

# Cultural Values in Motion: A Semiotic Interpretation of Joget Serampang Laut

Mohd Firdaus Mohd Herrow<sup>1\*</sup>, Nur Zaidi Azraai<sup>2</sup>, and Noriah Ahmad<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Art and Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor Branch, Puncak Alam Campus, 42300 Bandar Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>School of The Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup>Institut Warisan Melaka, No. 9, Rumah Kerajaan, Bukit Peringggit, 75150 Melaka, Malaysia

\*Corresponding author: firdausherrow@uitm.edu.my

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## ABSTRACT

Joget Serampang Laut is a Malay folk dance that reflects both aesthetic form and cultural philosophy, serving as an important vehicle of identity and tradition. While earlier scholarship has examined its history and music, little attention has been given to the cultural meanings embedded in its 14 *ragam*. This study addresses that gap by analysing how these *ragam* operate as semiotic signs that embody the values of Islam, adat, and adab, thereby revealing their role as expressions of Malay philosophy. A qualitative interpretive design was employed, drawing on video recordings, direct observation, and practitioner interviews, with findings triangulated against published sources. The movements were visually transcribed and examined through a semiotic framework of representation, denotation, and connotation, with validation provided through expert review. The analysis identifies two thematic strands: *ragam* of human relationships, which emphasise modesty, respect, and unity, and *ragam* of nature and symbolism, which articulate resilience, guardianship, companionship, and courage. Together, these themes demonstrate that Joget Serampang Laut is not merely entertainment but a living text of Malay values where gestures, pathways, and choreographic motifs transmit cultural memory and ethical principles. The study concludes that semiotic analysis enriches the understanding of this dance while also offering broader implications for pedagogy, heritage preservation, and future research. For teaching, the findings suggest the importance of integrating cultural philosophy into dance training. For heritage work, the study provides a framework for meaningful documentation of intangible culture. For research, it opens pathways to apply similar approaches across other Malay and Southeast Asian dances.

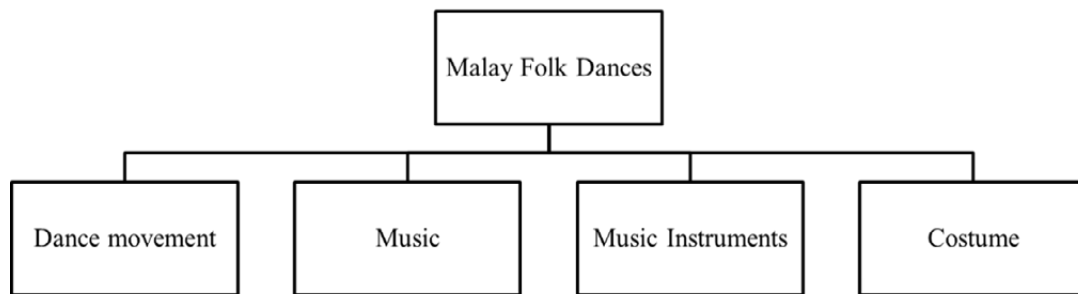
**Keywords:** intangible heritage, Malay folk dance, Joget Serampang Laut, semiotic analysis, visual representation

## INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), performing arts encompass vocal performances, musical instruments, dance, theatre, pantomime, and song verses (Kabanda 2014). Kabanda (2014) highlights that performing arts drive social progress and contribute to national branding, fostering economic growth, social

inclusion, cultural democracy, and shifts in cultural behaviour.

Malay cultural heritage is deeply valued in Malay society, bringing joy and excitement to communities. Malay folk dances incorporate elements like martial arts, storytelling, humour, and playful interaction, guided by regional, religious, and belief-based cultural codes. These dances are performed during special events, with some categorised as royal court dances (Soon 2017). Emerging in the 14th century within the early Malay Kingdom, they were initially performed exclusively before the Sultan and royalty (Muhammad Zaffwan et al. 2017).



**Figure 1** Elements of Malay folk dances

Source: Adapted from Bannerman (2014) and Koff (2000)

Bannerman (2014) and Koff (2000) define dance as rhythmic body movement within a defined space, communicating through cultural codes. Choreography draws inspiration from coordinated music, melody, and well-arranged lyrics. Malay folk dances are structured around four key elements: dance movements, music, instruments, and costumes. Within this heritage, *joget* occupies a central position, blending Portuguese influences with Malay cultural expressions and symbolising joy, playfulness, and social unity (Ooi 2011; Hazizon 2014; Yayasan Warisan Johor 2018).

