

Bali's Legong Pancer Langit Dance as Cultural Diplomacy and National Identity Construction: A Case Study of the Jeddah Festival

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of *Legong Pancer Langit*, a traditional Balinese dance deeply rooted in the Hindu philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (the harmonious relationship between God, humans, and nature) as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and national character development. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research focuses on the dance's 2023 performance at the Jeddah Cultural Festival in Saudi Arabia. It analyzes how the symbolic choreography, strategic art management, and audience reception contribute to enhancing Indonesia's soft power. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants (including Saudi attendees, Indonesian diplomats, and artists), observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that movements such as *mutering jagat* (rotational steps symbolizing unity) and *ngelayak* (a back-bridge posture signifying environmental care) resonated with Saudi audiences, aligning with Islamic values like *tawazun* (balance) and *habluminallah* (human-God harmony). The study underscores the dance's role in promoting intercultural dialogue, national identity, and the foundational values of Pancasila.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy; soft power; national identity; Balinese Pancer Langit dance

1. Introduction

Cultural diplomacy has become a cornerstone of Indonesia's strategy to project its national identity and foster international relations in an increasingly interconnected world. Defined as the strategic use of cultural expressions to promote mutual understanding and cooperation (Nye, 2004; Yigit, 2024), this approach leverages Indonesia's rich intangible heritage (from shadow puppet *wayang kulit* to *gamelan* music) to articulate the nation's ethos of *Bhinneka Tunggal*

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Ika (Unity in Diversity) (Whinarno & Arifin, 2019). Historically, Indonesia’s cultural diplomacy gained momentum during the Soekarno era (1945–1967), when cultural missions were sent to Eastern Bloc countries to showcase traditional arts as a tool of soft power and political solidarity (Cohen, 2019; Steelyana & WawoRuntu, 2024). A 1957 Balinese Legong dance performance in Prague captivated spectators and underscored Indonesia’s cultural dynamism while emphasizing its identity as a non-aligned nation during the Cold War (Imran et al., 2011; Li, 2023). Since 1957, several cultural diplomacy missions have been sent by Soekarno abroad (Cohen, 2019), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Cultural Mission Diplomacy in the Soekarno Era

No	Month	Year	Country	Place
1.	August	1957	Czechoslovakia	Liberec Forestry
2.	August	1957	Poland	Smetana Theatre Prague
3.	September	1957	Hungary	Parliament Palace, Budapest
4.	September	1957	Russia	Stanilavsky & Neemirovich-Danchenko Theater Moscow
5.	October	1957	Egypt	Indonesian Embassy in Cairo
6.	December	1961	Republic of China	Tiananmen Square, Beijing
7.	December	1961	North Korea	Indonesian Embassy in Pyongyang
8.	January	1962	Thailand	Bangkok Art Museum
9.	April	1964	United States of America	Flushing Meadow – Corona Park New York
10.	May	1965	French	Chaillot Palace, Paris
11.	May	1965	Belanda	Soestdijk Palace, Baarn
12.	31 May - June 20	1965	North Korea	Indonesian Embassy in Pyongyang
13.	Juni 21 - July 4	1965	Republic of China	Tiananmen Square, Beijing
14.	July 9 - 18	1965	Japan	Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo

Source: Imran et al. (2011) with additional information.

These missions were not only politically beneficial in garnering support for Indonesia but also advantageous for the participating artists and local cultural officials. Through the art performances, the artists realized their existence as part of a large country with diverse cultures (Cohen, 2019; Fathonah & Puguh, 2022). Friendship and ideas of exchanges emerged organically as individuals acknowledged and enriched one another’s strengths while collaboratively navigating their differences (Gareis, 2023). In the Old Order days, there were democratic youth and students who were sent to East Germany to organize a festival (vocal arts) group. The group had to be given a name, so there was

a suggestion for 'Gembira' (glad) as something light related to Indonesia's diplomatic relations with other countries (Lindsay & Liem, 2012).

Entering the New Order era under the leadership of President Soeharto (1967–1998), the regime prioritized economic and political stability, which, according to some observers, had a significant positive and restrictive impact on artistic activities across various genres (Yudarta et al., 2025). Indonesia's cultural diplomacy efforts continued with the successful organization of the *Kebudayaan Indonesia di Amerika Serikat* (KIAS) or Indonesian Cultural Exhibition in the United States during 1990–1991 (Nainggolan, 2022). The event featured traditional cultural elements such as *gamelan*, *wayang*, and *batik*, which received an overwhelmingly positive response from American audiences. As the 21st century, Indonesia expanded its cultural diplomacy on the global stage through various high-profile initiatives, including the Indonesia Pavilion at Expo 2010 in Shanghai, China; *Indonesia Eye* at the Saatchi Gallery, London (2011); *Performing Indonesia* at the Smithsonian Institution; the Indonesia Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2013, 2015, 2017); *Discover Indonesia* in Glasgow (2015); *Europalia Festival* (2017–2018); and the *Market Focus* program in London (2019).

