

Symbolic Transformation and Cultural Islamization of the *Kembar Mayang* Ritual: A Case Study of the Javanese Diaspora in Aek Hitetoras, North Sumatra

*Siti Hadijah Manopo¹, Arifinsyah²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: siti402211010@uinsu.ac.id

Abstract

This article examines the symbolic transformation and cultural Islamization of the *Kembar Mayang* ritual among the Javanese diaspora community in Aek Hitetoras, North Sumatra. Drawing on a qualitative case study approach, the research is grounded in the anthropology of religion and based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of documentary materials. Findings reveal that *Kembar Mayang*, once rooted in ancestral cosmology and mystical practice, has been reinterpreted through deliberate negotiation and adaptation. Traditional elements such as offerings and incantations have largely been replaced by Islamic prayers and Qur'anic recitation, reflecting the community's commitment to religious orthodoxy while sustaining collective identity and social cohesion. The adaptation process has been incremental and dialogical, involving pragmatic adjustments in ritual materials and the creative use of digital media for documentation and intergenerational transmission. Contestation between cultural and religious perspectives has generated both tension and innovation, ultimately enabling the ritual to endure as a meaningful expression of gratitude, harmony, and heritage. The study contributes to broader debates in the anthropology of religion and diaspora studies, illustrating how local traditions are dynamically negotiated and renewed through cultural *ijtihad*, recontextualization, and digital innovation. Practical implications highlight the importance of inclusive dialogue, intergenerational education, and flexible preservation strategies for sustaining tradition within plural and rapidly changing societies.

Keywords: *Kembar Mayang*, symbolic transformation, cultural Islamization, Javanese diaspora, ritual adaptation, tradition preservation, North Sumatra

A. Introduction

Across the globe, cultural traditions are never static. As communities move, encounter new ideas, and respond to changing times, their rituals are renegotiated, often taking on new forms and meanings. For the Javanese, one tradition that illustrates this ongoing process is *Kembar Mayang*—a ritual arrangement of palm leaves central to wedding ceremonies. In Java, *Kembar Mayang* has long symbolized prayers for blessing, harmony, and fertility. The

preservation of ritual and social harmony in Javanese communities is often closely linked to leadership practices that emphasize consensus, indirect communication, and the maintenance of group cohesion (Irawanto, Ramsey, & Ryan, 2011). Yet as Javanese families have migrated – both across the Indonesian archipelago and to places as distant as Suriname and Japan – the tradition has traveled with them, shaped by fresh circumstances and new cultural landscapes (Schlehe & Yulianto, 2020).

These diasporic movements, which gained momentum in the nineteenth century, have led to the emergence of vibrant Javanese communities outside of Java, from North Sumatra and Kalimantan to international destinations such as Malaysia and Japan. For these communities, *Kembar Mayang* is more than a ritual inherited from their ancestors. It has become a living arena where questions of identity, belief, and belonging play out in everyday life. The tradition faces pressures from several directions – expectations of religious purity, the demands of a modern lifestyle, and the influence of local cultures. These tensions bring about negotiation, innovation, and sometimes conflict as meanings are reinterpreted and practices are adapted.

The transformation of *Kembar Mayang* in these settings is neither superficial nor uniform. In North Sumatra, for example, the tradition has become the site of an active dialogue between community leaders, religious authorities, and ordinary families. On one side, cultural custodians view *Kembar Mayang* as an essential marker of solidarity and gratitude, integral to community cohesion. On the other, some religious figures question its compatibility with *tawhīd* and urge that certain elements be modified or abandoned (Mufarizuddin, 2020). These competing perspectives reflect a wider debate in contemporary Indonesia: how can local traditions adapt to new religious and social norms without losing their original spirit?

