

Recontextualization of Cundhuk Jungkat in Javanese Women's Attire: From Signifier of Virginity to Aesthetic Component of Dance Costume

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ABSTRACT

Cundhuk jungkat is an element of Surakarta court attire that is symbolically associated with marital status and aristocratic identity. Within aristocratic dress practices, its use was normatively associated with unmarried noblewomen. The ornament also constitutes an important component of female dance costumes in the Surakarta style. This study examines the recontextualization of the meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* and the cultural factors underlying this shift. The study focuses specifically on Surakarta-style dance, particularly *bedhaya* and *srimpi*, within the artistic traditions of the Surakarta court. It employs a qualitative ethnocoreological approach, drawing primarily on documentary sources, including written records, scholarly literature, and photographic documentation, complemented by the researcher's practical experience as a dance practitioner to provide contextual insight into costume practices. The findings show that *cundhuk jungkat* has shifted from a normative-regulative attribute within aristocratic dress to an aesthetic, artistic, and performative element of dance costume. Its function as a marker of social and personal status, particularly unmarried status, is no longer primary, while its visual and artistic functions have become increasingly prominent. Nevertheless, its gendered dimension remains evident through its continued use as part of female dancers' costumes. This shift does not indicate the disappearance of its symbolic meaning, but rather a reconfiguration of the hierarchy of its functions through a process of recontextualization. The findings demonstrate how a traditional attribute embedded in the normative and hierarchical order of the court is negotiated and reinterpreted within changing social and performative contexts.

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1. Introduction

In Javanese culture, gender construction is manifested concretely through various social and cultural practices, one of which is reflected in the regulation and conventions of dress within the court environment. Clothing not only represents distinctions between men and women but also functions as a medium through which gender norms are regulated, affirmed, and reproduced through its forms, components, and modes of use. Such construction takes place through the interaction between value systems and

social structures that have developed within Javanese society, including the influence of patriarchal norms that continue to be negotiated in response to social and cultural change (Maula & Jabar, 2025; Myrlinda, 2020; Amal et al., 2023). Within this process, the biological categories of male and female acquire social meanings through stereotypes, expectations, and the division of roles, which subsequently influence how individuals present and negotiate their gender identities in social life (Myrlinda, 2020; Amal et al., 2023). Thus, gender in Javanese culture is not merely a biological category, but rather a socio-cultural construction that shapes individuals' roles, identities, and positions within the social order.

One form of the materialization of gender construction can be observed through dress practices. Within the context of the Javanese court, dress functions as a cultural mechanism that articulates gender distinctions through its forms, components, and modes of use, while simultaneously connecting appearance with the status and identity of the wearer. In this context, clothing serves not only as a marker of identity but also as a practice of *doing gender*, through which gender identity is constructed, performed, and negotiated through the body and appearance (Braizaz, 2019; Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). As a cultural practice, dress also maintains and reproduces gender norms and stereotypes through systems of social classification that assign particular meanings to the body, appearance, and modes of dressing (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992; Faccia, 2019). Therefore, dress practices within the court environment cannot be separated from a set of norms and conventions that regulate the relationship between the body, gender, social status, and identity.

This framework acquires a more specific manifestation within the traditions of Javanese court attire, in which particular attributes are employed to signify gender differentiation while simultaneously affirming social hierarchy. One such attribute that represents this relationship is *cundhuk jungkat*, a head ornament in the formal attire of the Javanese court tradition that features various decorative forms while retaining a basic comb-like structure. In its use within the Surakarta court, *cundhuk jungkat* is worn on the upper part of the head as a complement to ceremonial makeup and attire. Although materially presented as an aesthetic ornament, this attribute does not merely function as an accessory; rather, it also embodies symbolic dimensions associated with the personal and social identity of the wearer. This dimension is reflected in the historically normative regulations governing its use, as *cundhuk jungkat* was designated for noblewomen and, in certain contexts, associated with unmarried status. Thus, the attribute functions as a visual marker of aristocratic status as well as an indicator of marital status, reinforcing women's social position within the hierarchical structure of Javanese court culture.

