

Tarling Art as a Medium for Internalizing Cultural Values and Strengthening Citizenship Identity

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the cultural values embedded in Tarling, a traditional form of regional art, and their role in fostering civic culture and national identity within local communities. The research is motivated by the author's concern over the diminishing cultural significance of Tarling, which is increasingly being eroded by the influence of global cultures in Indonesia. In response, this study seeks to highlight and preserve the cultural values inherent in Tarling, positioning them as meaningful resources for character and civic education. These values are expected to be applicable in society through the development of civic culture as reflected in arts and cultural practices. The research employs a qualitative case study approach, utilizing data collection methods such as structured interviews with selected informants, direct observations, and the distribution of questionnaires to residents in the vicinity of the Tarling art studio.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a pluralistic nation, with a rich diversity of ethnicities, races, cultures, and religions spread across its vast archipelago. This diversity is also reflected in regional languages and traditional arts, where each region holds its own uniqueness and values. Traditional arts in Indonesia not only showcase aesthetic elements but also convey philosophical reflections of community life that embody the nation's noble values. These values are shaped through social customs rooted in Pancasila, the foundational ideology and guiding principle

of the Indonesian state. In this context, the preservation of cultural values is not solely a cultural responsibility but also an integral part of civic education.

Culture and citizenship are two interrelated aspects. Culture, as the product of human creativity, feeling, and intention, reflects the identity of a nation. Through understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, society can foster awareness of the importance of maintaining unity and national identity. This awareness should be instilled not only in the broader community but also within families and educational institutions. A concrete example of the relationship between culture and citizenship can be seen in traditional performing arts.

A study by Yulianti (2021) on Jaipong art in West Java revealed that artistic expression can serve as a medium for social reflection and for delivering moral messages that are contextual to the lives of the people. This supports the notion that regional art is not merely a cultural heritage but also an effective means of social communication. However, most of the studies have not specifically examined Tarling art as the primary object, leaving an opportunity to explore its potential contributions in shaping civic culture.

In the region of West Java, there are various forms of local art that play a role in shaping character and community identity. One of them is Tarling, which developed in the areas of Cirebon and Indramayu. Tarling, an acronym for *guitar* and *flute*, is a form of performing art that blends musical and dramatic elements. In its performances, Tarling not only presents musical harmony but also conveys moral messages and life values through its lyrics, dialogues, and storytelling. These values implicitly reflect the principles of Pancasila, particularly the third principle: The Unity of Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the cultural and moral values embedded in Tarling art have not been fully internalized by the community. Tarling performances tend to focus on aesthetic and ritual aspects, while the civic messages conveyed through song lyrics, stories, and performance symbols are not yet optimally utilized as instruments for character education. In fact, Tarling performances often contain noble messages such as the importance of solidarity, appreciation for one's origins, and loyalty to the homeland, as illustrated in the famous lyric *nelatar kudu eling* (those who migrate must remember God and their birthplace).

The urgency of this research lies in the need to rediscover the potential of Tarling art as a medium for shaping civic culture and strengthening national identity, particularly amidst the challenges posed by cultural globalization. In the past two years, both national and international discourses have increasingly emphasized the importance of character education based on local culture in reinforcing social cohesion. Traditional arts like Tarling can serve as strategic platforms for conveying civic values in contextual and creative ways. This research focuses on qualitative data obtained through interviews with artists, field observations, and performance documentation, while also considering government policies related to cultural development and character education.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine how character values and civic culture are internalized through Tarling art. The formulated research question is: Can Tarling art serve as a medium for the internalization of cultural values and the strengthening of civic identity within society? Thus, this research offers scholarly novelty by linking traditional art with civic education, while also contributing to the preservation of local culture grounded in Pancasila values.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research conducted by Rijal Abdillah Koencoro (2015) titled "*Values and Moral Messages of Tarling from the Perspective of Tarling Artists in Cirebon*" serves as a significant reference in understanding Tarling art as a medium for conveying social and cultural values. In his study, Rijal Abdillah reveals that Tarling is rich in religious values, local wisdom, solidarity, and respect for one's cultural identity. This research employs an ethnographic approach, collecting data from artists in the Candra Kirana community, as well as various written and visual documents.

Although the study successfully explores the moral dimensions of Tarling art, it does not explicitly examine the relationship between the cultural values embedded in Tarling and the formation of civic identity. In contrast, the present study aims to develop and extend the previous research by positioning Tarling art as a medium for the internalization of cultural values as well as a vehicle for strengthening the civic identity of communities.

This research is grounded in Milton Rokeach's (1973) theory of value internalization, which explains that values are formed through social and

symbolic processes, and Henri Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, which emphasizes that group identity is shaped through shared interactions and cultural symbols. In this context, Tarling art is viewed not merely as an artistic expression, but also as a tool for character education capable of reinforcing national identity within the framework of civic culture. Accordingly, this study not only complements but also broadens the understanding of the social function of Tarling as a strategic medium in shaping culturally rooted and civic-minded citizens.