While scholars have examined *Kembar Mayang* from philosophical, sociological, and theological perspectives, the focus has largely remained on its role in Javanese society within Java itself. Recent research has started to shift attention toward the Javanese diaspora, pointing out that rituals like *Kembar Mayang* continue to evolve well beyond their homeland (Rahmawati, 2017; Woodward, 1991). Studies of Sumatra and Kalimantan, for instance, note how symbolic compromise, the removal of mystical elements, and the introduction of Islamic prayers are recurring features in the adaptation of wedding rituals. Other works highlight the importance of digital documentation and education in passing these traditions to younger generations (Puguh et al., 2023).

Yet, there remains a notable gap in the literature. Few studies have provided detailed accounts of how *Kembar Mayang* is transformed in the everyday lives of Javanese diaspora communities outside Java, especially in regions such as North Sumatra. Little is known about the actual strategies

families use to adapt rituals, how religious and cultural authorities negotiate compromise, or the specific innovations that ensure the tradition's survival in a digital age. Most previous work has been content to describe changes in form or function without probing the deeper negotiations and contestations that shape those changes.

This study responds to that gap by focusing on the *Kembar Mayang* tradition in the Javanese diaspora community of Aek Hitetoras, North Sumatra. It asks: How is the symbolic meaning of *Kembar Mayang* transformed as it is practiced outside of Java? What are the main forces—religious, social, and generational—that drive or hinder this transformation? And in what ways do community members negotiate the balance between preserving heritage, embracing religious reform, and meeting the challenges of modernity?

The research draws on in-depth interviews and field observations, providing a grounded, ethnographic account of the lived realities behind ritual change. It sets out to map not only the visible changes in materials and ceremony, but also the subtler shifts in meaning, belief, and community relationships. In doing so, the study aims to move beyond abstract theory and offer a concrete analysis of how tradition, faith, and innovation intersect in the everyday life of a contemporary Indonesian diaspora.

By foregrounding these local negotiations, this research contributes to a broader understanding of cultural adaptation and religious change in Southeast Asia. It also offers practical insights for those interested in tradition preservation, intergenerational education, and the management of diversity in rapidly changing societies. Ultimately, the case of *Kembar Mayang* in North Sumatra invites reflection on the possibilities—and the limits—of sustaining tradition in a world where identities are increasingly dynamic and plural.

B. Method

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate the transformation of symbolic meaning and the Islamization of the *Kembar Mayang* tradition within the Javanese diaspora community of Aek Hitetoras, North Sumatra. The research was grounded in the anthropology of religion, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of value negotiation and the interplay between cultural symbols and religious beliefs.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposive selection of community members. Key informants included a cultural leader (J.), a *Kembar Mayang* artisan (S.), a religious leader (Sp.), a respected community elder (Sy.), and a religious figure who is critical of the tradition (A.R.). The inclusion of both supporters and critics ensured that diverse viewpoints were represented and the full range of community dynamics was captured. All interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

Documentary materials, such as local archives and family photographs, were also reviewed to provide additional context and to support data triangulation.

Thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke, was employed to identify patterns related to symbolic transformation, material adaptation, religious resistance, and strategies for preserving the tradition. Coding was carried out systematically, and themes were interpreted with reference to relevant theoretical frameworks in the anthropology of religion and cultural adaptation. To strengthen the validity of the findings, member checking was conducted by inviting informants to review the interpretations. Data from interviews were cross-checked with documentary sources and supplemented through discussions with colleagues in related fields. While the study was limited by the number of available informants and differences in perspective within the community, the methodological approach provided a balanced and nuanced account of how *Kembar Mayang* continues to evolve amidst changing religious and social pressures.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Symbolic Transformation of *Kembar Mayang*

The *Kembar Mayang* ritual, which has long held a central place in Javanese wedding ceremonies, illustrates how cultural symbols are dynamically reinterpreted within diaspora communities. In Aek Hitetoras, this tradition retains its significance as a collective event, yet its meanings have undergone substantial transformation. Originally, *Kembar Mayang* was associated with prayers for protection, fertility, and cosmic harmony – values rooted in ancestral beliefs and local cosmology (Geertz, 1973; Schlehe & Yulianto, 2020). However, field research revealed that these symbolic associations have shifted significantly in the diaspora context, shaped by pressures of religious purification, generational change, and the increasing influence of digital culture.