*Joget Serampang Laut*, which emerged prominently in Malaysia in the 1970s, has been documented for its musicality, performance contexts, and intercultural influences (Muhammad Zaidee 2022; Mohd Firdaus and Nur Zaidi 2023). Yet, despite its significance, less attention has been paid to the cultural meanings embedded in its movement vocabulary. In particular, the 14 *ragam* that structure *Joget Serampang Laut* have not been systematically examined as signs carrying Malay philosophical values. This study, therefore, analyses how these *ragam* function as semiotic expressions of Islam, *adat* (custom), and *adab* (manners), offering new insight into how movement itself preserves and transmits cultural heritage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

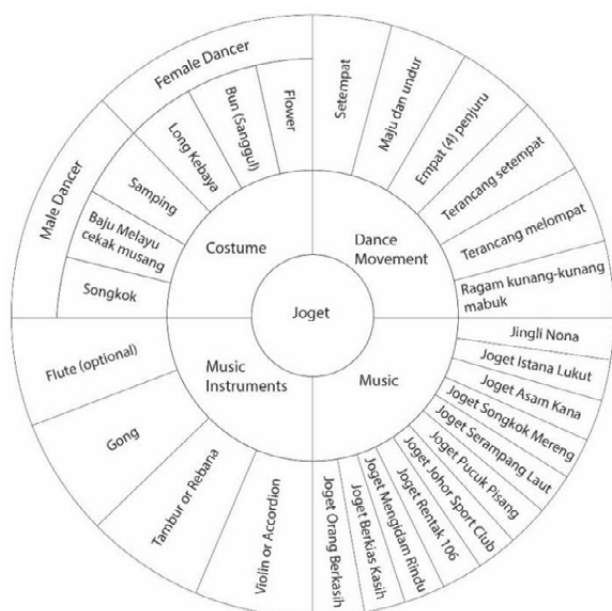
### *Joget*

Parani (2018) describes *joget* as a blend of Western and Eastern cultures, shaped by European and Asian influences. Emerging during the colonial era in Southeast Asia, *joget* reflects a historical cultural shift within an intercultural environment. This blend is evident in its Portuguese musical roots, adapted from the Branyo dance, combined with Malay cultural expressions such as modest bodily movements, gendered interactional norms, and symbolic gestures. It has become a key cultural heritage in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, and parts of Thailand, influencing Malay society.

Ooi (2011), Hazizon (2014), and Yayasan Warisan Johor (2018) trace *joget*'s origins to 16th-century Malacca, adapted from the Portuguese dance Branyo, which evolved from the Iberian Brangle. This adaptation led to the creation of *joget*, often accompanied by classic Portuguese songs like *Jingli Nona*. Known as *ronggeng* in Indonesia and *Joget Lambak* or *Cak Kun Cak* in Malacca, it is typically performed in pairs or groups during special occasions.

*Joget* plays a crucial role in preserving traditions and customs (Muhammad and Fadlin 2014). It embodies cultural and social interaction, economic development, and community engagement, holding aesthetic, commercial, ritual, and narrative significance. The dance, widely recognised in Malaysia, features both fast (3/8 tempo) and slow (2/4 tempo) movements, emphasising leg over hand motions. *Joget* symbolises joy and liveliness, performed in a playful and jesting style.

According to Mohd Firdaus and Nur Zaidi (2021), Malay dance culture is typically expressed through inner reflections, stories, or values, sometimes containing denotations and connotations that require learning and observation. The primary terms related to Malay dances are *tandak*, *igal*, *liuk*, and *tari* (Sheppard 1972; Sabri 2017). In *joget*, the basic movements emphasise the legs, which are more aggressive and fast compared to the more rigid and fixed arm or hand movements.



