ethnographic design, which is particularly apt for the purposes of this research topic, that is, to capture the rich layers of cultural meanings, values, and belief systems embedded in a community practice through a description of the living situation. This design is not merely measuring variables, but capturing the cultural atmosphere of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Besides, ethnography allowed the researcher to interact intimately with the community during fieldwork so that the researcher could grasp the nuances, the patterns of belief, and the forms of symbolic communication of DanceDewa Sembilan which the community performed as an art form as well as one aspect of the wider adat system of Muara Sahung Subdistrict, Kaur Regency, Bengkulu Province.

Research Setting



Figure 1 <Administrative Map of Muara Sahung Subdistrict, Kaur Regency, Bengkulu Province, the Research Setting>

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Kaur (2025).

The main focus was to present the dance of DanceDewa Sembilan at a wedding ceremony in Muara Sahung Subdistrict. The field research happened in an area where dance had not been totally abandoned so as to get data on the topic. Therefore, the researcher selected this wedding as the research setting, and in doing so it was possible to collect firsthand data of the dance. The researcher noted the entire presentation process from making preparations to the performance and conducted intensive interviews with the informants found by snowball sampling. That started with the main informant and gradually expanded to the other informants as advised by the first one. The method provided us with informants who were in the best knowledge of the details of the dance: a culture-bearer/adat/arts person, a dance leader/trainer, the supporting musicians, and also other individuals from the community and the local government who had a hand in organizing the wedding celebration.

Research Instrument

As is traditional in qualitative research, this study predominantly drew upon the researcher himself as chief data-gatherer and human instrument (Moleong, 2012). Concurrently, he was the researcher in charge of the research (planning research activities); the field-worker (carrying out the research); the analyst; and the interpreter and disseminator of the results as the major instrument of research. Together, these different roles were assisted by five minor instruments: field notes were the means of jotting down all data and contextual information that the researcher observed; a mobile recorder was the tool the researcher used to capture the interviews entirely without missing words which allowed for later transcription; mobile phones which served as both recording devices and as tools for photographic/video documentation and as means of communication with the informants; digital cameras to visually record the dancer's moves, body floor patterns, costumes, make-ups, props, interactions of the audience and stage presentation during the performance; photographs/videos to support triangulation of performance sequences with observational and interview data through repeated viewing.

Informants

Seven interviewees were selected using snowball sampling, such that every interviewee had close, work-specific, knowledge of the dance. First was a recognized culture-bearer/arts figure, who was interviewed on the origins, evolution and social, ritual aspects, and symbolic meaning of the dance. Then was a performer/dance trainer who was asked about performance form, variations of movement, the number of dancers involved, floor pattern, costumes, make-up, properties, and the rehearsal process. A musician was the third to be interviewed. He talked about the musical arrangement, instruments, the interplay of movement and music, rhythm, and tempo. The next three (4) and (5) were musicians/arts practitioners and were interviewed on the musical instruments used in particular and tempo generally. A local-community government figure was one out of seven whom we talked to in order to learn Muara Sahung community in socio-cultural aspects generally and adat wedding practices. A community member was the sixth interviewee who gave insights on how actually the wedding was organized and what the community felt about the dance's presence continuing.

Table 1 <Research Informants>

Informant	Role	Topics Covered
Maida Topan	Culture-bearer / arts figure	History and origin of the dance, development over time, ritual and social function, symbolic meaning
Dwi Rahayu	Dancer / dance trainer	Performance form, movement variation, number of dancers, floor pattern, costume, make-up, properties, rehearsal process
Maulana	Musician / arts practitioner	Musical accompaniment, instrumentation, relationship between music and movement, rhythm, tempo, performance process
Ayuthia	Arts practitioner	Musical instruments used in the dance
Mardiani	Arts practitioner	Musical accompaniment, instrumentation, rhythm, tempo
Arina Gustina	Community / local-government figure	General socio-cultural profile of Muara Sahung, conduct of adat weddings, preservation of the dance
Zulfa Salsabila	Community member / event organizer	Practical staging of the wedding celebration, community perceptions of the dance's continued presence

