

THE EXISTENCE OF THE KELE DANCE IN THE CIAMIS REGENCY COMMUNITY

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Abstract *This study aims to examine the presence on the background of the creation of the Kele Dance, its existence within the Ciamis Regency community, and the factors that support and hinder its sustainability, drawing on perspectives from dance anthropology and urban anthropology. This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation and a review of relevant literature. The informants included a choreographer, a dancer, and a community activist, selected to data source triangulation. The findings indicate that the Kele Dance was created in 2006 by Raden Rachmajati Nilakoesoemah (Neng Peking). The Kele Dance was inspired by traditional activities of the Ciamis community in the past, particularly the practice of collecting water from natural springs using kele (bamboo containers). The existence of the Kele Dance continues to be maintained, as indicated by its relatively consistent performance frequency. Factors supporting the sustainability of the Kele Dance include the active contributions of the choreographer, the regeneration of dancers within local studios (sanggar), the participation of younger generations, and the flexibility of its performance contexts. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include changes in policymakers, insufficient dissemination to the wider community, and restricted distribution of learning resources.*

Keyword:

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1. Introduction

Ciamis Regency, located in West Java Province, is known for its rich cultural heritage, which strongly preserves local wisdom and Sundanese traditions (Erwina et al., 2023). From an anthropological perspective, Ciamis is understood not only as a geographical space but also as a dynamic social space, where interactions between tradition and modernity continuously take place (Nurrohman et al., 2024). According to Harsojo, (in Nurdiyana & Indriyani, 2023: pages 2) anthropology is the study of humans as social beings, particularly their physical characteristics, modes of production, traditions, and values that shape relationships and distinguish one group from another. From an urban anthropological perspective, (Manuel Castells, 1977, as cited in Espinosa, 2024) conceptualizes urban communities as systems of values, norms, and social

relations that possess specific historical characteristics, along with their own organizational logic and patterns of transformation. This perspective highlights the dynamic nature of social change, encompassing shifts in social organization, values, and norms, within urban contexts, rather than viewing them as static. Historically and culturally, Ciamis has been known recognized as a region that continues to preserve its traditions, including oral traditions of wawacan and Galuh folklore the traditional ceremonies of Nyangku and Misalin, and traditional performing arts such as the Kele Dance, Bebegig Sukamantri, and Ronggeng Gunung (Hervista, 2025). Arts are an integral part of culture, expressed through various forms such as visual arts, music, dance, theatre, and literature (R. Saputra et al., 2024). Dance, in particular, serves as a medium for expressing emotions, conveying narratives, and embodying cultural values through patterned movement (Kasmahidayat et al., 2025). In this sense, dance functions as a significant form of cultural expression that represents social experiences, symbolic meanings, and human interactions with the environment and tradition (Rizqi, 2024). In an increasingly dynamic society, particularly in regions undergoing a transition toward modern life, dance has undergone a process of adaptation and innovation. This has given rise to various creative dance forms that remain rooted in tradition yet are adapted to the needs of the times. Consequently, this dynamic encourages artists to create new dance works.

There is an artist in Ciamis Regency named Raden Rachmajati Nilakoesoemah, who is recognized as a dancer, choreographer, and costume designer. In the field of choreography, she has produced numerous works, particularly in contemporary dance. Contemporary dance is a form of dance that lacks the rigid rules typically found in traditional dance (Rahmadani & Syefriani, 2024). In addition, within the category of tradition based creative dance, which includes existing dances or dances that have been adapted into new forms without altering their original structure, these creative dances are also often created in new forms resulting from artistic exploration (D. N. Saputra, 2024), one of her most notable works is the Kele Dance, created in 2006. To this day, Neng Peking remains actively engaged in artistic production and is dedicated to the field of dance as the manager of Sanggar Titik Dua Studio in Ciamis Regency. This aligns with (Suherman et al., 2025), who describe a *sanggar* as a space or community, either individual or collective, where structured activities, programs, and shared goals are organized to generate new artistic ideas. These ideas have developed in ways that allow the Kele Dance to be accepted and appreciated by the wider community.

Through her *sanggar*, Neng Peking continues to mentor and regenerate dancers, while playing a significant role in preserving and developing the Kele Dance as one of her signature works. The Kele Dance was inspired by the daily practices of earlier generations, who collected water from natural springs using *lodong* (bamboo containers). According to Sumaryono (2011) (in Vawaka et al., 2018) Dance anthropology is understood as a field that examines dance as a cultural product closely related to community practices). The Kele Dance can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of cultural values, particularly those related to the relationship between humans, nature, and ancestors. The use of the kele as a water container in the dance functions not only as an aesthetic element but also carries deep philosophical meanings, symbolizing purification and life (Wawancara Neng Peking, 30 March, 2026). Furthermore, from an urban anthropological perspective, the existence of the Kele Dance cannot be separated from the evolving social dynamics of the Ciamis community. Social transformation, shifting patterns of cultural consumption, and the influence of globalization are factors affecting the existence of this art form.