During the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), Indonesia also actively engaged in gastrodiploamacy through programs such as Hello Indonesia, Indonesia Weekend, Taste of Indonesia, Indonesia Kontemporer (IKON), and initiatives under the Indonesian Chef Association (INCA). The annual Diplomatic Reception complemented these efforts, held every October at the Indonesian Embassy in London (KBRI London), which served as an important platform for showcasing Indonesian culinary and cultural heritage to international audiences (Ishlah, 2019). This legacy continues through platforms such as the Jeddah Cultural Festival in the Middle East, where diverse Indonesian art forms bridge contrasting cultural and religious contexts (Mariyono et al., 2024; Sunaryo et al., 2024). However, while existing scholarship has extensively explored Javanese and Sumatran art in diplomacy, Balinese traditions, such as the Legong Pancer Langit Dance, remain under-researched, especially in the context of Islam, a gap addressed in this study through a focused analysis of its 2023 performance in Saudi Arabia.

According to Nugroho et al. (2024), academic discourse on Indonesian cultural diplomacy disproportionately emphasizes Javanese *batik* textiles and Sumatran *randai* theater, neglecting Balinese contributions despite its prominence as a cultural and tourism hub. This neglect is compounded by the lack of research on how Hindu-Balinese art navigates conservative Islamic environments, such as Saudi Arabia, where cultural norms are deeply rooted in Wahhabi interpretations of Islam (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). Prior research on Islamic cultural diplomacy, such as Malaysia's use of *nasyid* music or Turkey's

emphasis on Ottoman heritage, has predominantly centered on exchanges within Muslim communities, leaving interfaith cultural interactions relatively understudied (Cull, 2019). The Legong Pancer Langit Dance, with its Hindu-Balinese symbolism and adaptability, offers a unique lens through which to examine how Indonesia's pluralistic identity can resonate in such contexts while strengthening national character.

The variation of the Legong Pancer Langit choreographed by Anak Agung Mas Sudarningsih is well-suited to address this question (Figure 1). Rooted in the Hindu-Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*—harmony with God (*Parahyangan*), humans (*Pawongan*), and nature (*Palemahan*)—the dance aligns with Indonesia's constitutional values, particularly the Pancasila principles of social justice and belief in one God (Marjaya, 2008). The choreography, featuring movements such as *mutering jagat* (rotational steps symbolizing unity) and *ngelayak* (a back-bridge posture expressing gratitude to the earth), translates abstract national ideals into a kinetic narrative (Oktavianus et al., 2024). Unlike static art forms, Legong Pancer Langit has demonstrated remarkable adaptability, having been performed in over 15 countries since 1995, including secular democracies such as France and theocratic states such as Iran (Imran et al., 2011). This adaptability contrasts with the Javanese *bedhaya* dance, which maintains a rigid ceremonial structure, limiting its diplomatic utility (Purwasito & Kartinawati, 2019). In Jeddah, the dance faces the dual challenge of preserving Balinese Hindu authenticity while respecting Saudi Arabian cultural norms—a negotiation crucial to understanding the interplay between tradition and innovation in cultural diplomacy.



Figure 1. Performance of Legong Pancer Langit Dance Variations in the Cultural Festival in Jeddah (Source: Personal Documentation of Elyana Yulianti, 2024).

This study asks: How does the Legong Pancer Langit Dance contribute to cultural diplomacy and foster national identity in a transnational context? To investigate this, we evaluated the 2023 performance at the Jeddah Cultural Festival using qualitative interviews, participant observation, and a review of relevant documents. The study highlights three key dimensions: (1) the dance's symbolic alignment with Indonesian constitutional values, (2) its adaptation to Saudi cultural sensitivities through arts management strategies, and (3) its role in fostering intercultural dialogue. By situating its findings within Joseph Nye's soft power theory and UNESCO's Convention on Cultural Diversity (2005), the study contributes to broader debates on the role of intangible heritage in global diplomacy. The study also offers policy recommendations for integrating traditional arts into Indonesia's diplomatic strategy, ensuring that cultural resilience remains central to the nation's soft power in an increasingly digital world.

2. Literature Review

Cultural diplomacy, as an instrument of soft power, has long been recognized as a critical mechanism for states to project their values, foster international relations, and navigate a complex global landscape (Nye, 2004; Ryniejska-Kiełdanowicz, 2021). Rooted in the strategic use of cultural expressions—from performing arts to visual traditions—cultural diplomacy transcends linguistic and political boundaries, creating platforms for mutual understanding (Cull, 2019; Enaim & Amine El Alamy, 2023; Yigit, 2024). This review synthesizes existing scholarship on cultural diplomacy, traditional arts, and national identity, positioning Legong Pancer Langit Dance within this framework while identifying critical gaps in the literature.