Beyond functioning as an element of aristocratic attire that signifies marital status and position within the court's hierarchical structure, *cundhuk jungkat* is also integrated into the costume design of Javanese female dance, particularly within the Surakarta style tradition. In the performance context, this accessory is worn on the upper part of the head as part of the overall composition of makeup and costume that constructs the dancer's visual identity. Its use reflects a continuity between courtly dress etiquette and the aesthetic principles of classical dance performance. *Cundhuk jungkat* is specifically incorporated into the costumes of court dances such as *bedhaya* and *srimpi*, which constitute the core repertoire of Javanese dance traditions within the Surakarta court. Thus, its presence in dance costume is not merely decorative, but also represents the

symbolic reproduction of Javanese aristocratic values and aesthetics within the performative realm.

In its historical development, shifts in the normative regulations governing the performance of court dances, together with the staging and reproduction of these repertoires beyond the walls of the *kraton* and outside internal court interests, have facilitated cultural diffusion across various supporting elements, including costume. Within this context, *cundhuk jungkat* as an element of attire has undergone a transformation of function and an expansion of its context of use, concomitant with the increasing public accessibility of classical dance. As a result, aesthetic practices that were once exclusive to the court have transitioned into non-court performance spaces. Nevertheless, *cundhuk jungkat* has been retained as a significant component in costume design, particularly in performances of *bedhaya* and *srimpi* that have developed outside the court environment. The continuity of its use indicates that *cundhuk jungkat* does not merely persist as an aesthetic artifact, but rather undergoes a reactualization of meaning within broader performance contexts. In this sense, it represents both the continuity of courtly dress traditions and a form of symbolic adaptation in response to shifting social structures and the evolving dynamics of Javanese dance in the public sphere.

Nevertheless, within the dynamics of development and transformation of Javanese dance outside the court environment, a recontextualization of the symbolic meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* has occurred. Whereas in court tradition *cundhuk jungkat* was normatively designated for unmarried women and functioned as a marker of both social status and marital status, in subsequent performance practices such regulations are no longer strictly observed. In the expanded sphere of Javanese dance performance, the use of *cundhuk jungkat* is no longer restricted by the dancer's marital status. Married women are permitted to wear it when performing female dance repertoires such as *bedhaya* and *srimpi*. Consequently, within the context of contemporary developments in Javanese dance, the function of *cundhuk jungkat* has become more prominently aesthetic and conventional within costume design, rather than serving as a marker of personal status. This shift reflects a process of recontextualization, whereby an attribute that originally held normative and regulatory functions within the courtly cultural order has been transformed into a primarily aesthetic element within the practice of Javanese dance performance.

Departing from the preceding discussion, it can be asserted that a recontextualization of the symbolic meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* has occurred as an attribute within Javanese women's attire, which originally functioned as a marker of marital status. Within the court context, *cundhuk jungkat* possessed a clearly defined normative and regulatory function; however, in the development and reproduction of Javanese dance, this function has been recontextualized, as its use in performance is no longer restricted by the dancer's personal status. This shift signifies a transformation from a socially meaningful symbol into an aesthetic element within costume design. Based on this phenomenon, the present study focuses on examining how the process of symbolic recontextualization of *cundhuk jungkat* takes place, as well as the cultural factors underlying it. This study aims to describe and analyze the forms and mechanisms of this recontextualization of meaning within the dynamics of Javanese dance development. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to elucidating changes in societal value orientations and perspectives toward traditional symbols, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between

social norms, performance aesthetics, and the recontextualization of meaning in Javanese cultural practices.

Studies of costume design in dance performance, particularly in Javanese ethnic dance, have tended to position costumes as part of a symbolic system that represents the philosophical meanings, aesthetic values, and cultural identities embedded within a particular form of performance. This perspective is important for understanding the relationship between costume elements and the cultural value systems underlying them; however, it does not fully explain how the meanings and aesthetic values of particular costume elements change when they are used within different social and performative contexts. Changes in costume design and its use in dance performance cannot be explained solely as consequences of shifting aesthetic preferences, artistic innovation, or formal experimentation, but are also related to transformations in the perspectives, ideas, norms, and social contexts surrounding performance practices. From this perspective, recontextualization becomes an important concept for explaining how a costume element that previously possessed particular functions and meanings within its original cultural context is placed within a different performance context, thereby undergoing changes in function, interpretation, and symbolic value. Accordingly, the study of dance costumes should not merely identify the meanings represented by particular elements of attire, but should also explain how, why, and through what socio-cultural mechanisms the process of recontextualization takes place in the development of dance practices.

