

SACRED AND CULTURAL AWARENESS: PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES OF THE TANGGAI DANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF PALEMBANG MALAY TRADITION, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This study aims to explore and interpret the philosophical and religious values contained in the Tanggai Dance as a representation of Palembang Malay identity in Indonesia, which in the categories functions as an aesthetic vessel, ethical tool, and religious medium.

Methods. The research method used is a case study with an interdisciplinary approach, data collected through literature review, field observations, and in-depth interviews with dance artists, maestros, traditional leaders, and the younger generation. Data analysis uses a combined paradigm: movement semiotics for sign mapping, performativity theory for understanding reproducible norms, and body phenomenology for interpreting embodied experiences.

Results. The meaning in Tanggai Dance is relational and multi-layered: formation patterns, subtle hand movements, repetitive rhythms, and props (*golden nails*) interact to form a symbolic system that functions aesthetically, ethically, and religiously. Repetition of practice and performance becomes the primary medium for internalizing values; the studio as a community of practice reproduces meaning through imitation, narrative, and sensory experience. Cross-generational results show that the negotiation of meaning in which the older generation maintains a sacred nuance, while the younger generation emphasizes aesthetic aspects-mediated by changes in modes of bodily experience and performance context.

Conclusions. The findings indicate that Tanggai dance not only serves as a religious and ceremonial expression, but also has significant potential as a pedagogical medium for teaching local wisdom, strengthening cultural identity, and revitalizing dancers engagement with traditional arts as young people in contemporary times. This study recommends a dance curriculum based on embodied reflection, multimodal documentation, and standardized intergenerational programs to ensure the continuity of philosophical and religious meanings in cultural preservation.

Keywords: local identity, Tanggai dance, philosophical values, religious symbolism, cultural preservation

INTRODUCTION

Tanggai dance as a traditional dance, contains the philosophy of Rasan Tuo (the concept of local people's beliefs in match making carried out by parents to their children) (Agustina et al., 2022a). Meanwhile, in the research statement (Faradillah & Hera, 2017), Tanggai dance is an artistic asset in the city of Palembang, South Sumatera, where basically this dance is a welcoming dance with an odd number of dancers and one of the dancers placed in the middle as a holder of a *tepak* containing *sekapur sirih* is made a prima donna as a form of respect (Katungga & Syahril, 2019). According to an interview with the creator of the Tanggai dance, the late Elly Rudy in August 2023, he stated that the prima donna dancer who holds *the tepak* is a beautiful woman with ideal body proportions. The dancer in moving her body is not just moving, but the movements in the dance in question are movements that have been distilled or interspersed, so that they become a certain form of movement that has a beautiful meaning in it (Shilling, 2018; Shusterman, 2008).

Tanggai Dance is an important cultural heritage of the Palembang people, reflecting a series of philosophical and religious values that have developed and been passed down from generation to generation. These values are implied in the dance movements, accessories, costumes and accompanying music, all of which contain meaning. Tanggai Dance as a traditional welcoming dance of the Palembang Malay community has deep symbolic (Saputra et al., 2016), philosophical, and religious meanings that can serve as valuable

educational content. The structure and attributes of its choreography, such as (nail joints) called *Tanggai*, *Tepak* (offering tray), *Prindon* (decoration) reflects respect, gratitude, and hospitality toward invited guests visiting the city of Palembang, Indonesia. (Pahut et al., 2025). Integrating traditional arts into local education encourages the moral and spiritual development of dancers through embodied learning. This aligns with the argument (Eisner & Powell, 2002) that art serves as a powerful vehicle for meaning-making, offering a multidimensional way of knowing that transcends verbal and logical cognition. Through movement and symbolism, *Tanggai* dance can foster cultural empathy and spiritual awareness among dancers as learners.