The research by Khoirul Fajri, Ahmad Maskur S., Syihabudin, and Vismania S. Damayanti (2018), in a study entitled "*An Evaluation of the Functions and Wangsalan in Cirebonan Tarling and Its Implications for Character Education*", reveals that the *wangsalan* elements in Tarling performances play a significant role in conveying social messages and character values among the Cirebon-Dermayu communities. By employing an entertaining and communicative approach, *wangsalan* not only serves as a source of amusement but also embeds life values such as simplicity, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and respect for tradition. This study was conducted through direct observation of Tarling groups Wa Kolor and Hj. Uun Kurniasari.

The strength of this research lies in its identification of local oral elements as educational tools in character formation. However, the study does not delve deeply into how Tarling performances particularly *wangsalan* can contribute to the development of civic identity and culture-based citizenship education.

This study builds upon that research, with a focus on how Tarling art including its *wangsalan*, narratives, and lyrics can be utilized as a medium for the internalization of cultural values that support the construction of civic identity. The theoretical framework draws upon Milton Rokeach's (1973) theory of value internalization, which asserts that values are formed through symbolic and social experiences, as well as Henri Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, which underscores the individual's attachment to cultural groups as the foundation of identity formation.

3. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply explore the role of *Tarling* art as a medium for the internalization of cultural values and the strengthening of civic identity. A qualitative approach

was chosen because it enables the researcher to understand the social and symbolic meanings embedded in *Tarling* cultural practices in a contextual and holistic manner. This aligns with Creswell's (2010, p. 4) perspective that qualitative research explores and seeks to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human issues. The case study design was applied because the research subject *Putra Sangkala*, a *Tarling* group based in Cirebon possesses unique and specific characteristics in the context of local performing arts and the civic values it embodies.

The objective of this study is to uncover the cultural and character values embedded in *Tarling* art and to explain how these values contribute to reinforcing civic identity within the community. Within the qualitative framework, the research population consists of *Tarling* practitioners (including *sinden* or female vocalists, musicians, and puppeteers), audience members, and cultural figures in the Cirebon and Indramayu regions. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Cultural Values in Tarling Art

The findings of this study indicate that *Tarling* art, which has developed in the Cirebon and Indramayu regions, contains cultural values embedded in the lives of coastal communities. These values include character values, moral principles, and the spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), which are manifested through song lyrics, dialogues within performances, and the social practices surrounding the performance process. *Tarling* reflects the collective culture of the community, as it encompasses social elements such as collaboration, mutual assistance, and reverence for the noble values of ancestral heritage.

The cultural values embedded in *Tarling* art reflect moral teachings and life guidelines that are passed down from generation to generation, such as honesty, respect for parents, and concern for others. This demonstrates that *Tarling* serves not only as a medium of artistic expression but also as part of a social system that instills norms and cultural values through collective practice. This aligns with Clifford Geertz's view in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), which states that culture is a system of symbols that carries meaning and is manifested in social action. Thus, traditional arts like *Tarling*

represent tangible forms of how communities interpret life values through cultural symbols.

The study reveals that *Tarling* is not merely a form of entertainment but a medium for the transmission of cultural values that reinforce the social structure of society. Cultural values, particularly character values embodied in *Tarling*, reflect moral teachings and behavioral guidelines that regulate social conduct across generations. These values include respect for elders, cooperation, honesty, and ethical interaction in everyday life. The strength of *Tarling* lies in its ability to convey such values naturally through an artistic medium that resonates closely with the community.

This is in line with the perspective of Koentjaraningrat (in Munandar, 2010, p. 62), who argues that national culture functions as a marker of national identity and represents a continuum from past history to the present. This assertion reinforces the idea that *Tarling*, as a form of local cultural expression, not only preserves tradition but also sustains the noble values that form the foundation of national identity. Therefore, *Tarling* should not be regarded merely as an instrument of entertainment, but as an educational medium that shapes community character, strengthens cultural identity, and supports non-formal education rooted in local wisdom. This is consistent with Elsera's (2022) findings, which show that traditional arts such as *Angklung* are effective in transforming local wisdom into a contextual instrument of character education. Accordingly, *Tarling* can be seen as part of a culturally based educational movement that promotes the sustainable strengthening of national character and identity.

B. Tarling as a Reinforcer of Civic Identity

In efforts to understand how traditional arts contribute to the reinforcement of national values, it is essential to view the role of performing arts not merely as cultural expression but also as a medium for social and political education. As explained by Putu Ronny (2014), civic education that is contextualized through traditional arts can enhance students' understanding of national values through a more humanistic and grounded approach. One clear example can be found in *Tarling* art, which not only presents aesthetic value but also plays a role in shaping the collective awareness of communities regarding their civic identity and responsibilities.