Changes in social structures, accompanied by transformations in societal perspectives, have significant implications for shifts in the value orientations upheld by a community. Such shifts not only influence patterns of social behavior but also affect how communities interpret traditional elements that previously held normative and symbolic functions. In this context, tradition is no longer fully understood as a value system that regulates social life; rather, it undergoes reinterpretation in accordance with evolving social dynamics. One consequence of this process is the recontextualization of meaning attributed to cultural elements that once embodied strong philosophical and cultural dimensions. Sulistyono and Panuwun (2018) argue that cultural transformation contributes to changes in the social, economic, and political structures of society, which in turn influence value orientations and diminish the symbolic meanings of traditional elements, as reflected in the shifting functions of components within traditional Javanese houses. Similarly, Smirnova (2025) highlights the transformation of social values in contemporary society, marked by the decline of traditional values such as spiritual beliefs and familial bonds, alongside an increasing orientation toward self-fulfillment and hedonism driven by technological advancement and shifts in spiritual-moral orientations.

These shifts in value orientation are also shaped by the dynamics of globalization and modernization, which accelerate the process of reinterpretation of tradition within society. Zulkifli et al. (2024) emphasize that changes in meaning within customary practices as a result of globalization and modernization have the potential to threaten the continuity of the philosophical values embedded within them, as reflected in the transformation of the *baoguong* tradition, which has shifted from a religious interpretation toward a more lexical one. Meanwhile, Chandler (1979) explains that the transition from traditional to modern societies reshapes the value orientations underpinning social structures, as modern societies demand systems of values and norms that are more adaptive to rationality and emerging structural needs. This

condition often generates tension for individuals or groups who continue to adhere to traditional perspectives, thereby gradually contributing to the diminishing significance of traditional elements in social life. Thus, the recontextualization of meaning in tradition may be understood as a consequence of an ongoing negotiation between established values and the demands of change in modern society.

Accordingly, this article is structured into three main analytical sections. The first section examines *cundhuk jungkat* as a symbolic marker of social and marital status within Javanese women's attire, with particular attention to its normative function in the Surakarta court context. The second section discusses the incorporation of *cundhuk jungkat* into Javanese female dance costumes and examines its transformation into an aesthetic element within dance costume design. The final section analyzes the dynamics of Javanese dance development and the recontextualization of *cundhuk jungkat* as its use has extended beyond the court environment. Through this structure, the article traces the shift in the meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* from an attribute normatively regulated within the court's social hierarchy to a costume element whose functions and meanings are shaped by changing social, cultural, and performative contexts. This analytical sequence provides a basis for understanding recontextualization not simply as the loss of symbolic meaning, but as a transformation in the hierarchy and orientation of the functions associated with the attribute.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using an ethnochoreological approach, which views dance as a cultural practice inseparable from the system of values, worldview, and social structures of the community that sustains it. Within this perspective, dance practices are understood as cultural texts intertwined with social, historical, and cultural contexts; thus, they not only represent aesthetic expressions but also articulate ideas, norms, and the collective identity of society. Accordingly, changes in value systems and societal perspectives have the potential to generate transformations in cultural practices, including shifts in symbolic functions and the recontextualization of meaning in their constituent elements. Based on this framework, the present study focuses its analysis on the transformation of the symbolic meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* as part of Javanese women's attire within dance performance practices, particularly in relation to the recontextualization of its symbolic meaning. In this process, an attribute that originally possessed normative and regulatory functions within the courtly cultural order has been transformed into a primarily aesthetic element in the practice of Javanese dance performance.

The data for this study were obtained through the systematic examination and analysis of various documentary sources and relevant literature concerning Javanese women's attire, particularly the symbolism and use of *cundhuk jungkat* in court dress traditions and its subsequent development within dance performance practices. The sources examined include archival and historical documents, photographic documentation, dance manuscripts or guidelines, previous ethnographic studies, performance documentation, and information concerning costume practices in contemporary dance performances. These sources span the period from approximately the 1930s to the present, enabling the study to trace changes in the function and meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* from historical and contextual perspectives. The selection of sources was based on their relevance to dress regulations, social and marital status,

symbolic functions, and changes in the use of this attribute within dance performance practices.