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected by means of four mutually supplementary methods: (1) collecting a selection of literature, books, articles, journal papers, and theses related to the performance form of DanceDewa Sembilan through

library search; (2) attending the live performance of the dance at a wedding celebration on May 12th, 2026, with the intent of gathering accurate and verifiable data on the performance; (3) deep interview with prepared question guides through the opening of informal talking leading up to the structured questionnaires, in an endeavor to get accurate personal experiences from the respondents who know the dances (Moleong, 2012); and (4) documentation work involving video and audio recordings of the performance and also taking pictures of costumes, musical instruments, and the performance stage which were employed to cross-check and add to the information gained through observation and interviews.

Data Trustworthiness

The use of triangulation of sources (cross-checking culture-bearer, dancers, musicians, and community figures' accounts) and triangulation of methods (comparing observation, interview, and documentary data) ensured the credibility of the findings consistent with the statement of Sugiyono (2020). Such triangulation approaches were further reinforced by member checking with the informants to verify that the researcher's interpretations aligned with their intended meanings, the audit trail which provided evidence of the research process from data collection through to analysis, prolonged participant observation which enhanced understanding of the cultural context, and continuous self-reflection of the researcher which helped to reduce interpretive bias.

Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis was done via an interactive model consisting of three key stages. Data reduction is where raw field data were focused on, categorized and eventually filtered through retaining only materials that respond to the research questions. In organizing data, reduced data were presented into a coherent descriptive narrative of the form and function of DanceDewa Sembilan performances. Then, the drawing and verification activities involved interpreting the meaning of the organized data, along with presenting the final interpretation as the completed research report.

Table 2 <Observation Focus and Corresponding Data Obtained>

Observation Focus	Data Obtained
General overview	Setting, adat context, and sequence of the wedding celebration
Movement	Names, forms, and floor patterns of the movement variations
Dancers	Number, eligibility criteria, and character of the performers
Musical accompaniment	Instrument types, rhythm, and tempo of the live accompaniment
Make-up and costume	Visual identity elements of the performance
Properties	Use and function of plates, candles, and other properties
Performance venue	Location and spatial arrangement of the performance

Results and Discussions

Research Setting

Muara Sahung Subdistrict has been identified as one of the administrative subdistricts of Kaur Regency that lies on the bordering line with South Sumatra Province. The area was created from the former Kaur Tengah Subdistrict subdivision. This subdistrict has a total land area of 250 square kilometers. It is situated in a remote location, around 39 kilometers away from the Kaur Regency capital and 234 kilometers away from the Bengkulu provincial capital. According to the 2025 statistical report of BPS Kaur Regency, there are 7, 019 residents living in the subdistrict. This low population density is due to the fact that the houses and residents are scattered and far away that results in the limited social interaction between them, except for the cultural ceremonies where the residents still adhere to and preserve their adat. One form of cultural ritual of adat is performing DanceDewa Sembilan during the wedding ceremony. The main economic system of this subdistrict is farming, and the residents are engaged not only in agricultural production but also the production of traditional drugs (ginger, galangal, kencur) and fruit planting such as mango, durian, banana, and papaya. They also do the trading (BPS 2025).

Adat and Culture of the Kaur Community

Along with the traditional way of life, the inhabitants of Kaur Regency who have been preserving their adat (custom/way of life) as a major guide to their life and society have not only used adat in dealing with family matters but also in the implementation of significant life events like marriage. A local community leader put it this way "all wedding celebrations are run according to the old adat and customs which are the main cultural pillars that represent the values of family solidarity (gatot royong), respect for elders and a high degree of cultural pride." A wedding according to these people, is not a romantic union between the couple

merely, but a union of the entire families and accordingly every stage of the procession carries deep cultural meanings, such as the performance of DanceDewa Sembilan, which is a key element to honor your guests, the married couple as well as the adat itself.