Nye's (2004) seminal work on soft power redefined cultural diplomacy as the ability to influence global actors through attraction rather than coercion. Nye proposed that cultural elements, including art, music, and historical heritage, empower governments to influence societal preferences and establish credibility or legitimacy. UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) expanded on this concept, emphasizing the role of intangible heritage in fostering intercultural dialogue and sustainable development (Yigit, 2024). Indonesian cultural diplomacy, particularly under Sukarno, exemplified this approach, with missions to Czechoslovakia, Egypt, and China featuring *wayang kulit* (puppet shadow) and Balinese dance to underscore Indonesia's non-aligned stance during the Cold War (Ardjo, 2011; Baruah, 2024).

However, contemporary studies tend to disproportionately focus on Western and East Asian cultural diplomacy models, for example South Korean K-pop and Japanese kabuki, which have been extensively analyzed for their

global appeal (Leiter, 2015; Kim, 2022), while Indonesia's efforts remain underexplored (Amalia, 2023; Viartasiwi et al., 2021; Wardhani, 2023). Studies on Indonesian cultural diplomacy often prioritize Javanese *batik* and Sumatran *randai* theater (Nugroho et al., 2024), leaving aside Balinese traditions such as Legong despite Bali's reputation as a cultural and tourism hub. This gap limits understanding of how Hindu-Balinese art navigates in a transnational context (Davies, 2011; Langi & Park, 2017), especially within a conservative Islamic environment.

Traditional dance serves as a kinetic embodiment of national identity, translating abstract values into visceral experiences. The concept of "kinetic nationalism" holds that physically choreographed movements enact the ethos of a nation, fostering collective pride and unity (Oktavianus et al., 2024; Ramadani, 2023). In Indonesia, dances such as Javanese *bedhaya* and Balinese *legong* have historically reinforced royal authority and spiritual harmony (Merdekawati & Supriyanto, 2022; Rahapsari, 2021; Sumaryanto, 2007). However, the rigid ceremonial structure of *bedhaya* contrasts with the adaptability of Legong Pancer Langit, which incorporates contemporary themes while maintaining traditional integrity (Maryono et al., 2022).

Traditional dance is closely tied to character development, particularly for students, as it fosters holistic growth through immersive educational experiences (Himayati et al., 2024). Beyond its role as physical exercise, dancing serves as an expressive medium for conveying emotions, narratives, and cultural values interwoven within movement. Thus, it is not surprising that traditional dance can be an effective tool in learning, especially in character building, triggering creativity and unity, and encouraging cultural appreciation (Ananda & Anjani, 2024; Jazuli & Paranti, 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2020).

Legong Pancer Langit, rooted in Hindu-Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (harmony with God, man, and nature), is in line with Indonesian constitutional principles of Pancasila (Wiratmaja et al., 2021). The human values in this dance are expressed through the harmony of man and nature. Similar to *Sajatina Hurip's* concept (Kasmahidayat, 2021), human life according to Islam consists of *habluminannas* (human relations with man), *habluminallah* (human relations with God), and *habluminalam* (human relations with nature). Philosophical values expressed in a series of movements, such as *mutering jagat* (rotational steps symbolizing unity) and *ngelayak* (back bridge posture expressing environmental stewardship), visually articulate national values, offering a model for kinetic nationalism (Aritonang et al., 2023; Djuned, 2023). However, existing studies of Indonesian dance have focused narrowly on ritualistic or aesthetic dimensions, ignoring its diplomatic potential (Cohen, 2019; Khairunnisa, 2024; Viartasiwi et al., 2021).

Effective cultural diplomacy requires careful arts management to balance authenticity with contextual sensitivity. Aditya (2024)'s 6M framework—Man, Money, Materials, Machines, Methods, Markets—provides a structured approach to managing performance in a transnational environment. For example, Japanese kabuki troupes adapt narratives and performances for Western audiences while maintaining traditional aesthetics (Kovalchuk & Bogdan, 2021; Leiter, 2015), reflecting modification of Legong Pancer Langit costumes to Saudi norms.

Digital platforms are increasingly strengthening the reach of cultural diplomacy. In its 2022 report, UNESCO underscores the role of augmented reality (AR) and social media platforms in expanding equitable access to the organization's intangible cultural heritage. The viral success of #LegongEyeChallenge on TikTok (12,500 posts) underscores the role of digital media in engaging younger audiences (Jember Costume Industry, 2023). However, scant scholarly investigation has addressed the incorporation of digital technologies into traditional art forms such as Legong, especially within Islamic frameworks where cultural engagement is shaped by religious principles (Hocking & Melissen, 2015).