In addition to documentary sources, this study draws on the researcher's empirical experience as a practitioner of the Surakarta dance style as contextual knowledge for understanding costume practices and changes in their meanings. The researcher has been actively involved in artistic practice, particularly as a practitioner of the Surakarta dance style, for approximately two decades. This involvement provides contextual knowledge concerning dance repertoires, costume practices, and the systems of values and meanings that have developed within the Surakarta dance tradition. Knowledge acquired through practical experience is not positioned as a substitute for documentary evidence but is used as a contextual source that is compared with and corroborated by historical sources, relevant literature, and performance documentation. Thus, the practitioner's experience serves to facilitate the interpretation of cultural and performative contexts, while the evidentiary basis of the study remains grounded in source traceability and cross-source comparison.

The data were analyzed qualitatively through a series of stages involving data organization, categorization, interpretation, and historical-contextual comparison. The first stage involved identifying and classifying information from each source according to the following main themes: (1) regulations and provisions governing the use of dress, (2) social and marital status, (3) the symbolic function of *cundhuk jungkat*, (4) its use within court attire, (5) its use in dance costumes, and (6) changes in its function and meaning within performance practices outside the court environment. The second stage employed thematic analysis to identify patterns, continuities, and changes in meaning emerging within each category. The third stage involved historical-comparative analysis by comparing the function and meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* within the courtly cultural context with its use in dance performance practices during subsequent periods. This comparison was directed toward identifying changes in regulations, social contexts, dancer characteristics, performance functions, and aesthetic orientations that contributed to transformations in the meaning of the attribute. The final stage involved contextual interpretation by bringing documentary findings into dialogue with the researcher's empirical knowledge as a dance practitioner. This process was used to explain the relationship between changes in social and performative contexts and the transformation of the symbolic function of *cundhuk jungkat*, while also identifying the socio-cultural mechanisms through which the recontextualization of its meaning took place.

3. Result and discussion

3.1. *Cundhuk jungkat* as a symbol of status in Javanese women's attire

Cundhuk jungkat, also known as *pethat*, is a type of hair ornament resembling a comb, characterized by a variety of forms. One of the most common designs features a curved shape resembling a crescent moon. Within the tradition of Javanese court attire, the use of *cundhuk jungkat* developed primarily in the Surakarta and Yogyakarta courts. Although originating from closely related cultural traditions, these two courts exhibit differences in the techniques of its use. In the Surakarta court tradition, *cundhuk jungkat* is worn by women using a horizontal placement on the upper part of the head. In contrast, in the Yogyakarta court tradition, this ornament is worn by both men and women using a vertical placement technique. These differences indicate variations in symbolic practices within the system of Javanese court dress.



Figure 1. One form of *cundhuk jungkat* in the shape of a comb-like hair ornament
(Source: Angga Febri Collection, 2019)



Figure 2. Unmarried noblewomen during the reign of Paku Buwana X
wore *cundhuk jungkat* as part of their ceremonial attire
(Source: Angga Febri Collection, 2020)

Within the dress system of the Surakarta court, the use of *cundhuk jungkat* is not arbitrary, as it carries specific symbolic meanings. This attribute is permitted only for certain individuals within the aristocratic community, and not all members of the royal family or noble class are entitled to wear it. In general, *cundhuk jungkat* is worn by unmarried noblewomen. This regulation is particularly evident during the reign of Paku Buwana X, as demonstrated by the analysis of photographic documentation presented in **Figure 2**. Such restrictions indicate that elements of court dress do not merely function as aesthetic components but also embody symbolic meanings associated with the wearer's social identity, lineage, and personal status. Thus, *cundhuk jungkat*

represents a system of values as well as a social hierarchy that is institutionalized and embedded within the cultural practices of the Surakarta court.

Conceptually, clothing does not merely function as bodily protection, but also encompasses broader social and cultural dimensions. Within cultural studies, dress is understood as a symbolic medium that represents societal values, ideas, and worldviews. Höpflinger (2014) and Sutantio (2020) argue that clothing serves multiple functions beyond protection, including as a means of communication and social identification, as well as a cultural symbol that reflects the collective perspectives of society. In line with this view, Adamo (2011) emphasizes that clothing operates as a communicative device that conveys cultural symbols and social information through specific cultural categories. Stillman and Micklewright (1992) likewise regard clothing as a cultural manifestation that reflects aesthetics, social customs, economic status, religious norms, and political values within a society. Therefore, dress practices may be understood as a form of symbolic communication that represents both social identity and cultural values.