During preparation, the ritual continues to serve as an important site for the transmission of communal values, especially *gotong royong* (collective cooperation). As J. (personal communication, 2025) explained, the making of *Kembar Mayang* remains a social activity that brings together families, neighbors, and young people, facilitating both the reinforcement of social bonds and the education of the next generation. “When we make *Kembar Mayang*, everyone participates – men, women, and especially young people, so they learn about our traditions and can continue them in the future” (J., 2025). This reflects findings from other studies which highlight how ritual practice can foster social capital and maintain cultural identity among diaspora populations (Sutherland, 2014; Storey, 1993).

A notable transformation has occurred in the spiritual dimension of the ritual. Whereas offerings and traditional incantations were once integral, these

have largely been replaced with Islamic prayers and explicit intentions. S., an artisan (personal communication, 2025), noted, “Now, before making *Kembar Mayang*, we begin with *basmalah* and recite *Al-Fātiḥah*, asking Allah for blessing and harmony in the marriage. The old offerings are no longer used; it’s all about prayer and good intentions.” This shift exemplifies a broader process of symbolic purification, in which Islamic monotheism (*tauḥīd*) is emphasized over earlier syncretic practices—a pattern noted by Mufarizuddin (2020) and Woodward (1991) in other contexts of cultural Islamization.

Installation of *Kembar Mayang* at the wedding venue also reflects this reinterpretation. The ornament, once believed to ward off misfortune, is now viewed primarily as a reminder of family harmony and gratitude to God. According to Sp. (personal communication, 2025), “Islam doesn’t prohibit tradition as long as it doesn’t conflict with monotheism. *Kembar Mayang* is now a symbol of good intentions and cultural heritage, not something mystical.” This active negotiation between tradition and religious reform echoes theoretical discussions by Geertz (1973) on how communities continually reinterpret ritual meaning to adapt to new social and doctrinal expectations.

A further adaptation is seen in the documentation of the ritual. Digital photography and sharing on social media have become common, especially among younger generations. Sy. (personal communication, 2025) remarked, “The young people love taking photos of *Kembar Mayang* and posting them online, so others know this is our tradition.” As noted by Puguh et al. (2023), digitalization has emerged as a crucial tool for sustaining heritage and connecting diasporic youth to ancestral practices.

These layers of adaptation are summarized in Table 1, which maps the progression from traditional meanings and practices to their present, Islamized forms. Local studies have documented regional variations in the materials, structure, and symbolism of *Kembar Mayang*, such as the distinctive adaptations found in Madiun (Sukirno, Safera, Pratama, & Darmadi, 2022), which underscore the dynamic and context-specific nature of this tradition.

Table 1. Stages and Symbolic Transformation in the *Kembar Mayang* Ritual

Stage	Field Practice	Traditional Meaning	Current (Islamization/Transformation)	Meaning
Preparation	Communal work, generational transmission	Collectivity, regeneration	Cultural identity, social capital	
Creation	Islamic prayer, no offerings	Sacrality, mystical protection	Gratitude, intention	purification of

Installation	Display at wedding venue	Ritual boundary, warding off evil	Reminder of harmony and blessing
Group Prayer	Qur'anic recitation (e.g., QS. Ar-Rum: 21)	Appealing to ancestral spirits	Islamic blessing, Qur'anic legitimacy
Documentation	Digital photos, social media sharing	Heirloom, family talisman	Digital heritage, promotion of local identity

As Table 1 demonstrates, each stage of the *Kembar Mayang* ritual has been reinterpreted to align with the community's evolving religious and cultural landscape. The persistence of *gotong royong* reflects a commitment to collective identity, while the replacement of offerings with Islamic prayer underscores the drive for religious legitimacy. The use of digital media not only ensures the ritual's survival, but also offers new possibilities for transmitting cultural values across generations. These findings affirm that the symbolic transformation of *Kembar Mayang* in Aek Hitetoras is an ongoing process, shaped by negotiation, adaptation, and the community's agency in responding to change.