Origins and Development of DanceDewa Sembilan

DanceDewa Sembilan is an Indonesian dance that has its origin in ritual and religious practices that predate the region's Hindu-Buddhist and later, Islamic religious traditions. Initially, this dance performance was a medium to communicate with ancestral spirits, but then it became part of the wedding celebration especially. The local oral story is a source, according to which the name of the dance relates to either the tale of nine celestial maidens who came down to bathe in the Begelung Hill's lake, the nine river mouths of Muara Sahung converging into each other, or the nine Islamic saints (*Wali Songo*), (Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Bengkulu, 2022). Preliminary observation (culture-bearer, 12 January 2026) showed that the dance usually comes after the wedding party and is generally available for families of higher economic levels and not at every wedding festivity. The dance is kept alive by the Putri Serunting Sakti arts studio, which the original form it has preserved over time, without any changes.

Performance Form of DanceDewa Sembilan

There are seven elements of performance which are connected to each other: movement, stage setting, sound design, dancers, make-up, costumes, props, and theatre setting. All of these together make up the whole artistic presentation.

It is customary for the dance to be carried out by nine unmarried girls, the count and requirement, in fact, being an element of the core identity of the dance. The interviewees clarified that only single females are viewed as being pure and sincere enough in attitude to give expression through movement to a sacred and religious dance. Selection is also based on a performer's skills in movements, her dedication during rehearsals, and her ability to coordinate an ensemble. While dancing, the nine girls move in perfect coordination at a quite slow, light, meditative rhythm, representing harmony, unity, and respect with the bridal couple as the main guests.

In real life accompaniment is being played on traditional musical instruments such as *gendang* (a type of drum), *rebana* (a kind of frame drum), and *kerincing* (a type of metal jingle). They are usually accompanied by the song of the *rejong*, also known as traditional singing. Each instrument plays its own role: a drum sets up the main rhythm and indicates when movement variation change is going to happen; a *rebana* keeps on playing the main rhythm or the pulse; a *kerincing* just adds rhythmical decorations; and the singer of the *rejong* performs her role by singing during the whole performance and transmitting religious or cultural messages (*adat*) to the audience as a medium. In most cases, the music speed increases slowly and gradually to a faster one, which parallels the intensity changes of the movements in the scene.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2 <Musical Instruments Accompanying DanceDewa Sembilan: (a) Gendang, (b) Rebana>

Source: field documentation, 2026.

Dancers wear costume and make-up in such a way as to create the image of celestial maidens, thereby keeping in line with the narrative of the origin of the dance. Out of the three aspects which convey a special message to people only through symbolic meaning, piring (plates) is the first one that can be either a floor (the one on which dancers step on) or a dancer's accessory (plate held in hand) besides it representing that we must be careful and balanced to survive through our journey on life. A lilin or candle placed at the middle

of the plate and sometimes at the head of a lady dancer is the symbol of light of life, purity of heart and the guide to the Creator. Whereas, the selendangs or shawls are an attire piece as well as a tool of movement.

The shawl symbolizes the qualities of Kaur ladies tenderness, humility, refinement, etc. People who know said that to dance with only stepping on the plates and not to break them at the same time are things that a very skilled dancer can do because it is a matter of very good balance, physical strength and intense concentration. Also, people said that if a ritual plate is broken accidentally that is considered bad luck and people who were to break plates were regarded as ineligible to take part in any such sacred performance, thereby proving how important are the eligibility and competence requirements.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 3 <Symbolic Properties of Dance Dewa Sembilan: (a) Piring (Plates), (b) Lilin (Candles), (c) Selendang (Shawl)>

Source: field documentation, 2026.

The dance takes place either on the venue's open courtyard or in the front of the pelaminan (bridal platform), which is the position usually selected to enable a wide view for the audience and at the same time highlight the dance's role as a respectful performance for the couple and their family and friends.