A critical review of the existing literature reveals three areas that the study seeks to address. First, Balinese performing arts have been largely neglected in Indonesian cultural scholarship, which tends to prioritize Javanese and Sumatran traditions despite Bali's international recognition (Nugroho et al., 2024). Second, there is a lack of research on how Hindu-Balinese performances operate in a conservative Islamic context such as Saudi Arabia. While studies of Indian classical dance, such as Bharatanatyam in the Gulf, highlight the cultural frictions that may arise (Ulrichsen, 2021), comprehensive analyses of adaptive strategies are scarce. Third, while UNESCO advocates the integration of digital innovations in heritage preservation, little scholarly attention has been paid to the use of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), or social media in traditional dance diplomacy (Vilar et al., 2022).

This study addresses the gap by analyzing the 2023 Legong Pancer Langit performances held at the Jeddah Cultural Festival in the Middle East. It examines the interplay between choreographic symbolism, methods of cultural adaptation, and the contribution of dance to fostering intercultural exchange, all analyzed through an Islamic lens. By synthesizing Nye's concept of soft power, Shay's theory of kinetic nationalism, and Aditya's 6M framework, the study introduces an innovative analytical lens to examine the shifting interplay of cultural diplomacy in contemporary global engagements. It contributes to policy debates on intangible heritage preservation in the globalized digital era.

3. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study uses a qualitative case study design to investigate how Legong Pancer Langit Dance functions as a tool for cultural diplomacy and strengthening national character during its performance at the 2023 Jeddah Cultural Festival in the Middle East. The methodology combines interdisciplinary approaches from cultural studies, anthropology, and performance management to answer the research question: How does Legong Pancer Langit Dance advance cultural diplomacy and strengthen national character in a transnational context? Below, we detail the research design, data collection methods, analytical framework, and ethical considerations, adhering to strict academic standards.

A qualitative case study approach was chosen to holistically examine Legong Pancer Langit's performance within the unique socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia. This direct engagement allowed the researchers to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of the experiences of the research subjects. This is in line with the principles of cultural studies, which state that experience is key in this context (Nuriarta et al., 2024). Case studies are well-suited to exploring complex phenomena in real-world settings, allowing researchers to capture the nuanced interactions between cultural practices and audience reception (Yin, 2018). The Jeddah Cultural Festival serves as a bounded system for analysis, offering insight into how Balinese Hindu aesthetics negotiate Islamic norms. The study design aligns with Creswell & Creswell's (2018) framework for qualitative inquiry, which emphasizes depth over breadth. This study, focused on a case, prioritizes detailed, situational data to investigate how symbolic choreography and strategic adjustments facilitate intercultural dialogue.

The study was conducted in Little Asia, Ash-Shati, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, between December 2023 and March 2024. The festival runs for 27 days each month, showcasing 65 artists from 8 countries and selling 15,000 tickets daily. In contrast to earlier festivals that primarily highlighted European performances, this year's event distinguishes itself by showcasing eight diverse Asian cultures: Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Korea, China, Thailand, Japan, and Singapore. The festival is also an opportunity for cultural exchange from these countries. Analyzing how this festival promotes the celebration of diverse cultures and fosters dialogue among different communities can offer valuable insights into its broader societal impact. Indonesia features a diverse array of traditional performances, such as the Legong Pancer Langit Variation Dance from Bali, the Merak and Mojang Priangan Dance originating in West Java, the Blantek Dance from Jakarta, the Plate Dance hailing from West Sumatra, and a fashion carnival hosted by the Jember Costume Industry.

Purposively selected stakeholders participated in semi-structured interviews to capture multiple perspectives on Legong Pancer Langit's

performance. They included Saudi audience members—consisting of cultural officials, expatriates, and residents—Indonesian diplomats from the embassy's festival coordination team, festival organizers representing Breakthrough FZ LLC and Little Asia management (Anna), the Chief Manager of Jember Costume Industry (Hamda Arifta), dancers (Elyana Yulianti, Annisa Siti, Anita Tri Utami, Maulani Lestari, Erda Febri, and Ivona Ichwan), and the choreographer of Legong Pancer Langit group (Annisa Rumpaka). The interview protocol probed participants' perceptions of the dance's cultural and symbolic meanings, explored the practical and ethical challenges of adapting a Hindu-Balinese performance to conservative Saudi norms, and examined how strategic arts management decisions—such as costume modifications and digital outreach—contributed to the production's diplomatic effectiveness.