Studies on the Kele Dance remain limited, with previous research primarily focusing on aspects of creation and performance form. Comprehensive studies that examine its existence within the broader social context, particularly through the integrated perspectives of dance anthropology and urban anthropology, are still scarce. The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which combines dance anthropology and urban anthropology to explore the existence of the Kele Dance, incorporating the perspectives of the choreographer, a dancer, and a community activist. Based on these issues, this study addresses the background of the creation of the Kele Dance at Sanggar Titik Dua Studio, the existence of the Kele Dance as recognized by the Ciamis Regency community, as well as the factors that support and hinder its sustainability. This study is significant as it seeks to examine the Kele Dance in depth through the lenses of dance anthropology and urban anthropology. It aims to describe the background of its creation, analyze its existence within the Ciamis community, and identify the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its sustainability. This study is expected to contribute to the development of dance anthropology and urban anthropology, particularly in understanding dance as a cultural product within dynamic social contexts. Furthermore, it is anticipated to provide a comprehensive account of the Kele Dance, covering its historical background, existence, and sustainability factors, while also serving as a reference for artists, local government, and the community in efforts to preserve and develop the Kele Dance as a cultural identity of Ciamis Regency.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. This study is framed by the perspectives of dance anthropology and urban anthropology. Assyakurrohim et al. (2022)(in Wulandari et al., 2024) explain that qualitative research is used to explore a phenomenon in depth through descriptive data in the form of words. The qualitative method was chosen because this study aims to gain an in depth understanding of the phenomenon of the existence of the Kele Dance in the community of Ciamis Regency. The research results are then presented in the form of descriptions that provide an understanding of the presence of the Kele Dance in the community of Ciamis Regency (Leksono, 2013). This research was conducted at the Studio Titik Dua in Ciamis Regency in March 2026. The informants consisted of three categories: Raden Rachmajati Nilakoesoemah (Neng Peking) as the creator and choreographer of the Kele Dance, Dini Dian Anggraeni as a Kele dancer, and Wida Wardah as a community activist. The object of the study was the Kele Dance in Ciamis Regency.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and a literature review. Observation was conducted indirectly through the examination of documents in the form of photographs, videos, and archives related to the Kele Dance obtained from the participants, as no rehearsals or performances took place during the research period. However, the researcher also conducted additional observations of the Kele Dance performances on May 2–3, 2026, to gather supporting data for the study. Interviews were conducted with all three informants using a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexible and open-ended questioning (Sugiyono, 2018, as cited in Wanta et al., 2022) The type of question used is an open ended question; is one whose answer is broad in nature and allows the subject the freedom to provide a wealth of in-depth information (Herdiansyah, 2013). The Informants interviewed were Neng Peking on March 9 and March 30, 2026; with Dini Dian Anggraeni on March 13, 2026; and with Wida Wardah on March 14, 2026. The interviews in this study were recorded using an audio device on a mobile phone and conducted face to face with the informants. Documentation was used

to collect photographs, recordings, and archival materials related to the Kele Dance. In addition, a literature review was conducted by analyzing secondary sources such as books, journal articles, previous studies and archival materials related to the arts to complement the primary data, strengthen the theoretical framework, and support data analyst in the research.

The data analysis technique employed in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied triangulation techniques. According to Sugiyono (as cited in Hermawan, 2016), triangulation is a method of data collection that integrates various techniques and sources. Source triangulation is used to test the credibility of data obtained from three sources (Sugiyono, 2009). Meanwhile, methodological triangulation involves research that uses different data collection methods to obtain data from the same source in order to test the credibility of the data through data verification (Ule et al., 2023). This approach aims to enhance the credibility of the data and strengthen the overall findings of the study (Fikri et al., 2025).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 The Kele Dance as Inspired by the Nyangku Traditional Ceremony