Contemporary Performance Structure

Presently, the form of performance keeps the traditional elements that have been transmitted to this generation: the bride's procession, the dance DancePersembahan done by the guests as a present dance for the bride and the groom, the couple's arrival at the pelaminan, the time when performers (dancers and musicians) get ready, the dance DanceDewa Sembilan, etc., and finally the closing. Informants said all together that this order was not to be touched since it is the adat, or customary law, and at every stage carries a particular symbolism connected with honoring the guests, the couple, and community tradition. The only changes in appearance noticed are the matters related to logistics such as the time of the performance and layout of the venue, while other elements such as the number of dancers, vocabulary of movements (dance

steps), musical accompaniment, use of props, and underlying meaning remain unchanged and are being followed as they have been from our ancestors.

Names of Movement Variations

DanceDewa Sembilan's movements break into two categories. Thirteen principal movements are the core. Six transitional movements complete them.



Figure 4 <Sembah movement, The Opening Reverence Movement Performed with the Plate Properties>

Source: Field documentation, 2026.

Table 3 <Principal and Transitional Movement Variations of DanceDewa Sembilan>

Category	Movement Name	Description
Principal	Gerak Sembah	Opening gesture of reverence; plates struck together three times before the dance begins
Principal	Gerak Petik Cincin	Ring worn on the finger plucked rhythmically against a small plate
Principal	Gerak Petik Bunge	Wrists rotated while holding the plates
Principal	Gerak Bumi Langit	Arms alternate upward and downward with crossing footwork
Principal	Gerak Pengulangan Petik Cincin	Repetition of the ring-plucking movement transitioning toward plate-treading
Principal	Gerak Ngecak Piring	Plates grasped while dancers shift to the next floor position
Principal	Gerak Mengayun Piring	Plates swung rhythmically between dancers
Principal	Gerak Nitih Piring	Dancers step directly onto the arranged plates
Principal	Gerak Membentang	Arms extended outward in a spreading motion
Principal	Gerak Mengayun Selendang	Shawl swung in coordination with the music
Principal	Gerak Nyatukah Piring	Plates brought together between dancers
Principal	Gerak Tebas Piring	Sweeping movement across the arranged plates
Principal	Gerak Pengulangan Menggenggam Piring	Repetition of the plate-grasping movement
Transitional	Lari-lari Kecil	Small running steps shifting dancers between floor positions
Transitional	Putar di Tempat	Turning in place, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life
Transitional	Tepuk Tangan	Hand-clapping reinforcing rhythmic unity
Transitional	Delapan Penjuru	Movement expanding toward eight directions of space
Transitional	Putar Piring	Spinning of the plate property, showcasing dancer skill
Transitional	Gerak Pulang	Closing movement marking the end of the performance

Principal movements are as follows: Gestu Sembah (reverence gesture, a greeting involving the three-strike plate, which opens the dance); Gestu Petik Cincin (ring-plucking movement, in a small plate the finger-worn ring is rhythmically being hit); Gestu Petik Bunge (this movement of plucking the flower is performed by rotating the wrists while holding the plates); Gestu Bumi Langit (earth-and-sky movement, in which arms



are lifted and lowered and crossed leg moves are used alternately); Gestu Mengulang Petik Cincin (repetiting the ring-plucking movement by gradually leading the dancers to a state of treading plates); Gesture Ngecak Piring (a movement of taking a plate grasp as dancers are moved to the next floor level); Motion Mengayun Piring (the plate is being used to swing); Gestu Nitih Piring (plate-treading movement in which dancers step directly on the arranged plates); Gestu Membentang (extending/spreading movement); Gestu Mengayun Selendang (a movement of swinging a headscarf); Gestu Nyatukah Pirek (a movement during which plates are united or combined plates); Motif Tebas Piring (plate-swept movement); and Gestur Pengulangan Menggenggam Piring (movement of re-taking a plate grasp).