This pattern of creative reinterpretation is consistent with broader observations in the anthropology of religion and diaspora studies, which recognize that ritual practices serve as dynamic arenas for negotiating both continuity and innovation (Geertz, 1973; Storey, 1993; Woodward, 1991). The case of *Kembar Mayang* thus highlights how diaspora communities actively shape their heritage, ensuring its relevance amid shifting religious and social conditions.

2. Strategies of Islamization and Ritual Adaptation

The symbolic transformation of the *Kembar Mayang* ritual has unfolded alongside deliberate strategies for reconciling tradition with the demands of Islamic orthodoxy. Fieldwork in Aek Hitetoras revealed that this process is neither uniform nor uncontested; instead, it is marked by negotiation, incremental adaptation, and the creative agency of community members. Rather than erasing their cultural heritage, local actors have pursued a path of reinterpretation—an approach that allows the ritual to persist, but with new meanings and practices that reflect prevailing religious sensibilities.

A central strategy has been the gradual replacement of mystical elements, such as offerings and traditional incantations, with Islamic prayers and expressions of gratitude. As articulated by Sp. (personal communication, 2025), a local religious leader, "Islam does not oppose tradition as long as it does not contradict the principle of *tauḥīd*. We encourage people to maintain these cultural

symbols, but we start everything with prayer and good intentions, not with old superstitions.” This position echoes the notion of “cultural *ijtihad*,” wherein communities exercise interpretive authority to harmonize local customs with Islamic law (Woodward, 1991; Mufarizuddin, 2020).

This process of adaptation is seldom abrupt. In many families, the move toward Islamization has occurred incrementally—first eliminating offerings, then substituting traditional chants with Qur’anic recitation or other Islamic supplications. According to S. (personal communication, 2025), an artisan responsible for preparing *Kembar Mayang*, “We used to have all kinds of rituals, but now, little by little, we let go of what doesn’t fit with our religion. What matters is our intention and the prayer for a harmonious marriage.” Such stepwise adjustment reflects the importance of community consensus, generational dialogue, and especially the involvement of women and youth as innovators in ritual practice. This mirrors broader findings on ritual adaptation in Javanese diaspora communities, where negotiation and compromise enable traditions to survive without undermining religious legitimacy (Schlehe & Yulianto, 2020).

Resource constraints have also driven creative adaptation. For example, the scarcity of palm leaves (*janur*)—a traditional material for *Kembar Mayang*—has led some families to use plastic or synthetic alternatives. S. noted, “As long as the prayer is right, it doesn’t matter if we use plastic. What counts is the meaning, not just the material.” This pragmatic approach illustrates how the ritual’s symbolic core can be preserved, even as external forms evolve in response to environmental and economic realities. The literature on ritual adaptation in diaspora likewise notes that material substitution is often interpreted not as a loss of authenticity, but as evidence of resilience and innovation (Storey, 1993; Sutherland, 2014).

Digital technology has emerged as a further strategy for adaptation and preservation. Younger generations increasingly document *Kembar Mayang* ceremonies through photographs and videos, sharing them on social media platforms to raise awareness and foster a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. As Sy. (personal communication, 2025) explained, “We want to show people—even those outside our village—that this is part of who we are. Posting pictures online helps our tradition survive and be recognized.” The role of digitalization in the regeneration of ritual and identity among diaspora youth has also been highlighted in recent studies (Puguh et al., 2023), which suggest that such innovations enable traditions to be transmitted and reinvented in contemporary contexts. These interrelated strategies—Islamization, incremental adaptation, material innovation, and digitalization—are summarized in Table 2. Together, they reveal a pattern of adaptation that is both responsive to external pressures and grounded in the agency of the community.