Using a phenomenological approach within the framework of the philosophy of art (Iser, 2022; Neubauer et al., 2019), this study explores how the symbolic movements and ritual elements of the *Tanggai* dance embody the worldview of the Palembang Malay community. Phenomenology, as discussed by Merleau Ponty (1945) in (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2013), emphasizes life experiences and the embodiment of perceptual meanings that enable researchers to interpret dance as both an artistic and existential expression. In the context of this study, the *Tanggai* dance is not merely an aesthetic performance, but rather a manifestation of harmony between the spiritual, social, and natural worlds through its ritual movements, for example *Siguntang Mahameru*, *Mudra*, and *Tolak Balak* (Hera et al., 2023). The dancers internalize the philosophical values of humility, purity, and balance that align with Malay-Islamic cosmology (Idris et al., 2019; Jama' et al., 2017).

Therefore, this study highlights how cultural education rooted in local arts can transform community learning. Similar approaches have been effectively applied in other cultural contexts, for example in research on *Nihon Buyo* in Japan and *Bharatanatyam* in India, where traditional dance functions as both spiritual practice and character education (Iyengar & Smith, 2020; Pinzón, 2020). In the *Sendok Piyogo* tradition, philosophically, dance functions as a living repository of moral and philosophical teachings, which are transmitted through concrete practices, rather than abstract instructions (Agustina et al., 2022b). This cross-cultural parallel strengthens the potential of *Tanggai* dance as an ethnopedagogical medium that embodies local wisdom while engaging dancers as the younger generation holistically, cognitively, affectively, and kinaesthetically.

The findings of this study reveal that the philosophical and religious meanings contained in the *Tanggai* dance movements are closely related to noble and local values. However, these values have not been optimally conveyed in current teaching practices, as the focus is often still on technical choreography rather than reflective understanding. As in recent research (Li & Vasilyevna, 2025), arts education should emphasize interpretive and reflective processes that enable learners to internalize cultural meanings, rather than simply reproducing forms (Malarsih et al., 2017). Thus, incorporating reflective dialogue, storytelling, and contextual explanations in *Tanggai* dance learning can revitalize its educational and spiritual essence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The revitalization of Tanggai dance in educational settings offers a transformative pathway to re-engage young people with their cultural heritage. By integrating traditional dance as a living learning resource, educators can bridge the gap between cognitive learning and cultural experiences, which in turn fosters intellectual and emotional intelligence. This aligns with the UNESCO framework for cultural education, emphasizing the role of the arts in fostering intercultural understanding and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2024). Therefore, Tanggai dance is not only a representation of Palembang Malay identity, but also a valuable pedagogical medium that fosters holistic education grounded in philosophical, religious, and cultural values.

The Tanggai dance is a cultural identity of the Malay people of Palembang, reflecting a series of philosophical and religious values that have developed and been passed down through generations (Hidayatullah, 2020). These values are implicit in the dance movements, accessories and costumes, and the accompanying music, all of which contain profound symbolic meaning. However, public understanding, particularly in the context of community-based education (Jakubovská et al., n.d.; Yevtushenko, 2025), of the philosophical and religious meanings contained in the Tanggai dance is very limited, both in terms of their understanding and interpretation.

Thus, strengthening this understanding is crucial for preserving and maintaining the cultural values that shape the identity of traditional communities, but few have explicitly examined the potential of Tanggai dance as a learning medium for teaching local culture within the community. Community-based education serves as a strategic platform for internalizing cultural values while fostering national awareness and local identity (Sugiarto et al., 2025). Therefore, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding how the philosophical and religious values of Tanggai dance can be effectively utilized as a learning resource in community education.