The Kele Dance is inspired by the Nyangku Traditional Ceremony in Ciamis Regency (Frame, 2025). "The Nyangku Traditional Ceremony is a traditional ritual performed once a year to ritually cleanse artifacts from Panjalu Kingdom." (Sujaya, 2018). In this context, the concept of "inspiration" is a process that drives or stimulates the mind to take action, particularly to engage in creative activities (Antara & Yogantari, 2018). The people of Panjalu have always used a kele when carrying water, just as they do in the Nyangku Traditional Ceremony. As Rezza Fauzi's statement (as cited in Khairunnisa et al., 2024), which explains that kele functions as a container for water used in the purification process during the Nyangku Traditional Ceremony. Nevertheless, the Kele Dance is not directly involved in the Nyangku traditional ceremony, as it is never performed within the ritual context and serves solely as a source of inspiration. Wida Wardah (community activist) emphasized that the Kele Dance has never been performed as part of the Nyangku ceremony, despite its close association with it (Wida Wardah, 14 March, 2026). This indicates that the relationship between the dance and the ceremony is indirect. The inspiration drawn from the Nyangku tradition lies primarily in its philosophical and visual aspects rather than its sacred ritual elements. In other words, the Kele Dance adopts the symbolic meanings and material elements, particularly the use of kele and the activity of collecting water, without incorporating the ritual practices themselves. This is further supported by Dini Dian Anggraeni (2026), who stated that "the dance draws only on the philosophy, properties, and the activity of water collection associated with the tradition." (Interview, 13 March, 2026) Therefore, the Kele Dance is not considered sacred; rather, it represents a reinterpretation of cultural practices in the form of a staged performance.

3.2 Background of the Creation of the Kele Dance

The Kele Dance emerged from a creative process that developed at Sanggar Studio Titik Dua, a dance studio in Ciamis Regency established in 1995. The studio was founded by Raden Rachmajati Nila Koesoemah commonly known as Neng Peking, with the aim of introducing and fostering traditional, creative, and contemporary dance to the community. Studio Titik Dua actively serves as a space for dance training and development for people of all ages in Ciamis. Neng Peking's academic and artistic background subsequently influenced the creation of the Kele

Dance. The Kele Dance was created in 2006 within the context of a traditional arts development program organized by the West Java Office of Tourism and Culture. This initiative involved collaboration between alumni of ISBI Bandung and Taman Budaya West Java. The Kele Dance was created through a collaboration among three artists from ISBI specializing in different art forms: Neng Peking in dance, Kang Yuyus in theater, and Kang Endi in traditional music. The three worked together to create an artistic performance from Ciamis Regency titled *Ngarumat* (Official, 2021). At that time, the Kele Dance was performed by six dancers from Buniseuri Junior High School. In the *Ngarumat* performance, the Kele Dance was combined with the Bebegig Sukamantri art form a dance tradition from Ciamis Regency that uses masks and natural props (Rostika et al., 2020). The performance was held at the West Java Cultural Park in Bandung, specifically at the Dago Tea House indoor theater. This aligns with (Novrianti & Indrayuda, 2024), who argue that dance is often created to represent regional identity, reflecting the vision, mission, and value system that develops within a particular community.

At that time, the artistic landscape in Ciamis Regency was predominantly characterized by community-based art forms and *helaran* (processional performances), which are communal and open in nature. In contrast, proscenium-based dance performances had not yet developed optimally. This context became one of the key underlying factors that motivated Neng Peking in the creation of the Kele Dance. She stated that the need for stage-based dance performances was the main reason for the emergence of this work, as reflected in her interview: "In Ciamis, proscenium dance performances are still limited. Therefore, I created the Kele Dance" (Neng Peking, March 9, 2026). This indicates a need for more modern and structured forms of dance performance. The proscenium stage, also known as *panggung bingkai* (framed stage), is characterized by a viewing arrangement in which the audience observes the performance through a frame or proscenium arch. This architectural structure separates the auditorium from the stage, with seating arranged to direct the audience's focus toward the framed performance space (Rosmiati & Rafia, 2021). This explanation suggests that the Kele Dance emerged as a response to the artistic needs of a community undergoing transformation, particularly in the context of a transition toward a semi-urban society. The perspective urban anthropology shows that, this condition can be understood as part of a broader process of cultural transformation, in which communities no longer rely solely on collective traditional art forms but also begin to require more structured performances that can be presented on formal stages. Moreover, the creation process of the Kele Dance involved collaboration across multiple artistic disciplines, including dance, theatre, and karawitan (traditional music). Interdisciplinary collaboration is the integration of knowledge and methods from two or more different disciplines to solve a problem or answer a research question (Nazifa et al., 2024). This collaboration demonstrates social interaction among artists with different academic backgrounds in creating a performance art piece. This process is carried out through discussions, the exchange of ideas, and the division of roles in choreographing dance movements, the dramatic elements of the performance, and the musical accompaniment. Therefore, the Kele Dance is not merely a dance performance, but also a cultural product that emerged from social interaction and collaboration among artists (Khairunnisa et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this idea originated from Neng Peking's observation of the Nyangku Traditional Ceremony, where she saw the community using a kele as a tool to draw water from a spring. Neng Peking explained that the purpose of creating the Kele Dance was to reintroduce the younger generation to how people lived in the past, particularly in the activity of drawing water from a spring using a bamboo container. In an interview, she stated that "I want to bring everyday

culture into the modern world, because children today don't know how water was collected in the past." (Interview with Neng Peking, May 9, 2026). This observation served as the inspiration for the creation of the Kele Dance. The Kele Dance serves as a medium for cultural education that bridges the past and the present. Thus, it can be concluded that the background behind the creation of the Kele Dance was influenced by several key factors: the need for a stage dance form, the desire to highlight local culture, and the social conditions of a community undergoing change. This demonstrates that the Kele Dance is the result of a creative process that is not merely aesthetic but also possesses strong social and cultural dimensions.