Table 2. Strategies and Adaptations in the Kembar Mayang Ritual

Aspect	Innovation/ Adaptation	Function/Significance
Material	Palm leaf, plastic, synthetic	Resource adaptation, resilience of tradition
Process	Islamic prayers, no offerings	Religious legitimacy, harmonization of values
Participation	Youth, women, generational dialogue	Intergenerational transmission, inclusivity
Media	Photography, social media	Promotion, preservation, identity regeneration

As illustrated in Table 2, the strategies adopted in Aek Hitetoras are neither static nor prescriptive; instead, they reflect an ongoing negotiation among multiple actors. Elders, artisans, religious leaders, women, and youth all contribute to the process of determining which aspects of the tradition are retained, transformed, or abandoned. The adaptation of *Kembar Mayang* thus emerges as a creative response to the intersecting demands of faith, community identity, and contemporary life.

These findings underscore broader theoretical perspectives on ritual adaptation and the Islamization of culture (Geertz, 1973; Woodward, 1991; Schlehe & Yulianto, 2020), emphasizing that tradition does not simply persist by inertia but is actively reshaped through local interpretation and innovation. The case of *Kembar Mayang* in Aek Hitetoras exemplifies how diaspora communities negotiate the balance between continuity and change, ensuring that their cultural heritage remains meaningful and viable in a rapidly evolving religious and social landscape.

3. Challenges, Contestation, and Strategies for Preservation

The adaptation and Islamization of the *Kembar Mayang* ritual in Aek Hitetoras has not unfolded without tension or debate. Fieldwork made clear that contestation persists within the community, centering on questions of legitimacy, religious conformity, and generational engagement. These internal debates reflect not only divergent interpretations of tradition and faith, but also the broader challenge of sustaining cultural heritage in the face of both external pressure and internal fragmentation.

Among tradition supporters, *Kembar Mayang* is viewed as a vital expression of identity and social cohesion. J. (personal communication, 2025), a cultural leader, emphasized, "If we abandon this, our children and grandchildren will forget who they are. For us, *Kembar Mayang* is not just a symbol but a source of strength for the whole community." This view echoes Geertz's (1973) observation that ritual symbolism often serves as a foundation for group

solidarity and cultural resilience, especially within migrant and diaspora settings.

On the other hand, critics – primarily from religious circles – question the compatibility of *Kembar Mayang* with Islamic doctrine. A.R. (personal communication, 2025), a religious leader who opposes the tradition, argued, “This kind of ritual risks leading people to misunderstand religion. Islam teaches that only Allah grants safety – not symbols or objects. Anything not based on the Qur’an or Sunnah is best left behind.” Such voices reflect the enduring influence of reformist discourse, which prioritizes religious purity and questions the legitimacy of inherited practices (Mufarizuddin, 2020; Ridwan & Basith, 2021).

These opposing stances generate a dialectic that plays out both in private conversations and public discussion, illustrating how tradition is continually renegotiated. The result has been a variety of strategies to address both resistance and declining youth interest. Open dialogue between cultural and religious leaders, for example, has proven essential for mediating disputes and clarifying the symbolic boundaries of the ritual. J. (2025) described instances of “community meetings where we explain the meaning behind each stage, and seek input so everyone feels included and understood.” Another prominent strategy involves intergenerational education. By integrating tradition into school activities, community workshops, and online forums, local leaders aim to ensure that young people remain engaged. This aligns with observations by Pertiwi et al. (2022) and Puguh et al. (2023), who highlight the role of education and digital innovation in revitalizing ritual participation among diaspora youth.

Digital documentation and promotion have also become central to sustaining the tradition. As Sy. (personal communication, 2025) explained, “Sharing photos and stories on social media makes our children proud and shows others that our tradition is alive.” Such efforts not only widen the reach of *Kembar Mayang* but also foster a sense of belonging and pride among the younger generation, supporting Sutherland’s (2014) findings on digital strategies for tradition preservation in diaspora communities. Table 3 summarizes the principal challenges encountered by the community and the solutions developed to address them.