METHODOLOGY

The method used is a qualitative case study based on the philosophy of art with phenomenological investigation to explore the philosophical and religious values contained in the Tanggai dance (Iser, 2022; Neubauer et al., 2019), as well as interpreting its relevance to cultural education among the younger generation. Qualitative methods allow research to capture the lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations of dancers, teachers, and cultural practitioners in their natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is highly relevant because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the decline in youth engagement with traditional dance and how integrating cultural performances into education can enable an in-depth understanding

of the decline in youth engagement with traditional dance, as well as how integrating cultural performances into education can foster a deeper sense of identity and belonging. The focus of the study is on meaning, and in line with the view (Finley, 2018) that qualitative research seeks to interpret phenomena through the meanings that people give to the phenomena being studied, so this context is relevant to understanding the cultural and symbolic meaning of the Tanggai dance as a material study in this study.

This research uses a perspective Phenomenology, particularly the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) in (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2013), emphasizes that perception and embodiment are central to human experience. In the context of this study, a phenomenological perspective is used to reveal how dance movements, gestures, and symbols in the Tanggai dance embody the spiritual and collective cultural consciousness of the Palembang Malay community. As stated by (Van Manen, 2017), phenomenology seeks to interpret life experiences as perceived by individuals, making it an appropriate lens to explore how dancers internalize and express philosophical and religious values through embodied performances that bridge the cognitive dimensions that are dominant in the current education system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to explore and interpret the philosophical and religious values contained in the Tanggai Dance as a representation of Palembang Malay identity in Indonesia, which in the categories functions as an aesthetic vessel, ethical tool, and religious medium.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES IN THE TANGGAI DANCE

Tanggai Dance displays strong philosophical values in the form of the concept of harmony between humans, nature, and community in the category of values recorded in the dancers' movement patterns, formations, and costumes (Agustina et al., 2022a). The dancers' smooth and repetitive hand movements emphasize a philosophy of balance and self-control as the basis of social ethics; these movements function as symbols of social order and moral aesthetics that are passed down orally and culturally. In the religious dimension, Tanggai Dance contains symbolic elements that reflect gratitude and respect for transcendent powers (Hera, 2020). The placement of dance attributes *Tanggai nails* (nail decorations and makeup) and the sequence of the opening ritual of the performance act as communicative rituals that connect profane and sacred elements. This emphasizes the function of dance

as a means of collective religious expression as well as an educational medium for spiritual values.

Analysis of the findings using traditional semiotic theory and performative theory shows that the meaning of dance is constructed through culturally encoded bodily signs. According to the semiotic approach, each movement motif functions as a sign that maps local values of politeness, solidarity, and devotion. Meanwhile, the performativity approach emphasizes that the repetition of movements in a community context reproduces and validates these values in everyday social practices (Oktavianus et al., 2024). Qualitative observations indicate interpretive variations between generations: the older generation tends to interpret the Tanggai dance as a religious ritual that binds the community, while the younger generation places more emphasis on aesthetic aspects and cultural identity. This difference demonstrates the dynamics of the process of cultural preservation in which philosophical values are maintained (Mensah, 2022), but their religious nuances are negotiated in the context of modernization and contemporary arts education (Islami et al., 2022)

The discussion using the concept of cultural transmission highlights the role of informal and formal education in maintaining dance values. Teaching practices that combine philosophical narratives and technical exercises successfully strengthen students' understanding of the deeper meaning of dance, so that Tanggai dance functions not only as a spectacle but also as a medium for character formation and local spirituality (Oktavianus et al., 2024). From an intercultural perspective, the religious elements of Tanggai dance show symbolic flexibility that allows this dance to function across religious contexts as well as being an ethnic identity of Palembang. This adaptive approach is important for preservation strategies, by highlighting universal values such as harmony and gratitude. Tanggai dance has the potential to be preserved without losing its philosophical core even if performed on national or international stages (Hera, 2020).