3.3 Conceptual and Symbolic Analysis of the Kele Dance

This analysis extends previous studies by examining the concept and symbolic meaning of the Kele Dance, including the background of the selection of properties, movements, floor patterns, costumes, and musical accompaniment. The creation of the Kele Dance is derived from the daily activities of the Sundanese community, particularly the use of *lodong* to collect water. In this he *lodong*, or kele, functions not only as a dance property but also as a symbol of life. A symbol of life manifested through efforts to introduce bamboo to future generations and to demonstrate one of bamboo's functions in daily community life. The creative process of the Kele Dance began with the selection of appropriate bamboo, followed by an exploration of the philosophical meanings embedded within it. In the Kele Dance, bamboo holds philosophical significance as a symbol of strength and closeness to community life. Bamboo is a sturdy plant, and every part of it is useful, from the roots to the leaves. Bamboo is seen as something close to and beneficial for human life, and this value is reflected in the props and concepts of the Kele Dance. The bamboo used for Kele Dance props is the Gombong, is a large sized bamboo with yellowish-green culms featuring yellow stripes running parallel to the culms (Walid, 2019). The bamboo used as a dance property must be soaked in water for approximately three months to ensure its durability, as untreated bamboo is prone to decay. Initially, Neng Peking expressed uncertainty regarding the name of the dance, since the people of Ciamis are more familiar with the term *lodong* to refer to the bamboo container. However, she aimed to choose a name that would be distinctive, authentic, and unique. To address this, Neng Peking consulted an ISBI Bandung theatre lecturer, Mr. Artur Esnalan, who is originally from Majalengka. He explained that in Majalengka, *lodong* is commonly referred to as kele (interview, Neng Peking, 2026). Based on this insight, Neng Peking named the dance the Kele Dance, a name that continues to be used to this day. Kele is a container made of bamboo, characterized by its elongated shape and a hollow section used to hold water. In addition, the use of kele as a dance property presents a significant challenge, particularly in maintaining balance while handling the bamboo. This requires consistent and disciplined practice. Water, as a symbol of life, is transformed into jasmine flowers in the performance of the Kele Dance, as not all stages allow the use of water or fire as properties. Symbolically, both water and jasmine share similar meanings, representing purity, renewal, and harmony. The substitution of water with jasmine in the performance reflects an adaptation to stage constraints. While water embodies qualities of cleansing and freshness, jasmine conveys a similar symbolic function through its fragrance, associated with purification and refinement. Although they differ in physical form, both elements maintain equivalent symbolic meanings. Symbolically, the two have different meanings, yet both represent the concept of purification in different ways; water is seen as a symbol of purification due to its cleansing properties, while the jasmine flower is seen as a symbol of purity because of its fragrance, which symbolizes sincerity and spirituality. This indicates that the Kele Dance undergoes a process of transformation

without losing its essential meaning. In addition to kele and jasmine, the dancers also use *hanjuang* leaves or Palm lily (held during the performance) and waregu leaves (worn as a head accessory).



Figure 1. Bamboo as the Main Dance Property
Source: Dwi Rahmalia Nur'aini, 2026

“From that point, I drew inspiration from Sundanese cultural elements, particularly those associated with bamboo, such as *hanjuang* leaves or Palm lily. I chose *hanjuang* leaves because, when I was a child, I was often ill, and my mother would sprinkle water on me using these leaves. In addition, I used *waregu* leaves, which were also employed in the Bebegig performance at that time, as they can remain fresh for one to three days, making them suitable for use in dance. Furthermore, I incorporated *kebaya* and *sinjang* to emphasize the Sundanese identity, as I wanted the performance to clearly represent Sundanese people and culture.” (Interview, Neng Peking, March 9, 2026). The daily activities of the Sundanese community were then transformed into the foundational ideas for the creation of the dance, which were further developed into movements carrying both aesthetic and symbolic meanings. The movements in the Kele Dance include *jengke* (tiptoe movement), *nyiuk* (scooping water), *sibanyo* (washing the face), *kepret* (sprinkling or flicking water), and *suay* (clearing or parting vegetation). These movements reflect the activity of collecting water, which, within the context of agrarian communities, holds significant meaning as a source of life. These movements not only demonstrate aesthetic qualities but also embody the values of agrarian life, such as hard work, balance, and harmonious relationships between humans and nature. The duration of the Kele Dance is adaptable to the needs of the performance context, with an original duration of approximately 10 minutes. The sequence of movements may be adjusted, either expanded or reduced, without omitting the core movements. The dance can be performed by a minimum of five dancers, with no fixed maximum number of performers. The Kele Dance is adaptable to various performance contexts and can be staged with a large number of dancers, ranging from small groups to hundreds or even thousands of performers. In addition, Neng Peking often prefers odd-numbered formations, typically seven dancers, as these are considered more aesthetically pleasing in terms of floor patterns. The floor patterns in the Kele Dance are generally designed for group performance, requiring strong collaboration among dancers. Individualistic behavior is discouraged, as the choreography emphasizes collective harmony. This reflects the social values embedded in the dance, where collective achievement is prioritized over individual ambition, such values resonate with the