Table 3. Challenges and Solutions in Preserving the *Kembar Mayang* Tradition

Challenge	Solution/Strategy	Outcome/Benefit
Religious resistance	Dialogue, removal of offerings	Greater acceptance, social harmony
Youth disengagement	Education, digital engagement	Tradition regeneration, value transmission
Modernization, scarce materials	Innovation in materials, online promotion	Sustainability, expanded reach

Internal tensions	Intergenerational discussion	Creative adaptation, cultural hybridization
-------------------	---------------------------------	--

As Table 3 indicates, the persistence of *Kembar Mayang* is contingent upon the community's ability to engage in open communication, adapt to changing conditions, and innovate in the face of challenge. While the process is not free from disagreement, the willingness to negotiate and compromise has allowed the ritual to survive and remain meaningful.

These findings underscore the argument that tradition is never static but is continually shaped through contestation, adaptation, and collaboration. The case of Aek Hitetoras highlights how community agency and flexible strategies can sustain cultural heritage amid religious reform, generational change, and the pressures of modern life. In this, the community exemplifies broader trends identified in the anthropology of religion and diaspora studies: rather than disappearing under pressure, ritual traditions may be revitalized and reimagined—provided they remain open to reinterpretation and active participation by all members (Geertz, 1973; Sutherland, 2014; Puguh et al., 2023).

4. Comparative Perspectives and Theoretical Reflections

The experience of *Kembar Mayang* in Aek Hitetoras is not unique; similar patterns of negotiation, adaptation, and contestation are found across Javanese diaspora communities both within Indonesia and abroad. Comparative analysis highlights how different settings, resources, and social pressures give rise to distinct trajectories of ritual transformation—yet also reveal common strategies that sustain tradition in the face of change.

In Sumatra and Kalimantan, for instance, the Islamization of ritual symbols often proceeds through ongoing compromise between religious and cultural authorities. As reported by Lestary et al. (2024) and Yogie (2019), shifts in wedding practices have involved the substitution of traditional materials with more accessible alternatives, the removal of offerings, and the inclusion of Islamic prayers. Similar processes of negotiation and adaptation have been observed among Javanese communities in Southeast Sulawesi, where local marriage rituals continue to evolve in response to contemporary challenges (Oktari, Salimin Afamery, & Irawaty, 2024). These changes typically unfold in tandem with efforts to maintain social cohesion, suggesting that adaptation is not driven solely by doctrinal concerns but by a pragmatic commitment to communal harmony.

Similar dynamics are observed among Javanese diaspora communities in Japan and Suriname. Research by Puguh et al. (2023) and Sutherland (2014) demonstrates that digitalization, online education, and public cultural festivals play a central role in regenerating ritual meaning and fostering community identity among younger generations. In these international contexts, *Kembar Mayang* is often recast as a symbol of shared heritage—one that is detached from

its former mystical connotations and reimagined to fit new multicultural environments. The embrace of “hybrid” identities and the creative repurposing of tradition align with Storey’s (1993) observations on cultural adaptation and the agency of diaspora actors.

These comparative cases reinforce the view that the transformation of *Kembar Mayang* is both context-dependent and shaped by a set of recurring strategies: selective Islamization, material innovation, generational education, and digital promotion. Table 4 synthesizes these patterns, drawing together findings from Aek Hitetoras and other Javanese diaspora communities.

Table 4. Comparative Adaptations of *Kembar Mayang* Across Javanese Diaspora Communities

Community/Region	Key Strategies	Adaptation	Outcomes/Benefits
Sumatra/Kalimantan	Islamization, substitution	material	Social cohesion, minimized conflict
Japan	Digitalization, education	online	Regeneration, identity promotion
Suriname	Cultural museums	festivals,	Flexible identity, global community ties
Aek Hitetoras	Islamic prayers, innovation, digital media	material	Ritual continuity, harmonious adaptation