The practical implications of this study suggest the integration of philosophical and religious values modules into the arts education curriculum in society (Tillman & Hsu, 2018). An explicit curricular approach that maps dance symbols to moral and spiritual values will help the younger generation understand the historical and functional context of Tanggai dance and maintain the continuity of cultural values consciously and reflectively. Tanggai dance displays a consistent and repetitive movement structure, which philosophically represents the concept of social balance and aesthetic harmony between community members. From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, these collective movement patterns and formations are not merely symbols, but rather embodied bodily expressions so that the meaning of balance is produced in sensory and relational practices between dancers (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2013), musical instruments, and the stage space. Subtle hand movements, especially the opening of the palms and the *Borobudur movement* in this dance, contain ethical content: self-control, politeness, and respect between

humans. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that perception is the embodiment of the body, therefore the reading of gestures in Tanggai dance becomes a shared experience between the audience and dancers, mutually reinforcing ethical meaning through motor resonance and shared attention.

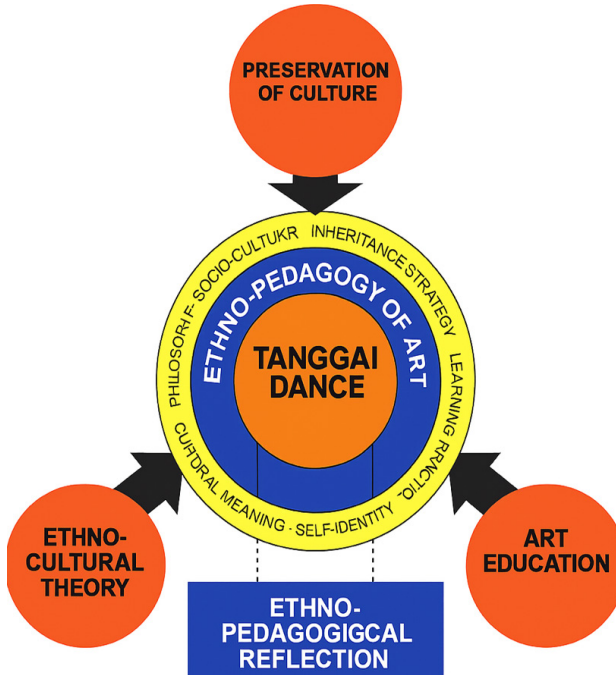
In the religious dimension, the opening sequence containing prayers or expressions of gratitude and the use of ritual properties (golden nails, headdresses as the main accessories) function as communication activities with the transcendent. According to Merleau-Ponty's body-image framework, these sacred objects do not simply stop as objects, but they are experienced through the senses and actions so that religious transmission occurs through bodily habits and choreographic practices that bind the community (Halák, 2021). Performative analysis shows that choreographic repetition in the studio and on stage produces value habituation by dancers in internalizing philosophical and religious norms, not only through verbal explanations but through repeated bodily exercises. Merleau-Ponty's concept of habit helps explain how the meaning of dance is reproduced in motor habits as a medium for collective memory and spiritual appreciation.

Cross-generational dynamics reveal the negotiation of meaning by the older generation, emphasizing sacred and ritual functions, while the younger generation prioritizes aesthetics and the value of public performance. A phenomenological approach Merleau-Ponty encouraged researchers to place the bodily experiences of different generations as the primary data source in recording sensory narratives, feelings that accompany movement (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2013), and changes in patterns of perception of dance values. Methodologically, the application of phenomenological interviews and video analysis based on body phenomenology resulted in the finding that philosophical and religious meanings are often present simultaneously in one movement connected to one motif, can function as an ethical sign as well as a nonverbal prayer. This is in line with Merleau-Ponty's idea that meaning emerges at the threshold between the subject's body and the world, so that symbolic interpretation must consider the embodied context performance.

Pedagogical implications for this research include recommendations for movement-based teaching in the dance curriculum that incorporate phenomenological reflection (writing sensory experiences, post-practice discussions, mindfulness exercises) to strengthen the understanding of philosophical and religious meanings. Merleau-Ponty emphasized the importance of education that reorients to the body's experience in performing dance movements as a source of knowledge, so that this approach is relevant for the preservation of dance values in a living way. The theoretical basis of this research is a description that contains an explanation of the concepts and theories resulting from the selection of scientific evidence within the scope of the scientific repertoire on the topic studied, about etnopedagogis, Learning Practice, Ethnocultural, Tanggai Dance and Cultural Preservation.