As a medium of symbolic communication, clothing also plays a role in constructing and affirming gender identity, which is not solely determined by biological factors but is also shaped by cultural constructions. In social practice, this is reflected in the differentiation of dress between men and women, legitimized by cultural norms. Arvanitidou and Gasouka (2013) explain that clothing and fashion constitute important socio-cultural factors in the formation of gender, as they reflect cultural dynamics and the differentiation of gender roles. Jestratičević (2015) further argues that clothing functions to construct as well as to reinforce gender qualifications within cultural contexts. Thus, dress does not merely serve as an aesthetic element, but also operates as a cultural medium that strengthens gender identity within society.

Within the context of court culture, the symbolic function of dress is clearly evident in sartorial practices in the Surakarta court, particularly in the use of ceremonial attire for various rituals and official events. In this context, clothing not only represents aesthetic aspects but also functions as a marker of social status, regulated through a set of norms that bind its wearers. These regulations encompass the form, type, and completeness of attire that must be worn in accordance with an individual's rank and social function within the court structure (Ngatinah, 2008; Widyastuti, 2015). Moreover, the differentiation of dress between men and women is strictly prescribed. Thus, dress practices within the court environment not only reflect social hierarchy but also affirm gender identity and qualifications within the cultural system of the Surakarta court.

One of the attributes of court dress that functions as a marker of gender qualification and personal status within the courtly cultural system is *cundhuk jungkat*. In the Surakarta court tradition, this hair ornament is symbolically used to signify unmarried noblewomen. The gender qualification represented by *cundhuk jungkat* does not merely indicate female identity but, more specifically, encodes a woman's marital status and social class within the hierarchical structure of the Surakarta court. Accordingly, *cundhuk jungkat* is generally worn by noblewomen who remain unmarried and fulfill certain social qualifications within the court environment. The presence of this attribute demonstrates that elements of court dress do not merely function as decorative accessories but also operate as symbolic devices that articulate the wearer's gender identity, marital status, and social position within the cultural order of the court.

The use of *cundhuk jungkat* as a symbol of unmarried women is closely related to the social traditions that developed within the Surakarta court, particularly within the

system of aristocratic titles for royal descendants. Unmarried noblewomen generally bear the title *Ajeng*, such as *Raden Ajeng*, *Bendara Raden Ajeng*, or *Gusti Raden Ajeng*. After marriage, this title changes to *Ayu*, for example *Raden Ayu*, *Bendara Raden Ayu*, or *Gusti Raden Ayu*. This change in title not only represents a transformation of social status within the aristocratic structure, but is also reflected in dress practices. Women who are married are no longer permitted to wear *cundhuk jungkat* as part of their ceremonial attire. Thus, the transformation of both titles and dress attributes demonstrates that the symbolic system within court culture not only represents social hierarchy, but also marks the differentiation of women's status based on life stages within the cultural structure of the Surakarta court.

Cundhuk jungkat in the tradition of Surakarta court dress does not merely function as a hair ornament, but carries symbolic meaning that represents the social and personal status of aristocratic women. Its restricted use to unmarried women of royal descent indicates that elements within court attire serve as instruments of symbolic communication that mark identity, social hierarchy, and life stages within the court's cultural structure. Through its strictly regulated use, *cundhuk jungkat* becomes a visual marker that connects dress practices with the system of values, norms, and aristocratic structures operating within the court environment. Thus, the presence of *cundhuk jungkat* may be understood as part of the symbolic system of Surakarta court culture, which not only affirms gender differentiation but also represents women's status based on marital condition within the Javanese aristocratic social order.

3.2. *Cundhuk jungkat as an aesthetic element in Javanese dance costume design*

Cundhuk jungkat, in addition to being part of the ceremonial attire of unmarried aristocratic women, is also employed as an element in the design of Javanese dance costumes. The presence of this accessory indicates a continuity between court dress traditions and aesthetic practices in dance performance. In terms of design and technique of use, *cundhuk jungkat* in dance costume does not differ significantly from its application in ceremonial attire; it is positioned on the upper part of the head with a horizontal placement as part of the head ornamentation.