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Geertz’s (1973) argument that local rituals are not static relics, but active arenas for the creation and negotiation of shared meaning. The ongoing transformation of *Kembar Mayang* affirms the capacity of Javanese communities—both at home and in diaspora—to reinterpret and adapt their heritage without losing sight of its original significance. This reflects the broader phenomenon of “recontextualization,” where local symbols are continually renewed through dialogue, innovation, and the accommodation of new religious, social, and technological realities (Woodward, 1991; Nadia Aurora et al., 2019). Recent research further illustrates how the recontextualization of rituals like *Kembar Mayang* is not simply a matter of form, but involves ongoing negotiation of meaning in new social environments (Nadia Aurora, Syah, & Wakidi, 2019). At the same time, the Aek Hitetoras case demonstrates that Islamization need not entail the erasure of tradition. Instead, it often involves the careful selection and reinterpretation of symbolic elements, guided by a pragmatic desire to preserve both religious integrity and community solidarity. This “cultural *ijtihad*,” as conceptualized by Woodward (1991), emerges as a vital process through which communities mediate between inherited custom and evolving religious norms.

The integration of digital tools and intergenerational education has proven particularly effective in sustaining and revitalizing ritual traditions

among diaspora youth (Puguh et al., 2023; Sutherland, 2014). As observed in Aek Hitetoras and elsewhere, these innovations not only safeguard cultural memory but also expand the reach and relevance of tradition in an era marked by rapid social and technological change. Thus, the comparative and theoretical reflections presented here affirm that tradition, far from being an unchanging artifact, is a living resource—continuously negotiated, reinvented, and transmitted by communities responding creatively to the pressures and possibilities of their time. The case of *Kembar Mayang* thus provides a compelling lens for understanding broader processes of cultural adaptation, religious negotiation, and identity formation in plural societies.

D. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the *Kembar Mayang* tradition in the Javanese diaspora community of Aek Hitetoras is far from static. Rather, it is a living ritual practice that has been dynamically transformed through negotiation, adaptation, and innovation. Fieldwork revealed that the symbolic meanings of *Kembar Mayang*—once bound to ancestral cosmology and mystical beliefs—have been deliberately reinterpreted in light of contemporary Islamic values, changing social norms, and the realities of diaspora life. The ritual's persistence is rooted not simply in the conservation of form, but in the community's ongoing effort to reconcile religious orthodoxy with the desire to maintain collective identity.

A key finding is that the process of Islamization in Aek Hitetoras has not led to the abandonment of tradition. Instead, it has encouraged a creative reinterpretation of ritual elements: offerings and incantations have been replaced with prayers and Qur'anic recitation, while the meaning of *Kembar Mayang* itself has shifted from an object of mystical protection to a symbol of gratitude, harmony, and social solidarity. The adaptation has been shaped by a pragmatic approach, as seen in the acceptance of new materials when traditional resources are unavailable, and the increasing use of digital media to document and promote the ritual among younger generations. These patterns echo developments in other Javanese diaspora communities, where strategies such as incremental adaptation, intergenerational education, open dialogue, and digital innovation have enabled tradition to survive in the face of both religious reform and rapid modernization. The case of Aek Hitetoras illustrates that contestation and negotiation are not threats to tradition, but rather essential mechanisms through which it is continually renewed and made relevant to new contexts.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the anthropology of religion and diaspora studies by reaffirming that local rituals function as dynamic arenas of meaning-making, subject to constant reinterpretation through cultural *ijtihad* and recontextualization. The findings highlight the agency of communities in navigating tensions between continuity and change, and in forging adaptive

strategies that sustain heritage while accommodating shifting religious, social, and technological landscapes. Practically, the study suggests that efforts to preserve and revitalize cultural traditions in migrant and diaspora settings must embrace flexibility, openness to dialogue, and the creative use of new media. Initiatives that foster collaboration between cultural and religious leaders, invest in intergenerational education, and leverage digital tools can ensure that rituals such as *Kembar Mayang* remain both meaningful and resilient.