Figure 1

Tanggai Dance in the Cultural Values Dialogue based on Preservation



Source. Author's elaboration.

THE NATURE AND MEANING OF SYMBOLS USED IN TANGGAI DANCE

The Tanggai Dance contains philosophical values centered on the concept of balance between the individual, community, and nature, which are reflected in the choreographic structure: circular or marching formation patterns, repetitive rhythmic movements, and an emphasis on hand movement control. appears in the opening and closing practices of the Tanggai dance performance: starting with a prayer or expression of gratitude in the form of worship movements, the selection of sacred accompanying music, and the use of attributes (golden nails, headdresses) that have spiritual symbolic meaning. Of the 24 key informant interviews, 12 informants stated that religious elements are the core meaning of the Tanggai Dance when performed in the context of customs or religious ceremonies.

A semiotic theoretical approach demonstrates how body movements function as layered signs: certain movement motifs contain aesthetic, moral, and religious meanings that can be read by community members who are inscribed in tradition (Shen et al., 2024). Performativity theory reinforces the understanding that the meaning of dance

is not static but is reproduced through performative repetition (Hamera, 2006). Routine community practice and public performances become arenas where philosophical and religious values are internalized by dancers through mimetic practices, instructor narratives, and collective experiences, as recorded in participant observation sheets during 10 practice sessions.

Qualitative documentation data reveals differences in interpretation across generations: the older generation, aged 50 and over, emphasizes the ritual and religious functions of Tanggai dance, while the 18–35 generation values dance more as a vehicle for aesthetic expression and cultural identity. Conceptual discussions link field findings to the concepts of cultural transmission and communities of practice: dance communities and indigenous groups act as “learning spaces” where symbolic knowledge and movement styles are passed down through observation, practice, and contextual stories. Participatory documentation shows that teaching methods that include philosophical narratives (origin stories, the meaning of dance properties) increase students’ connection to the values of dance. Critical analysis highlights the dynamics of adaptation when Tanggai dance is performed in a national performance or cultural festival, where some ritual elements are simplified for the aesthetic purposes of the stage. This reduction requires a preservation strategy that prioritizes complete documentation (ethnographic videos, interview transcripts, movement notation) so that the philosophical and religious dimensions remain available for academic and community reference.

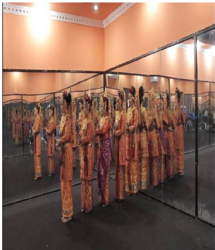

The practical implications of the research suggest the integration of a module on philosophical and religious values into the regional arts education curriculum: this module includes the historical context of dance, symbolic interpretation of properties, technical exercises, and reflection on values through written assignments or group discussions. Tanggai Dance exhibits subtle, rhythmic, and repetitive choreographic characteristics, so that the repetitive hand movement patterns and coordinated dancer formations produce a consistent visual rhythm. Theoretically, this characteristic is analyzed using the semiotic theory of movement that reads choreographic motifs as layered signs in the categories of aesthetics, ethics, and social narratives, so that the form of movement becomes material for reading meaning in the context of the community.



Ethical meaning is strongly evident in the dancers’ palm opening and hand movements, emphasizing politeness, self-control, and interpersonal etiquette. Using a performativity framework, researchers understand that ethics are not only explained verbally but are reconstructed when movements are repeated in practice and performances, so that social norms are materialized through bodily actions. In the religious dimension, the opening sequence, which often includes prayers in *Sembah* movements, expressions of gratitude, and the use of sacred attributes (e.g., the golden nails worn by dancers), shows that the dance form also functions as a ritual medium. The phenomenological approach to the body, including Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, helps explain how religious experiences are realized in sensory -experienced properties and movements, so

that objects and actions become means of relating to the transcendent (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2013).