Sundanese principle of *silih asuh* (mutual care and protection), which is a distinctive feature of Sundanese culture (Dharsono et al., 2025).

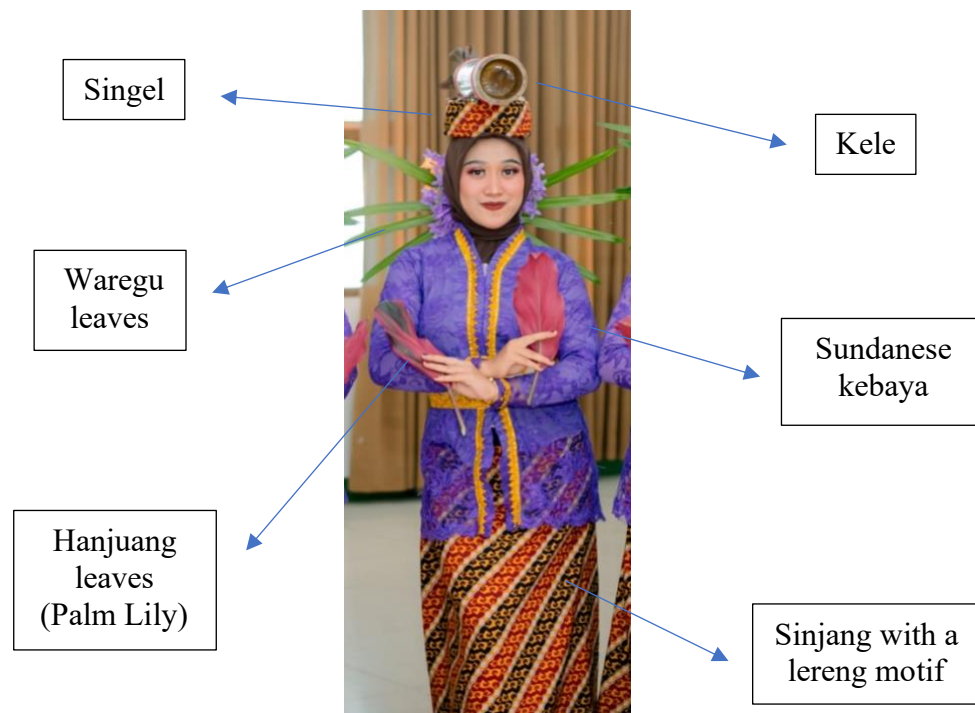


Figure 2. Dance Properties and Costumes in the Kele Dance Performance
Source: Neng Peking Documentation, 2025

Initially, the Kele Dance used a red kebaya as its primary costume. However, over time, the use of this color has become flexible and is now adapted to the theme of the event. For example, during the commemoration of the Ciamis Regency anniversary, purple is commonly used; for rituals or traditional ceremonies, white is preferred; while for entertainment performances, brighter colors such as red are typically chosen. In addition, the dancers wear a *sinjang*, a traditional Sundanese cloth, featuring the *lereng* motif. Initially, the Kele Dance used the Calung Renteng, combined with the bedug drum and the vocals of the sinden. The Calung Renteng, as a traditional musical instrument of West Java, is a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved, given that its existence is currently on the decline (Marwondo et al., 2022). Although Neng Peking personally felt it was sufficiently suitable, the music arranger assessed that there were still shortcomings, leading to changes. Subsequently, the musical accompaniment was changed to Celempungan music; however, Neng Peking felt that the character of this music was not quite suitable because it was considered too sweet and did not yet represent the desired nuance. Celempungan is a traditional art form of West Java that evolved from the *celempung*. In performances of the medium sized celempung ensemble, it is used to accompany kawih (vocal music), performed by a juru kawih or pesinden (Walid, 2019). Additionally, the previous music arranger had passed away, so Neng Peking decided to change music arrangers. Consequently, another change was made by incorporating Genjring Ronyok music from Kawali, using the *terebang/bangreng* (a type of tambourine) and combined with verses or lyrics centered on the theme of water. Genjring Ronyok is a traditional art form that has existed since Islam began to spread in the village of Kawali. Genjring Ronyok art consists of Islamic sholawat and poems, and this art form is always performed during major local and national events, celebrations, and

holidays (Sriningsih et al., 2021). In a previous study (Khairunnisa et al., 2024), the verses or lyrics of the Kele Dance music were as follows:

Ngala cai ulah gampang
Ulah kénah-kénah hérang
Tingal heula ku urang
Tingal heula ku urang
Bisi aya najis nyangsang

[Don't take getting water for granted,
Just because the water is clear,
Look at it first,
Look at it first,
In case there's still dirt clinging to it]

To date, this musical accompaniment continues to be used in Kele Dance performances. Nevertheless, Neng Peking remains open to further development and refinement of the musical composition in the future. In performance practice, the music is generally performed live; however, in certain situations, recorded music (e.g., MP3) may also be used, depending on the needs of the event. Therefore, it can be concluded that the concept of the Kele Dance is not only aesthetic in nature but also embodies philosophical values rooted in everyday life. The Kele Dance serves as a medium for conveying messages about the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the importance of maintaining balance in life.

3.4 The Existence of the Kele Dance in the Ciamis Regency Community

According to Abidin Zaenal in (Am et al., 2025), existence is the essence of humanity as individuals who are conscious of themselves, their freedom, and their ability to actualize their inner potentials. The existence of the Kele dance is evident in the community's ability to continuously actualize cultural values through the preservation and transformation of the dance performance. The existence of the Kele Dance can be viewed from two main perspectives: that of the artists and that of the community. From the artists' perspective, the Kele Dance continues to be actively performed in various contexts, both within and beyond Ciamis Regency. It is frequently presented at a wide range of events, such as opening ceremonies, the anniversary of Ciamis Regency, guest welcoming ceremonies, wedding receptions, *nyiar lumar*, the Bhayangkara anniversary, school art performances, and even during the ceremonial dispatch of Garuda components to the new capital city (*Ibu Kota Nusantara*, IKN). This is consistent with Soedarsono's view (in Argananto & Prihatini, 2021), which states that, in the modern era, performing arts generally serve three main functions in human life: as a medium for ceremonies, as a form of entertainment, and as a public spectacle.



Figure 3. Kele Dance at the Ringkang Mangsa, Ciamis
Source: Documentation by Dwi Rahmalia Nur'aini, 2026

The Kele Dance is frequently performed on an annual basis and has been presented not only in Ciamis but also in various regions, including Bandung, Tasikmalaya, Garut, and Pangandaran . Moreover, the Kele Dance has been performed in various regional and national events, including the International Rain Festival in Solo in 2015, the Surabaya Anniversary Festival in 2010, and a dance competition in East Priangan (Tasikmalaya), where it achieved first place. It was also presented at the Kemilau Nusantara Carnival at Gedung Sate, Bandung (2007), and at the inauguration of the Pagerageung Cultural Center in Tasikmalaya (2021). Its existence, therefore, needs to be maintained and transmitted to younger generations to prevent it from disappearing within a single generation (Nurmizan et al., 2025). Notably, the Kele Dance has never experienced a period of inactivity, as the regeneration of dancers continues annually, ensuring its sustainability.



Figure 4. Kele Dance at the Ciamis Regency Anniversary, 2022
Source: Documentation by Neng Peking

However, from the community's perspective, awareness of the Kele Dance remains uneven, as people tend to recognize the dance movements more readily than its name. In fact, a deeper understanding of the background of its creation would enable greater appreciation of the cultural values, meanings, and symbolism embedded in its movements. Such understanding can also provide insight into how the Kele Dance has developed and adapted over time (Nurmizan et al., 2025). From an urban anthropological perspective, this can be interpreted as an effect of shifting patterns of cultural consumption, in which people tend to favor visual and immediate forms of engagement. Consequently, the community is more likely to recognize distinctive visual forms than to engage with the deeper meanings and cultural identity embedded within them.