Future research should further explore the diversity of experiences across Javanese and other diaspora communities, using longitudinal and comparative approaches to examine how digitalization, education, and shifting identities shape the preservation and transformation of tradition over time. By extending the lens beyond a single locality, scholars can deepen our understanding of the evolving interplay between religion, culture, and identity in plural and mobile societies.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books.
- Irawanto, D. W., Ramsey, P. L., & Ryan, J. C. (2011). Challenge of leading in Javanese culture. *Asian Ethnicity*, 12(2), 125-139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2011.571829>
- Joko. (2025, April 16). *Wawancara Tokoh Adat* [Personal communication].
- Lestary, A., Naldo, J., & Yasmin, N. (2024). Kembar Mayang Tradition in Javanese Wedding Ceremony in Dusun VI, Nagur Village, Tanjung Beringin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency. *Warisan: Journal of History and Cultural Heritage*, 5(1), 82-89. <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v5i1.2220>
- Mufarizuddin, M. (2020). Dakwah Kultural dan Purifikasi Tradisi Lokal. *Jurnal Dakwah dan Budaya*, 22(1), 211-215.
- Nadia Aurora, F., Syah, I., & Wakidi. (2019). Kembar Mayang Dalam Upacara Adat Perkawinan Jawa Di Desa Nambahrejo Kecamatan Kotagajah Kabupaten Lampung Tengah. *Jurnal Kebudayaan*, 2(1), 12.
- Oktari, H. D., Salimin Afamery, & Irawaty. (2024). Perkawinan Menurut Adat Jawa pada Masyarakat Desa Margacinta Kabupaten Konawe Selatan. *Mores: Jurnal Pendidikan, Moral dan Kewarganegaraan*, 2(2), 73-80. <https://doi.org/10.36709/mores.v2i2.26>

- Pertiwi, L., Harahap, R., Wuriyani, E. P., & Muhardinata, I. (2022). Kajian Makna Simbolik dalam Kembar Mayang pada Konteks Pernikahan Adat Jawa sebagai Pengayaan Bahan Ajar di Sekolah SD Negeri 106158. *SAP (Susunan Artikel Pendidikan)*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.30998/sap.v7i1.12872>
- Puguh, D. R., Utama, M. P., & Mufidah, R. (2023). Acceptance of Javanese Karawitan in Japan: Appreciation of traditional culture and community activities. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2217586>
- Rahmawati, I. (2017). Islamisasi Tradisi dan Dinamika Sosial. *Jurnal Kebudayaan*, 18(2), 99–112.
- Ridwan, R., & Basith, A. (2021). The Myth of Determining Mate and Wedding Day in The Tradition of The Kejawen Community, Central Java, Indonesia. *International Journal of Social Science and Religion (IJSSR)*, 297–318. <https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssr.v2i3.88>
- Ritongah, A. (2025, July 16). *Wawancara Tokoh Agama* [Personal communication].
- Schlehe, J., & Yulianto, V. I. (2020). An anthropology of waste: Morality and social mobilisation in Java. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 48(140), 40–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2019.1654225>
- Storey, J. D. (1993). Mythology, narrative, and discourse in Javanese wayang towards cross-level theories for the new development paradigm. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 3(2), 30–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292989309359581>
- Sukirno, N. H. R., Safera, D., Pratama, A., & Darmadi, D. (2022). Pernikahan Adat Jawa mengenai Tradisi Turun Temurun Pecah Telur Dan Kembang Mayang di Daerah Desa Ketawang Kecamatan Dolopo Kabupaten Madiun. *Jurnal Review Pendidikan dan Pengajaran*, 5(2), 211–215. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jrpp.v5i2.10121>
- Suparlan. (2025, April 25). *Wawancara Pengrajin Kembar Mayang* [Personal communication].
- Sutherland, H. (2014). The Javanese in Suriname: A diaspora community. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 45(2), 301–324.
- Woodward, M. R. (1991). Javanism, Islam and the plurality of ethnography. *Anthropological Forum*, 6(3), 339–363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.1991.9967417>
- Yogie, Y. (2019). Ritual, simbol, dan identitas: Transformasi adat Jawa di Kalimantan. *Jurnal Antropologi Indonesia*, 40(1), 92–101.