Primary data were systematically collected using a structured template that included three main dimensions: audience reactions (including variations in applause, visible facial expressions, and post-performance conversations), logistical adaptations (such as changes in traditional costume elements, modifications to stage design to respect spatial norms, and careful scheduling of rehearsal and performance slots around daily prayer times), and intercultural exchange (documenting informal dialogues between troupe members and festival attendees during post-performance receptions). All field notes were recorded live and then coded thematically, allowing for the identification of patterns in audience engagement, practical production strategies, and the nature of the cross-cultural dialogues fostered by the dance.

Secondary data for this study were sourced from three main domains to enrich and contextualize the main findings. First, official government publications, particularly the Indonesian Embassy's post-event analysis, provided structured assessments of the festival's diplomatic impact and consistency with broader foreign policy objectives. Second, media coverage, including feature articles from *Destination KSA* and user-generated content on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, provided real-time insights into public engagement and narrative framing. Third, archival materials from Indonesia's Soekarno era (1957-1965) were analyzed to examine the evolution of the nation's cultural diplomacy approaches and underscore enduring patterns in their strategic planning. Documents were analyzed using Krippendorff's (2018) content analysis to identify recurring themes (e.g., "soft power" and "cultural hybridity").

Aditya (2024)'s 6M framework serves as an analytical lens to examine the logistical and managerial strategies underlying Legong Pancer Langit's performance at the Jeddah Cultural Festival. The Men's component involved training sessions for dancers on Saudi cultural norms, such as avoiding direct eye

contact with royals. In this context, the “money” signifies the funding allocated for creating *Semar Pegulingan* gamelan music and marketing the event through social media channels. The material aspect entailed redesigning costumes with opaque fabrics and incorporating Islamic geometric patterns to ensure cultural appropriateness. The event leveraged cutting-edge machinery, sophisticated lighting and audio systems, and a strategic TikTok initiative to amplify audience interaction and participation. Methods used included rescheduling performances around prayer times and hosting post-event intercultural dialogues. Finally, the Market strategy targeted Saudi elites and expatriates through curated VIP invitations. The framework’s effectiveness is enhanced by aligning with UNESCO’s (2022) priorities for digital heritage preservation and drawing parallels to South Korea’s impactful K-pop diplomacy strategy (Leiter, 2015).

The 6M Framework guided data analysis by integrating Man (training dancers on Saudi norms), Money (budgeting gamelan production), Materials (redesigning modest costumes), Machines (AR/social media use), Methods (prayer-time scheduling), and Markets (targeting elites via VIP strategies). Each component ensured logistical alignment with Saudi cultural contexts while preserving artistic authenticity, enabling systematic evaluation of adaptation strategies in cross-cultural diplomacy. The 6M framework is used as a reference to analyze all values and all aspects contained in the Legong dance, especially those used as objects in this study. The Legong dance performance created by Pancer Langit, which is packaged and adjusted to the conditions of all aspects supporting the performance, makes the dance a medium that is considered appropriate for cultural diplomacy between countries. Interpretations of the dance from various levels of appreciators create discussions and dialogues that strengthen the importance of dance as a medium for cultural diplomacy between communities in various countries.

The data in this study were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), which involved six systematic phases. First, an introductory phase involved an immersive reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and archival materials to gain a comprehensive understanding. Second, initial coding identified patterns such as “religious symbolism” and “logistical challenges.” Third, theme development grouped these codes into broader categories, such as “Negotiating Cultural Sensitivity.” Fourth, reviewing themes ensured that emerging insights were relevant to the research objectives. Fifth, themes were defined and their meanings refined. Finally, the findings were reported as integrated narratives that illustrate the cultural and diplomatic significance of Legong Pancer Langit. Ensure credibility, triangulation was applied by cross-validating interview data with observational insights and

media sources. For example, dancers' feedback on costume modifications was corroborated by social media analytics revealing favorable audience reactions, highlighting consistency across data sources.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The 2023 Legong Pancer Langit Dance performance at the Jeddah Cultural Festival yielded important insights into its role as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy and strengthening national character. Triangulating data sources—including interviews, field observations, and document reviews—revealed three core findings: how audiences interpret the subject, its symbolic connection to national principles, and exemplary practices in arts administration.

4.1.1 Audience Reception and Cross-Cultural Resonance

The dance earned a standing ovation at every one of the five performances, with notable enthusiasm from Saudi royal family members and senior government officials. A post-event survey conducted by the Indonesian Embassy showed that 82% of Saudi attendees felt the performance deepened their understanding of Indonesian culture (Jember Costume Industry, 2023). Media coverage in *Destination KSA* highlighted the dance's ability to transcend religious boundaries, with one article describing it as "a harmonious blend of Balinese spirituality and universal ethics" (Sh, 2024). Social media analysis revealed that posts related to the dance garnered over 300,000 views, with 40% from Saudi users aged 18–35, underscoring its appeal to a younger demographic.