Figure 5. Kele Dance at the Milangkala Tatar Sunda, Ciamis
Source: Documentation by Dwi Rahmalia Nur'aini, 2026

On the other hand, the community also recognizes the potential of the Kele Dance as a form of local traditional art and as a cultural identity of Ciamis Regency. This indicates that, socially, the Kele Dance has the potential to be constructed as a symbol of regional identity. In the past, the Kele Dance was more frequently performed as a representative of Ciamis, including in competitions and in collaborations with the Bebegig Sukamantri tradition, as part of efforts to unify local cultural expressions. However, current conditions show that each artistic group has become more focused on its own activities and development. Neng Peking is no longer involved in Bebegig Sukamantri performances and now concentrates on the development of the Kele Dance since 2010. Previously, the Kele Dance was often performed outside Ciamis Regency; however, at present, performances are more predominantly held within the Ciamis area. Despite this shift, the Kele Dance remains actively performed. “The Kele Dance is still frequently performed and continues to attract many audiences. In addition, the dance was officially recognized within the cultural domain around 2013 or 2014, and this recognition serves as evidence that the Kele Dance remains active to this day.” (Interview with Dini Dian Anggraeni, March 13, 2026). Audience responses to the Kele Dance are generally positive. When performed in Bandung, the Kele Dance contributes to the diversity of Ciamis dance traditions, as it possesses distinctive characteristics compared to dances from other regions. This uniqueness strengthens the identity of Ciamis dance, so that when performed outside the region, audiences tend to perceive it as something distinctive, particularly when it is presented in collaboration with the Bebegig tradition. In contrast, for the people of Ciamis, the Kele Dance is already considered an integral part of local cultural expression. As a result, community responses tend to be more neutral or less enthusiastic due to familiarity. Interestingly, the Kele Dance appears to be more widely recognized outside Ciamis Regency than within it. Thus, while external audiences perceive the Kele Dance as a distinctive cultural representation of Ciamis, local communities tend to respond more modestly, as it is regarded as a familiar and everyday cultural form.

3.5 Factors Supporting the Existence of the Kele Dance

The continued existence of the Kele Dance to this day is supported by several key factors. First, the role of the creator, Neng Peking, has made a significant contribution to its sustainability. She not only created the dance but also actively maintains and develops it at Sanggar Titik Dua

Studio. In the teaching process, Neng Peking provides direct instruction without the use of assistants.



Figure 5. Kele Dance Workshop at Sanggar Titik Dua Studio, 2015
Source: Documentation by Neng Peking

Second, the regeneration system of dancers within the *sanggar* plays a crucial role. The regeneration process is one of the most influential aspects in sustaining an art form (Daryana et al., 2024). All members of the *sanggar* are required to learn the Kele Dance, ensuring a continuous process of cultural transmission. Even children at the elementary school level are introduced to the dance, indicating a structured form of cultural inheritance. Currently, Sanggar Titik Dua Studio has approximately 100 active dancers, ranging from kindergarten and elementary school students to adolescents and adults. Third, the participation of the younger generation also contributes significantly to the sustainability of the Kele Dance. This dance is considered unique, as not everyone is able to carry the kele on their head while maintaining balance. Wida Waridah observed that many young individuals are interested in learning the Kele Dance, both within and outside the *sanggar*. “If I observe the Ciamis Regency anniversary celebrations, the performers are predominantly from the younger generation, and their number is quite large. This indicates a strong interest, both from members of Sanggar Titik Dua and from outside the studio. For example, in an event held in Kawali, the Kele Dance was performed by dancers from outside the *sanggar*. This suggests that there is also interest from dancers beyond Sanggar Titik Dua.” (Interview with Wida Waridah, March 14, 2026). This serves as a positive indicator for the sustainability of the dance. Fourth, the flexibility of its performance function also supports its sustainability. The Kele Dance can be performed in a wide range of events, both formal and informal. This flexibility provides greater opportunities for the dance to be continuously performed and maintained.

3.6 Factors Hindering the Existence of the Kele Dance

Several factors hinder the development of the Kele Dance. First, changes in policymakers, have led to the Kele Dance being included less frequently in performances outside the region, as greater attention is directed toward other art forms, such as Jaipongan. Nevertheless, some representatives from the Department of Culture still attend Kele Dance performances. This situation has caused the presence of Kele Dance on a broader scale to be less developed than before, as greater attention is often given to creative dance forms such as the Jaipongan Dance. In contrast, the Kele Dance was previously performed more frequently due to its participation in various competitions as a representative of Ciamis Regency. This finding is in line with Gugum Gumbira’s view (Herdini et al., 2008), which states that the Jaipongan Dance has spread widely

and gained public acceptance due to its dynamic, heroic, and enjoyable musical characteristics that align with its conceptual foundation (Herdini et al., 2008). Such dance forms tend to be more widely accepted and favored publicly, particularly among younger generations. Second, the lack of socialization to the community. Although the Kele Dance is frequently performed, information regarding its name and underlying meaning has not been effectively disseminated to the public. Therefore, greater efforts are needed to promote and socialize the Kele Dance, especially among the people of Ciamis themselves. Third, the limited distribution of learning. The Kele Dance remains largely centered in Sanggar Titik Dua Studio and has not been widely taught in other studios or formal institutions such as schools. Nevertheless, some development has begun to emerge, although still on a limited scale. The Kele Dance has recently been introduced at the higher education level, particularly at Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI). Interest in the dance is partly influenced by its musical accompaniment, which incorporates religious elements such as *gembyung*, a traditional arts in West Java that incorporates traditional elements and possesses sacred aspects (D. N. Saputra, 2024). In addition, this is supported by the availability of adequate institutional facilities.