The material nature of dance in the interaction between the body, attributes, and space produces co-embodied meanings, so that properties are not merely accessories but part of the “body language” that transmits ancestral stories, status, and protective meanings. This materiality analysis is relevant for conservation and documentation studies because meaning is also stored in objects that accompany movement. The rhythm and repetition of footsteps form a temporal continuity that binds dancers in a collective experience from a cognitive- embodied perspective. Motor habits formed through practice become a container of collective memory. These habits explain how philosophical and religious values are stored in the dancer’s body and activated during the performance. Cross-generational studies show a shift in emphasis on form in maestros and elders who place more emphasis on Tanggai dance as a ritual practice and reinforcement of sacred values, while the younger generation values aesthetic value and representational function on stage. Therefore, to emphasize this research, the researcher presents a table of findings on the philosophical meaning and religiosity of Tanggai dance, which is described in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Findings of Philosophical and Religious Meaning in Tanggai Dance Form

Form Dance	Documentation	Meaning Philosophical	Meaning Religious
Princess Street or Tiptoe Street		Marking social balance and community order	Symbolizes the cycle of life and the cosmic relationship between humans and the Transcendent.
Borobudur Movement		interpersonal etiquette	A gesture of respect and a request for gratitude to the transcendent

Form Dance	Documentation	Meaning Philosophical	Meaning Religious
Sembah Masuk Movement		Marking moral readiness and respect and collective reflection before action	The ritual practice of direct communication with the transcendent
Kuku Tanggai Properties		Affirmation of the aesthetic identity and symbolic hierarchy of Palembang society culture	Property is seen as a sacred and protective part

Note. Philosophical and religious values are stored in the dancer's body and are activated during the performance; Princess Step or Tiptoe Step, Borobudur Movement with both hands in front of the chest, Sembah Masuk Movement, Kuku Tanggai (Property is seen as a sacred and protective part). In each cell, the first meaning (philosophical) is taken from Sample A (field interview with two dance teachers, Palembang, 2023), and the second meaning (religious) is taken from Sample B (Own research; and analysis of personal video archives, 2025).

Source. Own research.

CONCLUSIONS

Tanggai Dance can be understood as a performative symbolic system in which choreographic properties (formation patterns, hand gestures, repetitive rhythms, and the use of props) function simultaneously as an aesthetic vessel, an ethical device, and a religious medium. Empirical analysis shows that meaning does not reside in a single element but rather in the relationships between elements in the performative practice of movement, accessories, and performance space that articulate with each other in a community context. Theoretically, the findings support the use of a combined framework in semiotics to map movement signs; performativity theory to explain the reproduction of norms through repetition; and body phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) to emphasize the embodied dimension of the experience of meaning.

These three approaches are complementary because they describe the process of meaning as simultaneously practiced and lived through the practicing and witnessed body.

Cross-generational results indicate a negotiation of meaning: while older generations retain sacred and ritualistic readings, younger generations tend to redefine aesthetic and representational aspects. This phenomenon does not merely indicate an erosion of meaning, but rather a shift in modes of experience that alter the way the body instills traditional values. Therefore, studies of performative culture must examine changing modes of experience (modes of embodiment) as crucial variables in the dynamics of preservation. This study underscores the importance of multi-modal data triangulation: micro-movement analysis (notation, frame-by-frame), codified video recordings, phenomenological interviews about sensory experiences, and ritual documentation.

This combination allows for a valid scientific interpretation of how philosophical and religious meanings are embodied, maintained, and negotiated in actual dance practices, not just as descriptive narratives. The implications of this research call for the design of preservation interventions that are sensitive to embodied Transmission in the dance curriculum must combine technical practice with reflection on movement experiences, contextual narratives, and intergenerational spaces for the transfer of meaning. Tanggai Dance emphasizes movement practices with multiple meanings in aesthetics and sacredness that are maintained through motor habits, ritual contexts, and intergenerational dialogue.

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