Interviews with Saudi participants show how certain movements align with Islamic values. For example, *cegut* (head-bowing movement) is interpreted as *tawadu* (Islamic humility), which fosters cross-cultural empathy. One participant commented:

"The humility of the dancers reminded me of our prayers. It felt familiar, not foreign. I was amazed by the dance performance. His admiration lies in the choreography, the cheerfulness of the dancers, and their costumes. This event is a place to introduce the diversity of Indonesian culture, especially traditional dance" (Shofiullah, 35 years old, barista, January 26, 2024).

Watching the show and discussing it with Indonesia's Executive Manager, Hamda Arifta, revealed the vast diversity of Indonesia's performing arts, deepening their respect for the nation's cultural richness and inspiring a stronger desire to explore its heritage.

The Legong Pancer Langit Dance variation, accompanied by four additional performances, was staged on December 9 and 23, 2023; January 12 and 26; and February 5, 2024. The December 23 performance was attended by Saudi Arabian state officials, including members of the Royal Family, who occupied front row seats with other VIP guests, standing and separated by royal security. At the end of each dance, the audience of 100 to 200 responded by standing and applauding for several seconds or even longer. Standing and applauding reflected their deep appreciation and satisfaction with the performance. Many did not anticipate experiencing such a variety of artistic expressions, especially from Indonesia. In addition to the Indonesian performances, artists from the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and China also presented their cultural arts, which were equally warmly received, especially by the Saudi Arabian government.

4.1.2 *Symbolic Alignment with National Values*

The Legong Pancer Langit Dance embodies the sacred values tied to the divine spirit Hyang Pertiwi, revered as the embodiment of Mother Earth and Nature. The purpose of this dance extends beyond mere entertainment; it is also a channel for expressing reverence toward Nature and God. Therefore, this dance integrates spiritual elements and reverence, aligning with the religious principles enshrined in the Indonesian Constitution. In line with Anggraeni et al. (2019), cultural values in Indonesia are a medium to promote religiosity and spirituality to create an ideal society. Through dance, Balinese spiritual values are translated into movements that can touch audiences with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

The Legong Pancer Langit Dance choreography is carefully crafted to reflect Indonesia's constitutional principles, making each movement a symbolic expression of national values. For example, the *mutering jagat* (rotational steps symbolizing unity) represents the concept of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), enshrined in Article 36A of the Constitution. This movement symbolizes the harmonious coexistence of Indonesia's diverse cultures, resonating with audiences both domestically and internationally. Meanwhile, *ngelayak* (the back bridge posture) aligns with Article 33's emphasis on environmental stewardship and was interpreted by Saudi audiences as a metaphor for ecological responsibility—a message that transcends religious and cultural boundaries (Lestari et al., 2023). The dancers view their roles not simply as performers, but as cultural diplomats. One performer reflects:

“By doing *sledet* (alert eye movements) abroad, I feel like I am showing Indonesia's resilience” (Erda Febri, 23 years old, dancer, February 5, 2024).

Legong Pancer Langit Dance also reflects equality in the sense of giving everyone the same opportunity to participate and express themselves through dance movements. This shows that dance is an inclusive discipline where everyone is given the same opportunity to contribute and develop. As conveyed by Wayan Dana (2022) in his book entitled *Multicultural and Prospects for Cross-Cultural Dialogue in the Era of Freedom of Expression*, freedom of expression is a human right to explore, accept, and give information and ideas in the form of aesthetic, artistic, and cultural expressions.

In addition, values that uphold the law are also seen in the commitment of all artists and dancers to adhere to the norms of the Legong dance customs. While rooted in variation, its development requires dancers to respect and adhere to established norms. This shows the importance of respecting and obeying the rules in innovating, both in a cultural context and outside of it. This element is also in line with the local wisdom used by artists in the development of arts and culture, as well as customary laws regulating the behavior of Balinese people (Astita et al., 2015).

Overall, the Legong Pancer Langit Dance integrates all the values outlined in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This dance not only showcases artistic talent but also actively conveys and reinforces the national identity of the artists involved. The dance aims to spread these values, strengthen national identity, and foster unity through shared pride.

4.1.3 Arts Management Strategy

Effective performing arts management actively fosters cultural growth and enhances the well-being of artists. Specifically, this can be expanded into several elements, such as (1) management of cultural organizations; (2) project management; (3) artist management; (4) company management; (5) festival management; and (6) international tour management (Utami, 2018). Each of the above elements is interrelated with the other and contributes to overcoming challenges, ensuring that the performance can make a cultural contribution accepted by the community.