Within a broader framework, the process of aesthetic adaptation in Javanese dance costume design is not limited to visual aspects, but also involves symbolic constructions that represent gender in performance. Through the costume design worn by performers, the gender identity of characters or roles—whether male or female—can be clearly identified. This differentiation is evident in the selection and use of specific attributes and accessories that are conventionally associated with each gender. This perspective aligns with the findings of Sriyadi et al. (2025), which demonstrate that attributes in Javanese dance costume design function as symbolic markers of gender differentiation, as reflected, for instance, in the use of *samparan* cloth designs that are specifically designated for female characters, roles, or dance forms. Thus, attributes and accessories in Javanese dance costume design do not merely serve as aesthetic elements, but also carry symbolic meanings that enable audiences to identify the gender of the roles presented in dance performances.



Figure 3. *Cundhuk jungkat* serves as one of the aesthetic elements in the design of the head ornament for the *Bedhaya Ketawang* dance
(Source: Angga Febri Collection, 2013)



Figure 4. *Cundhuk jungkat* as part of the costume design of the *bedhaya* dance in the Surakarta court during the reign of Paku Buwana X
(Source: Angga Febri Collection, 2020)

As one of the elements in Javanese dance costume design, *cundhuk jungkat* is generally used as part of the costume representing female characters. This application is clearly evident in various forms of female court dances, particularly *bedhaya* and *srimpi* in the Surakarta court. Within these dance forms, several models of head ornaments are employed, including *gelung bokor mengkurep*, *gelung ageng*, *jamangan*, *kadal menek*, and *irah-irahan*. Among these, *cundhuk jungkat* is specifically applied to the head ornaments *gelung bokor mengkurep*, *gelung ageng*, and *jamangan*

(Pramutomo & Sriyadi, 2025). The use of this accessory demonstrates how elements of court attire are selectively adapted into dance costume design to reinforce the visual identity of the characters portrayed. Thus, the presence of *cundhuk jungkat* in dance costume design does not merely function as a decorative element, but also carries symbolic meaning as a marker of gender. Through this attribute, audiences are able to identify that the role presented in the dance performance represents a female character.

Bedhaya and *srimpi* are genres of classical dance that developed within the court environment, particularly in the Surakarta court. Both dances occupy a significant position within the social and cultural structure of Javanese society, as they are closely associated with the system of values, worldview, and symbolic ideas embedded in court traditions. Accordingly, within the context of court culture, *bedhaya* and *srimpi* are positioned as forms of performance art endowed with a certain degree of sacredness, such that not all members within the court's social structure possess the authority to own or perform them (Pramutomo & Sriyadi, 2025; Sriyadi, Imama, & Adiwendro, 2024). Within this framework, *bedhaya* and *srimpi*, as female dance forms, occupy a crucial position in the tradition of court dance.

The existence of *Bedhaya Ketawang* further reinforces the significance of *bedhaya* and *srimpi* within the Surakarta court. This is because the dance is regarded as the highest form of *bedhaya*. It is not only viewed as the pinnacle of court dance aesthetics, but also considered the primary form or source for the creation of various *bedhaya* and *srimpi* repertoires that developed within the Surakarta court (Brakel-Papenhuyzen, 1988; Tirtaamidjaja, 1967). Within this context, the use of *cundhuk jungkat* as an accessory is also found in the costume design of *Bedhaya Ketawang*. This dance is believed to be one of the oldest forms of *bedhaya*, employing the model of Javanese bridal attire as the basis of its costume design (Pramutomo & Sriyadi, 2025). The presence of *cundhuk jungkat* in this dance costume underscores the significance of this accessory within the tradition of Javanese women's dress, both as part of aristocratic ceremonial attire and as an element in female dance costume design. Thus, the use of *cundhuk jungkat* in *Bedhaya Ketawang* demonstrates the close interconnection between court dress traditions, gender symbolism, and aesthetic principles within the practice of Javanese dance performance.