Figure 6. Kele Dance at the STAI Graduation Ceremony, 2025
Source: Documentation by Neng Peking

3.7 Analysis from the Perspective of Dance Anthropology and Urban Anthropology

Examined dance anthropology perspective, as proposed by Sumaryono (2011), the Kele Dance is not merely a collection of aesthetically pleasing movements, but also a reflection of the cultural system of the Sundanese agrarian community in Ciamis Regency. In the past, the activity of collecting and carrying clean water was an important part of daily life and agriculture, especially when modern tools such as buckets and pottery were not yet in use, so people used bamboo as a container for water. The diversity of ways in which people collected water later became a source of inspiration for the Kele Dance movement (Virtual, 2020). The movements in the Kele Dance not only mimic the act of fetching water but also represent the relationship between society and nature, which is the source of life. The use of natural elements in the Kele Dance, such as bamboo, water, flowers, and leaves demonstrates a connection between the community's cultural activities and the natural environment, which plays a vital role in the lives of an agrarian society. Several props in the Kele Dance also hold symbolic meanings related to purity, protection, and communal life. This indicates that the Kele Dance serves not only as entertainment but also embodies cultural and spiritual values that have evolved within the community's social life. symbolic medium that connects humans with nature as well as with the

spiritual values upheld by the community. Through a dance anthropology approach, the Kele Dance can be understood as a cultural product that emerges from the traditions of the Ciamis community and continues to develop within its social context.

Whereas, from the perspective of urban anthropology, based on Castells' theory (1977), one example of transformation can be seen in the shift in the function of dance, from a reflection of daily activities within an agrarian community to a formal performance presented on a proscenium stage. This shift indicates a process of cultural commodification, in which dance is no longer solely an expression of culture, but also a product adapted to the demands of modern performance contexts. The phenomenon in which the community is more familiar with the visual form of the Kele Dance than its name and underlying meanings reflects a transformation in cultural consumption patterns that tend to be visual, rapid, and instant. As a result, the symbolic meanings of the dance are not conveyed deeply, leading to a gap between visual representation and cultural understanding. In addition, the transformation of properties, from water to jasmine flowers, demonstrates cultural adaptation to the practical needs of modern performance spaces. This confirms that culture is dynamic rather than static, and is capable of adapting to changing social conditions. Furthermore, the adaptation of the Kele dance in the modern era involves the use of digital media such as videos and social media, which also help introduce the Kele dance to a wider audience, particularly the younger generation. This situation demonstrates that the Kele Dance continues to adapt to the times as an effort to maintain its existence amidst social and cultural changes (Studio, 2025).

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the Kele Dance is a creative dance work that was created in 2006 at Sanggar Titik Dua Studio by Raden Rachmajati Nilakoesoemah (Neng Peking). The creation of this dance was motivated by the need for stage-based (proscenium) performance forms in Ciamis Regency, as well as the intention to transform the everyday activities of the community, particularly the practice of collecting water from natural springs using bamboo *lodong*, into a form of performing art. Therefore, the Kele Dance not only possesses aesthetic value but also embodies symbolic meanings related to community life and the relationship between humans and nature.

In terms of its existence, the Kele Dance continues to be sustained and remains actively performed in various events, both inside and outside the region. This sustainability is supported by the active role of the choreographer, the ongoing regeneration system of dancers at Sanggar Titik Dua Studio, and the participation of younger generations in learning and performing the dance. However, from the community's perspective, awareness of the Kele Dance remains uneven. People tend to recognize its visual form more than its name and underlying meanings.

Several factors support the existence of the Kele Dance, including the choreographer's commitment, the presence of Sanggar Titik Dua Studio as a learning center, the process of cultural transmission through dancer regeneration, and the flexibility of its performance function. On the other hand, the inhibiting factors include changes in policymakers, insufficient dissemination of the Kele Dance to the wider community, and restricted distribution of learning opportunities. These conditions indicate that the Kele Dance still faces challenges in terms of recognition and development at the local level.

From the perspectives of dance anthropology and urban anthropology, the Kele Dance can be understood as a form of cultural adaptation that represents traditional values within a continuously evolving society. Therefore, more optimal efforts are required from various

stakeholders, including the government, art practitioners, and the community, to support the preservation and development of the Kele Dance as part of the cultural identity of Ciamis Regency.

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