Tarling also plays a vital role in the process of civic identity formation. National values such as tolerance, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and

love for local culture are internalized through the aesthetic experience offered by *Tarling* performances. These performances provide not only entertainment but also profound moral messages about life in society and the state. In this context, *Tarling* strengthens local cultural awareness while also instilling civic values such as social responsibility, equality, and concern for others—core foundations for building an active and inclusive civic identity. This aligns with Putnam's (2000) theory of civic engagement, which asserts that participation in social and cultural activities fosters social trust and strengthens civic bonds. Thus, *Tarling* performances do not merely create aesthetic experiences but also function as spaces for social interaction that reinforce civic values such as shared responsibility, equity, and empathy. When citizens actively participate in cultural practices like *Tarling*, they develop both an awareness of local cultural identity and a sense of belonging to the wider community and nation.

This perspective is also supported by Banks (2008), who argues that civic identity is not only shaped through formal education but also through cultural experiences that nurture a sense of national belonging. In this regard, *Tarling* strengthens civic culture because, through its local cultural expressions, the community is encouraged to think critically about social realities, uphold values of togetherness, and grow in their awareness of their roles as citizens. Therefore, *Tarling* is not merely a performing art form but a living medium of civic education that enables people to understand national values in contextual, participatory, and socially relevant ways. This is what makes *Tarling* a strategic instrument in shaping citizens who are not only aware of their rights and responsibilities but are also emotionally and culturally connected to their nation.

Furthermore, the role of *Tarling* in strengthening civic identity can be analyzed through Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony, which views art as a tool for shaping public opinion and social values. In this context, *Tarling* indirectly builds the collective consciousness of the community regarding civic issues such as injustice, social inequality, and moral crises through subtle yet meaningful forms of social critique.

By positioning *Tarling* as part of a character education strategy grounded in local culture, its revitalization becomes crucial in the face of globalization. As Tilaar (2004) emphasized, cultural education plays a critical role in constructing national identity. Therefore, *Tarling* holds strategic value in cultivating a society that not only cherishes its ancestral culture but also

comprehends civic values contextually and practically through performances that are rich in moral, ethical, and social messages.

C. Challenges in the Internalization of Cultural Values Through Tarling Art

Although *Tarling* holds significant potential as an educational medium and a tool for character formation, the process of internalizing cultural values through this traditional art form faces several challenges. One major obstacle is the generational gap. Today's younger generation tends to be more attracted to popular and modern cultural expressions, leading them to perceive traditional arts like *Tarling* as outdated or irrelevant. This perception becomes a barrier in embedding cultural values, such as the character-building values inherent in *Tarling* performances.

In addition, the currents of globalization and the influx of foreign cultures have also influenced the cultural preferences of society, particularly among youth. This aligns with Munandar's (2010, p. 61) observation that Indonesian culture is increasingly influenced by the dynamic nature of Western cultural values. Despite this, *Tarling* continues to uphold ancestral values that are highly esteemed by the local community, serving as a distinctive and authentic cultural identity.

Despite these challenges, artists and cultural communities remain committed to preserving *Tarling* by implementing various forms of adaptation, such as modifying performance formats to better align with the tastes of younger audiences without compromising the essence of the traditional values they convey. In line with this, the study by Aprlia Zandra & Hidayatullah (2023) highlights that traditional performing arts are frequently shared on social media platforms like TikTok. However, while these posts receive high levels of engagement, the actual participation of youth in traditional cultural practices remains low due to their preference for instant entertainment. Therefore, the process of internalizing cultural values particularly character values through *Tarling* can continue to be effective, provided it is supported by creative, educational, and participatory strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

In the modern era, marked by globalization and rapid social change, the role of local culture in shaping character and civic identity has become increasingly crucial to examine. Traditional arts such as *Tarling* not only

represent aesthetic richness but also embody noble values that are deeply rooted in the daily lives of communities. As a traditional performing art that emerged from the cultural life of the coastal communities of Cirebon and Indramayu, *Tarling* functions not only as a medium of aesthetic expression but also as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and shaping civic identity. Values such as honesty, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), moral integrity, and respect for elders are reflected both in the performance elements and in the collective processes behind the staging of *Tarling*.

These findings suggest that *Tarling* plays a dual role: preserving inherited cultural norms and serving as a form of civic pedagogy that fosters social responsibility and cultural identity awareness among citizens. Amid the currents of globalization, *Tarling* continues to act as a strategic instrument for strengthening national identity, encouraging civic engagement, and facilitating character education that is both contextual and rooted in local wisdom. Therefore, revitalizing local arts such as *Tarling* is essential—not only for preserving cultural heritage but also for cultivating civic consciousness that is inclusive and responsive to contemporary social dynamics.

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