Jember Costume Industry, which was established in 2017, has participated in various international events and has become a hub for Indonesian artists to develop their talents and careers. At the end of 2013, Jember Costume Industry, in collaboration with Breakthrough FZ LLC, Jeddah, was selected as one of the Indonesian delegates in the Cultural Festival in Jeddah. The Jember

Costume Industry promoted Indonesian culture and played an essential role in strengthening cultural identity in the international community. Jember Costume Industry actively fosters national character development by cultivating pride in Indonesia's cultural heritage among the youth.

Strategic adaptation based on Aditya's (2024) 6M framework played a significant role in ensuring the successful reception of the Legong Pancer Langit Dance at the Jeddah Cultural Festival. Under the material component, the costumes were redesigned using opaque fabrics and decorated with Islamic geometric motifs. These allowed the performance to maintain its Balinese artistic identity while respecting Saudi Arabian cultural norms regarding modesty. In terms of method, the performance was carefully scheduled to avoid overlapping with prayer times, ensuring respect for local religious practices. Additionally, post-event dialogues between artists and participants encouraged meaningful intercultural exchanges. From a market perspective, digital strategies were launched to expand audience engagement. Notably, the TikTok campaign #LegongEyeChallenge generated over 12,500 user submissions, with 60% coming from Saudi participants (Jember Costume Industry, 2023). This targeted adaptation not only upheld the authenticity of the dance but also enhanced its appeal and diplomatic resonance in a conservative Islamic context.

4.2 Discussion

The success of the dance aligns with Nye (2004)'s theory of soft power, which shows how cultural assets can foster international goodwill. By highlighting universal values such as environmental stewardship, the performance avoids the pitfalls of Bharatanatyam in India, which has faced criticism in the Gulf for being idolatrous (Ulrichsen, 2021). Instead, the performance reflects Japanese kabuki diplomacy, where traditional narratives are simplified for a global audience while retaining the cultural essence (Leiter, 2015). Bhabha (2012) argues that this strategic hybridity empowers the dance to align with Saudi norms while preserving its Balinese Hindu identity.

The choreographer of the Legong Pancer Langit Dance variation crafted a series of movements that distinguish its distinctive style. The hands are used to hold the fan while the footwork is focused on moving from left to right (*mutering jagat*), symbolizing the cardinal directions. Then, the dancer performs a back bridge movement (known as *kayang* in Indonesian or *ngelayak* in Balinese), symbolizing offerings and gratitude to Mother Earth (Lestari et al., 2023). Other structured and cultural movements in the Legong Pancer Langit Dance Variation can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The Meaning of Culture and National Character in the Variations of the Legong Pancer Langit Dance Movements

No	Movement	Information	The Meaning of Culture and National Character
1.	<i>Cegut</i>	Head bowed or hunched	Caring for others and the environment. This movement is in line with mutual cooperation and togetherness that have become the main characteristics of Indonesian society.
2.	<i>Kereta luncur</i>	Eye movement from left to right then to the middle	Strong authority and behavioral awareness. In line with this movement is Indonesia's spirit and resilience in overcoming challenges.
3.	<i>Mutering Jagat</i>	Kneel and rotate from left to right	Human life is dynamic and continuous like the movement of wind and the rotation of the earth. Nationally, this is in line with the motto of the Indonesian state: <i>Bhineka Tunggal Ika</i> .
4.	<i>Ngelayak</i>	Back bridge movement	As a form of offering and gratitude to the homeland, as a form of respect and love for the homeland. This is also in line with the spirit of unity and oneness of the Indonesian nation.

Source: Research result, 2025

Another element that needs to be considered in the Legong Pancer Langit Dance Variation is the red costume. There are several elements in the costume, including: a fan, a long-sleeved shirt, *kamen* (a piece of cloth worn around the waist), *angkin* (belt), *lamak* (chest accessory), *simping* (head accessory), upper kana bracelet, lower kana bracelet, and *oncer* (foot accessory). Each element in this costume contributes to the visual beauty and symbolizes the cultural values of the dance itself. In particular, the Legong Pancer Langit Dance Variation performed at the Cultural Festival in Jeddah which was adapted to Balinese traditional values, sponsored by Annisa Rumpaka Art Studio in Bogor.

In addition to costumes, music is another important aspect of dance. The music used in this dance was composed by Komang Wahyu Dinata, a music art lecturer at the Institut Seni Indonesia in Denpasar. Komang used the *gamelan semar pegulingan* without *terompong*. This Balinese gamelan is renowned for its melodically serene music, a fitting accompaniment to graceful dance. This performance, which combined the costumes and music, demonstrated that the features of a traditional Balinese dance can be adapted and represented in an international event without compromising its cultural values.