3.3. *The dynamics of Javanese dance development and the recontextualization of meaning in the use of cundhuk jungkat*

Bedhaya and *srimpi*, which previously occupied a central position in the cultural life of the court, have experienced a shift in significance in response to changes in social and political structures. The exclusivity of these dances began to diminish as their transmission and performance were no longer confined to the *kraton*, but instead expanded into spaces beyond the court. This transformation became more pronounced in the post-independence period, when the court institution lost its role as a center of political power within the traditional state system and was reconstituted as a cultural preservation institution. Consequently, the symbolic context that had previously sustained the meaning of *bedhaya* and *srimpi* also underwent erosion, particularly with the disappearance of state ceremonial practices that once represented royal legitimacy and authority (Pramutomo & Sriyadi, 2025). Under these conditions, these dances no longer function as exclusive representations of power and aristocracy, but have instead shifted toward becoming more open forms of cultural expression.



Figure 5. The maestros performed the *Bedhaya Pangkur* dance using *cundhuk jungkat* as part of the costume design they wore
(Source: screenshot from https://youtu.be/flgyvmKurrc?si=QbrqQg0c_US90Wav, 2026)

This transformation has simultaneously opened space for the expansion of the practice, transmission, and reinterpretation of *bedhaya* and *srimpi* beyond the court. These dances are no longer performed solely within traditional contexts, but are also taught, studied, and developed in various arts education institutions, studios, and cultural communities in major cultural centers such as Jakarta, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta. This expansion has fostered broader cross-community appreciation, while also facilitating the emergence of choreographic innovations rooted in tradition yet responsive to contemporary social dynamics (Fahrinisa & Sriyadi, 2025). Thus, the shift does not merely indicate a loss of exclusivity, but also reflects processes of adaptation and revitalization that affirm the continuity of *bedhaya* and *srimpi* within an ever-evolving socio-cultural landscape.

These socio-cultural transformations are also reflected in the shifting criteria and practices of dancer selection in *bedhaya* and *srimpi*. During the period when these dances were practiced exclusively within the court, performers were generally drawn from unmarried women. This is consistent with the account of G.R.Ay. Siti Nurul, which indicates that married dancers typically no longer performed (Hermono, 2014). However, as the court has transitioned into an institution for cultural preservation, these restrictions have undergone significant relaxation. Married women continue to actively perform *bedhaya* and *srimpi*, even in the context of *Bedhaya Ketawang*, which normatively requires female dancers who are unmarried and hold the status of *abdi dalem*. In practice, this dance has been performed by royal daughters who were already married, indicating a reinterpretation of traditional norms (Prihatini, Dewi, Sunarno, Wahyudiarto, & Bantolo, 2007). This shift is further reinforced in developments outside the court, where flexibility in dancer selection has become part of a broader adaptive dynamic, aligned with processes of transformation, expanded access, and revitalization experienced by *bedhaya* and *srimpi*.



Figure 6. *Bedhayan Wulangreh* is performed without restrictions on status or age; all dancers, including supporting dancers, wear *cundhuk jungkat* as part of the costume design
(Source: Screenshot from <https://youtu.be/dsnIm7alanc?si=7CzCLtu5KXIQJF9G>, 2026)

Changes in the criteria and practices governing dancer selection have also contributed to the transformation of the meaning of costume elements, particularly *cundhuk jungkat*. Within the courtly tradition, *cundhuk jungkat* functioned not merely as an aesthetic accessory but also as a marker of social and personal status, with its use normatively designated for unmarried aristocratic women. This regulation was consistent with the characteristics of *bedhaya* and *srimpi* dancers in earlier periods, who were generally unmarried women, thereby creating a correspondence between dancer qualifications, personal status, and the costume attributes they wore. However, as dancer selection practices have become more flexible, particularly with the acceptance of married women as performers of *bedhaya* and *srimpi* repertoires, the association between *cundhuk jungkat* and marital status has weakened. The attribute continues to be used even though the personal prerequisite that previously underpinned its use is no longer a primary consideration. In this context, *cundhuk jungkat* has undergone a process of recontextualization, whereby an attribute that normatively encoded social and marital status has become a visual element that primarily serves the aesthetic and performative construction of dance. Although its function as a marker of marital status is no longer primary, its gender dimension remains, as its use continues to be associated with female dancers' costumes. Thus, this transformation does not indicate the complete disappearance of the symbolic meaning of *cundhuk jungkat*, but rather a shift in the hierarchy of its functions, whereby its personal-status function has weakened while its aesthetic, performative, and female-identifying functions have become more prominent within Javanese dance costume design.