Transitional moves consist of: lari-lari kecil (small running steps, used to carry the dancers from floor positions while also expressing readiness and the shared energy of the people), putar di tempat (turning on the spot, representing the cyclical nature of life), tepuk tangan (hand-clapping, which strengthens the rhythmic unity and also acts as a solidarity symbol), delapan penjuru (eight directions movement, which broadens the space pattern and symbolically opens up to the surrounding social world), putar piring (spinning plate, showing the dancers' technical skill in manipulating the object), and gerak pulang (the closing "returning" movement, which finishes off the performance at a calmer and more measured tempo).

Apart from the fact that movements are performed following the floor pattern of the dance, there are other elements such as the positioning of the hands and the head to take into consideration. These include the counted rhythmic phrasing which usually come in units of twenty-eight (2×8), and the coordination of the dancing movements with the drum's rhythmic cues.

Function of DanceDewa Sembilan as a Dance of Honor in Wedding Ceremonies

Informants constantly portrayed DanceDewa Sembilan as more than a form of entertainment: it is a way of respecting adat; it is a means of expressing prayers and wishes, that by means of marriage, the couple can create a harmonious and blessed household; it is also the method of strengthening the social ties within the community by the dancers, families and the leaders of adat through their involvement at the event, and, finally, a tool for cultural preservation by which adat values are being passed on from one generation to the younger one, through direct participation in the ceremony.

Larger than just ceremonial value or dance itself, it becomes a channel of interactions to build family and community relations, it also helps foster communal cohesion. In this case, staging of the dance is done by families and people of the community working together which is a reflection of gotong royong spirit, the traditional Indonesian cultural concept or mutual help in community living, and the wedding itself turns out to be a good opportunity for the larger community to hang out, chat and socialize as well as get reacquainted and strengthen social connection with one other.

The dance is not merely an activity but it becomes a source of festive fun that holds people's attention. Guests get the chance to experience beauty through the interplay of movement, music, and perfect coordination between performers. The people who come to watch outside the district said they were very fortunate to witness such a performance as it was a beautiful glimpse of the indigenous culture which in return made the dance not only entertain but also culturally preserve and recognize. However, a number of informants pointed out that although the dance is a source of entertainment, it does not replace or diminish the value of its traditional ritual role.

Table 4 <Summary of the Four Functions of DanceDewa Sembilan in Wedding Ceremonies>

Function	Manifestation in the Wedding Ceremony
Ritual	Medium of honoring adat; vessel for prayers and hopes for the couple's harmonious household life; reinforces community solidarity through collective staging; transmits adat values to younger generations
Social	Strengthens kinship ties and communal solidarity; requires cooperative labor (gotong royong) among families; provides an occasion for the wider community to gather and interact
Entertainment	Creates a festive atmosphere and aesthetic experience for guests; introduces Kaur culture to outside visitors; does not dilute the dance's adat significance
Symbolic	Represents respect for adat and ancestral heritage; choreography conveys prayers and hopes for the couple; synchronized movement expresses cooperation and unity; changing musical tempo symbolizes life's changing dynamics; marks Muara Sahung's cultural identity

Dance is a symbol of one's respect for custom and the heritage of ancestors. It also communicates prayers and hopes for a happy and harmonious married life through its movements. By means of the dancers' synchronized action, the dance highlights, to a great extent, community and home life which depend on teamwork, unanimity, and fairness. Moreover, through the change of the musical tempo from a more leisurely to a more brisk tempo, it is conveyed a kind of human life dynamics and changes, which, according to the concept that the dancers are living out before us, require patience and steadiness as the main features for coping with such changes. In general terms the dance serves also as a representation of the cultural identity of Muara Sahung.