The Legong Kreasi Pancer Langit dance, performed by six dancers (Figure 2), contains deep philosophical meaning and ancestral wisdom from the Indonesian people, especially Balinese. This dance carries the concept of *Sajatina Hurip*, formulated by Kasmahidayat (the author) based on the South Banten community's outlook on life, which is in line with *Tri Hita Karana*, the basic principle in Balinese Hindu teachings. As performed at the Little Asia Festival in Jeddah, this dance combines the essence of *Tri Hita Karana*, which, as explained by Peters and Wardana (2013), symbolizes three sources of happiness: a harmonious relationship between humans and God (*Parahyangan*), relationships with fellow humans (*Pawongan*), and relationships with the surrounding environment (*Palemahan*). The deep philosophical essence contained in this concept provides inner strength to the Legong Kreasi Pancer Langit dance, which deeply touches the hearts of its audience, so that they are immersed in the cultural values of the Indonesian people.



Figure 2. Six dancers performing the Legong Pancer Langit Dance at the Cultural Festival in Jeddah (Source: Personal Documentation of Elyana Yulianti, 2024)

The Legong Pancer Langit Dance performance at the 2023 Jeddah Cultural Festival is an example of how traditional arts can transcend cultural and religious boundaries to become a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy

and national identity strengthening. Through blending Balinese Hindu philosophy with Indonesia's constitutional ethos and respectfully adapting to Saudi Arabia's religious norms, the dance serves as a bridge for intercultural dialogue, showcasing Indonesia's soft power in a conservative Islamic milieu. This study sheds light on the dance's dual role as a preserver of intangible heritage and a dynamic tool for global engagement, providing critical insights into the interplay between tradition, innovation, and diplomacy. We synthesize the studies' contributions, address their limitations, and propose actionable pathways for future research and policy development.

Through innovative dance choreography, Shay (2002) exemplifies the theoretical framework of kinetic nationalism. Movements such as *muttering jagat* physically embody Indonesia's constitutional ethos, transforming abstract principles into tangible experiences. This contrasts with Javanese *bedhaya*, which prioritizes ritual precision over thematic adaptability (Purwasito & Kartinawati, 2019). Legong's emphasis on *Tri Hita Karana* (harmony with God, humans, and nature) further strengthens its role as a pedagogical tool for nation-building, especially among the younger generation.

This study bridges the gap in cultural diplomacy studies by integrating Nye (2004)'s soft power theory, Shay (2002)'s kinetic nationalism, and Aditya (2024)'s 6M arts management framework. The study shows how traditional dances physically embody national identity (kinetic nationalism) while adapting to transnational contexts through strategic hybridity (soft power). These findings challenge the Eurocentric focus of cultural diplomacy studies, which offer a Global South perspective on heritage preservation and innovation.

The viral success of #LegongEyeChallenge underscores the role of digital media in modern cultural diplomacy. By leveraging platforms such as TikTok, Indonesia is capitalizing on (UNESCO, 2022) the vision of democratizing heritage through technology. However, this study also highlights gaps in the existing literature, such as the unexplored potential of AR/VR to enhance traditional performances in conservative contexts.

The findings from this study provide actionable policy insights. First, incorporating traditional arts into diplomatic training can empower envoys to articulate national values through performance, for example, framing *muttering jagat* as a metaphor for ASEAN unity. Second, public-private partnerships modeled on India's Ministry of Culture (2023) Sanskriti initiative can be leveraged to support cultural innovation and preservation. Finally, investing in AR-based platforms will enable broader, on-demand access to traditional performances, enhancing outreach to intangible heritage without physical constraints.

This study focuses on a context shaped by royal patronage, which constrains the generalizability of its conclusions. Future research should use

a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the measurable impacts of cultural diplomacy—such as tracking changes in public sentiment toward Indonesia—and investigate how immersive technologies can facilitate digital acculturation in cross-cultural arts exchange.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Legong Pancer Langit Dance advances cultural diplomacy by translating Indonesia's constitutional principles—*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) and environmental stewardship—into choreographic symbolism accessible to a global audience. Movements such as *mutering jagat* (rotational steps) and *ngelayak* (a back-bridge posture) visually articulate these values, which align with Saudi participants' Islamic ideals of *tawazun* (balance) and *habluminallah* (human-God harmony). This alignment with universal ethics, not sectarian doctrine, enabled the dance to navigate Saudi Arabia's conservative norms, fostering cross-cultural empathy and positioning Indonesia as a multicultural nation committed to addressing shared global challenges, such as climate change.

The journey of the Legong Pancer Langit Dance from Bali to Jeddah illustrates how traditional art can evolve without losing its essence. By embedding constitutional values into the choreography and employing adaptive management strategies, Indonesia demonstrates that cultural heritage is not merely a relic of the past but a living and dynamic force in global diplomacy. The dance's ability to promote cross-cultural understanding, even amidst significant religious divides, provides a powerful model for diverse societies worldwide seeking to address the challenges of contemporary diplomacy and global collaboration in the 21st century.

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