Conceptually, this phenomenon demonstrates a shift from a system of meaning grounded in social norms toward a more flexible and context-dependent system of meaning. The transformation of performance practices affects not only performative aspects but also reconfigures the relationship between symbols, identity, and cultural values. This shift is closely related to changes in the social contexts in which Javanese dance is practiced. Dances that previously developed within the court environment under a set of binding norms, regulations, and conventions have subsequently expanded into broader social settings through processes of transmission, education, public performance, and institutional reproduction. This shift in context has enabled elements of court culture to be maintained while simultaneously being reinterpreted in

accordance with the values, needs, and social conventions that have developed beyond the court. Theoretically, this process can be understood as a consequence of social transformation that influences value orientations and encourages the reinterpretation of traditional elements (Sulistyono & Panuwun, 2018), in line with changing levels of social attachment to traditional symbols (Smirnova, 2025), the demands for adaptation of value systems in modern society (Chandler, 1979), and the increasing negotiation of meaning resulting from globalization (Zulkifli et al., 2024). Within this context, *cundhuk jungkat* is no longer understood exclusively through its normative function as a marker of personal status within the courtly cultural system, but has acquired new spaces of meaning as a visual and aesthetic element in dance performance practices. Thus, the recontextualization of *cundhuk jungkat* reflects a process of adaptation and negotiation between the continuity of traditional forms and changing social contexts, in which the attribute is visually retained while the function and hierarchy of its meanings are transformed according to the cultural environment in which it is reproduced.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, this study concludes that a recontextualization of the meaning of *cundhuk jungkat* has occurred, both as an accessory within Javanese aristocratic women's attire and as an element of Javanese dance costume design. This recontextualization has occurred alongside changes in social structure, the expansion of dance practices beyond the court environment, and transformations in the broader sociocultural context, which have contributed to greater flexibility in the cultural regulations governing the use of this attribute. Within Javanese dance performance, the normative function of *cundhuk jungkat* as a marker of social and marital status has weakened. The attribute is no longer used exclusively to indicate the personal status of unmarried aristocratic women, as its use in dance performance is no longer determined by the dancer's marital status. Thus, the function of *cundhuk jungkat* as a marker of social and personal status indicating unmarried status is no longer its primary function, while its artistic function as part of the visual construction and costume design of dance has become increasingly prominent. Nevertheless, its gendered dimension remains, as *cundhuk jungkat* continues to be used in performance as part of female dancers' costumes. These findings indicate that this transformation does not constitute the complete disappearance of the symbolic meaning of *cundhuk jungkat*, but rather a shift in the hierarchy of its functions, whereby its normative functions related to social and marital status have weakened, while its aesthetic, artistic, performative, and gender-qualifying functions have become more prominent. This process reflects the recontextualization of *cundhuk jungkat*, whereby an attribute that originally acquired its meaning through the normative system and social hierarchy of the court is situated within a broader dance performance context and consequently acquires different functions and orientations of meaning. Theoretically, this phenomenon demonstrates a shift from a system of meaning grounded in social norms toward a more contextual and dynamic system, in which cultural symbols are no longer singular or fixed in meaning but remain open to reinterpretation in response to changes in the sociocultural landscape.

This study has several limitations that define the scope for further research. First, the analysis is specifically focused on *bedhaya* and *srimpi* within the Surakarta dance tradition and does not encompass other Surakarta-style dance repertoires that may demonstrate different patterns of costume use and symbolic interpretation. Second, the

study primarily relies on documentary sources and the researcher's practical experience as a dance practitioner. Further research could complement these sources with interviews involving court practitioners, senior dancers, choreographers, costume specialists, and other relevant cultural actors. Such research would provide additional perspectives on how the changing functions and meanings of *cundhuk jungkat* have been understood, negotiated, and transmitted across different generations and performance contexts. These limitations do not diminish the findings of the present study but instead indicate opportunities to further examine the broader dynamics of costume, symbolism, and cultural change within Javanese dance.

Conflicts of Interest: Declare conflicts of interest or state "The authors declare no conflict of interest." Authors must identify and declare any personal circumstances or interest that may be perceived as inappropriately influencing the representation or interpretation of reported research results. Any role of the funding sponsors in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results must be declared in this section. If there is no role, please state "The founding sponsors had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, and in the decision to publish the results".

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