Absence of Functional Change

A prime result of this investigation is that the role of DanceDewa Sembilan has largely remained the same from its origination to today. Several informants, working completely separately, declared that, whereas the staging's technical elements-performance span, venue setting, and detail of the costume-have been changed to suit contemporary situations, the fundamental ceremonial, societal, entertainment as well as symbolism functions still stay the same as they were by the predecessors who passed it on. Community perceives this unbroken tradition as a form of a group decision to keep adat identity intact, and the dance keeps representing respect and admiration shown to the bride and bridegroom as well as the other guests, a platform for the cultural knowledge handed down to younger generations, and also as a method of acquainting outsiders to Kaur's cultural identity.

Discussion

The study result about performance form is congruent with Soedarsono's (2002) idea of dance form as a unified combination of the different but mutually reinforcing components that altogether give rise to one artistic work. Within DanceDewa Sembilan, each of the different components movement, music, dancers, costume, and set elements play different roles yet contribute to a performance that has both artistic and cultural elements. Thus the dance's connection to the social life within Muara Sahung community is so deep that it can neither be physically cut off nor detached in spirit from one community to another in a meaningful way if it were to be transplanted.

Jazuli (2016) claims that dance communicates to the audience primarily through the movement, which he supports the movement analysis of this paper. A combination of the thirteen principal movements and six transitional movements displayed together in a synchronized, unhurried, and soft way encodes values of respect, solidarity, and harmony, not just visual display. The most significant point of the analysis is the predominance of movements carried out in unison: the solidarity values that informants described verbally as the reason why the dances are socially significant are embodied in those movements. This view is also supported by the experimental results that movement synchronization within a group of performers is one of the elements that drive audience immersion and their perception of the performance's unity. For example, independent of whatever story they were telling, Vicary et al. (2017) demonstrated that the synchronization factor in movements alone is enough to attract an audience and give them the feeling of the unity of the performance. Thus, the nine dancers' striving for perfect unison in DanceDewa Sembilan could be interpreted as social communication at the expense of aesthetics. Finding the same social function in Indonesian practice of gotong royong, or collective mutual assistance, which since longtime has been an idiom of national pride for community cooperation and support (Suwignyo, 2019), at the local level it is seen as labor cooperation that Muara Sahung families put forward to help in holding a dance performance within the wedding ceremony.

Live performance of music serves essentially the regulating function of tempo, dynamics and emotions, etc., that Murgiyanto (2015) noted regarding music in dance. Besides that, the live music allows musicians to modify tempo interactively in response to the dancers' movements, creating a far greater harmony of sound and gesture than an unchanging recorded track would allow for. Being the feature of the interaction through which a live performance unfolds is itself a major component in a dance tradition's enduring existence; its continued existence, after all, requires a close, personal working relationship between musicians and dancers that goes beyond the surface level, a sort of relationship that serves to maintain as well as transmit the conventional dance forms.

Regarding properties, the symbolic meanings that informants revealed to us like balance and caution (plates), inner illumination and divine guidance (candles), and gentleness and modesty (shawls) are exactly in line with Soedarsono's (2002) claim that in dance, the properties of a gesture function not only as a means to beauty but also as symbols that communicate meaning of the performance. The novelty in this case, compared to the reports of movement-vocabulary symbolism in Pili Dance, in Tanah Datar (Nofitri, 2015),

is that the features of DanceDewa Sembilan are connected to the rule of performer eligibility (unmarried dancers) whose breach will supposedly lead to direct, tangible effects (a broken plate). The combination of symbolic attributes, ritual prohibitions, and anticipated outcomes is thus a form of circular mechanism that enhances the cultural stability and continuity: It provides the community with a material, high-cost reason to maintain the eligibility criterion in its original form, which in turn accounts for the shortage of the functional drift documented in Section 4.8.

Come together, these results add to the body of work on Sumatran wedding dance (Rosyadi, 2022; Pedri, 2021; Apriyanto, 2020; Nofitri, 2015), changing the focus of what is usually a detailed description of the dance performance structure to an explanation of the reasons for the continued existence of its function. Previous articles describe entertainment-focused dances, but these ones show that the continuity of DanceDewa Sembilan is due to the sacredness and the firmness within the culture of dancer-eligibility rule and property symbolism rather than their being negotiable, customizable performance conventions. There has been a similar 'duality' found in Teochew opera in Malaysia in which sacred rituals-based performances are immune to innovation because their effectiveness relies on faithful repetition while a separate more modern repertoire undergoes changes so continuity and innovation are allowed to coexist within a tradition (Lin & Ang, 2025); if DanceDewa Sembilan represents such a duality case, the wedding-embedded dance could fit almost entirely into the "sacred" side of that duality thereby explaining its unusual functional resilience relative to dances that move effortlessly between ritual and entertainment settings. This gives some insight into theory for discussions on cultural survival, besides resilience as adaptation being a key factor, like people often think of resilience in heritage studies (Holtorf, 2018), the Kaur example indicates that the functional resilience of ritual performing arts might rely on a few, symbolic rules that are perceived as high-stakes by the community and that the community's collective commitment to preserving the dance's original meaning is a result of those rules (here, the dancer-eligibility rule and property-linked ritual consequence) while the technical or superficial details adapt to the pressure for changes. From a preservation view, such distinction is practically consequential: documentation and safeguarding initiatives, including the recording strategies through a digital medium which are used nowadays for the preservation of embodied heritage elsewhere (Reshma et al., 2023), will want to make sure to separate core elements which carry the message of the culture from the technical details that can be adapted so that the adaptation done on the latter should not result in the erosion of the former.

Conclusions

This study explores performance form and socia-cultural functions of Dancedewa sembilan performed in muara sahung subdistrict, kaur regency, bengkulu province wedding ceremonies.

DanceDewa Sembilan performance form consists of fixed adat-based sequence, thirteen primary and six transitional movement variations, live traditional musical accompaniment, nine female dancers who are still unmarried, and three symbolic implements (dishes, candles, and veil), all staged on the open space before the bridal stage. DanceDewa Sembilan serves ritual, social, entertainment, and symbolic functions that, according to community's own account, remains unaltered since inheritance from earlier generations; technical aspects of staging are only that have adapted to modern circumstances. This persistence shows community of Muara Sahung's enduring spirit of protecting adat identity through actively engaging in and transmitting across the generations this wedding tradition.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The authors of the study, through their research, found that the wedding dance of Muara Sahung remains true in the meaning and effect it carries, while on the other hand, dance forms of comparable regions have turned into a major mode of entertainment with staging as the main feature. The authors also explain how these changes may happen because of the performers' eligibility to perform linked to a ritual's perceived consequence and the mechanism by which such changes can still retain their original continuity. Besides the theoretical aspect, the materials produced from this work can help in preserving Muara Sahung people and their cultural institutions of Kaur Regency, being a source of reference for any studio that trains art performances and for the transfer of art across generations, and as teaching manuals for educational institutions intending to bring traditional arts from the localities into their curricula.

Limitations

Research was conducted through only one observation of ethnographic nature accompanied by interviews with seven subjects related to the arts studio, Putri Serunting Sakti, in Muara Sahung Subdistrict. This

research therefore portrays this particular community's way of doing things and should not be generalized without caution about how DanceDewa Sembilan is danced by other groups or in other subdistricts of Kaur Regency. Since this kind of research is qualitative and relies mainly on interviews, the interpretations given are based mostly on the informants' point of view and memory, and they have been shaped through the researcher who mainly acted as the data gathering instrument.

Future Research

Further research can build on this study by looking more closely at the movements and choreography of DanceDewa Sembilan in the technical aspect, the aesthetic qualities of its movements, the musicological aspects of its accompaniment, comparative ethnochoreological analysis of it with other dances in the adjacent regions, or the historical and functional changes (or continuities) of the dance as it is performed in various performance contexts.

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