**Figure 2** *Joget* according to the four elements of Malay folk dances

Source: Adapted from Ooi (2011), Hazizon (2014), Yayasan Warisan Johor (2018), and Hang (2020)

Wan Muhammad Afiq and Sharifah Kartini (2018) describe Malay characteristics as harmonious, peaceful, well-mannered, and respectful. These traits influence Malay folk dances, which are known for their beauty, sophistication, courtesy, and modesty. The unique dance philosophies and beliefs of Malay folk dances have been passed down through generations, preserving their distinct identities and characteristics (Sheppard 1972; Wan Muhammad Afiq and Sharifah Kartini 2018).

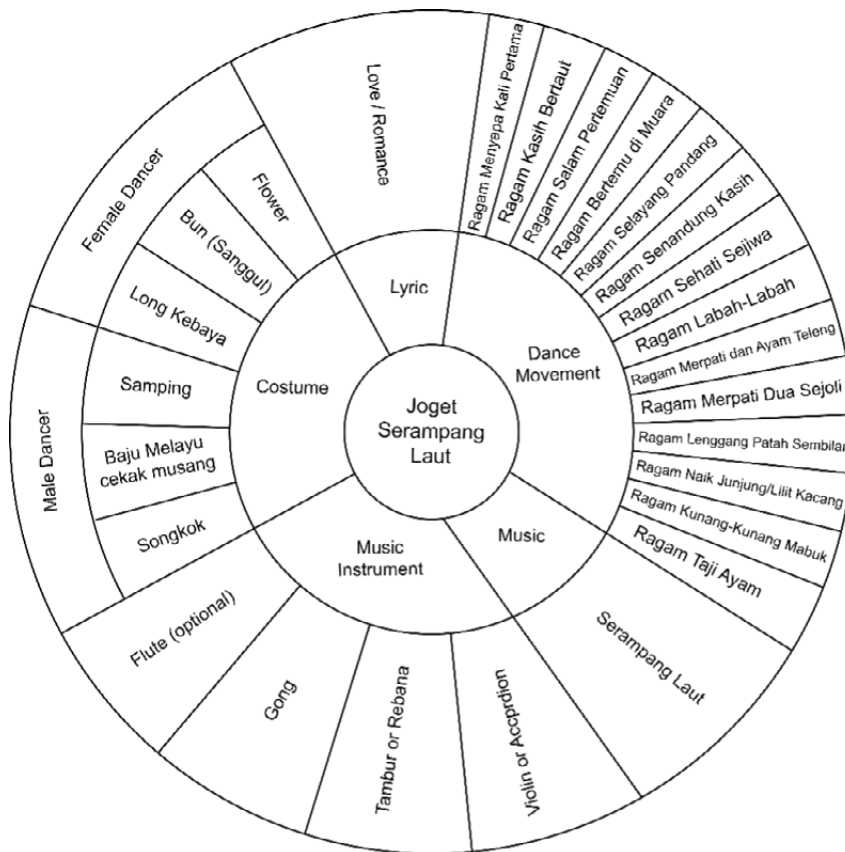
A combination of dance and music, *joget* embodies elegance and class while also conveying joy, playful banter, and pleasure, thus fostering community unity. As a foundational cultural element of the Malay community, *joget* encourages creativity through the development of new dance steps while preserving its original purpose, identity and meaning.

## Fundamental Components of *Joget Serampang Laut*

According to Muhammad Zaidee (2022) and Mohd Firdaus and Nur Zaidi (2023), *Joget Serampang Laut* originated in the 1970s, with Seid Manaf playing a crucial role in its development at Taman Budaya, later known as Kompleks Budaya Negara, in 1972. His contributions helped shape the dance's cultural identity in Malaysia, and his disciples, Noriah Ahmad and the late Zulkifli Zain, continued to preserve and promote the dance form.

Bannerman (2014) and Koff (2000) identify four key components of Malay folk dance: movement, music, instruments, and costumes. However, according to Noriah Ahmad (as cited in Mohd Firdaus and Nur Zaidi 2023), an expert in Joget Serampang Laut, lyrics should be considered as a fifth essential component alongside the dance movement, music, music instrument, and costume. These elements collectively enhance the harmony and synchronisation of the dance.

This research focuses on the dance movement of Joget Serampang Laut, which consists of 14 *Ragam* performed by a pair of dancers over three minutes and 40 seconds. *Ragam* refers to variations in movement styles that define the dance’s aesthetic and rhythm. The study provides a comprehensive set of dance step patterns and a visual representation of each *ragam*, highlighting both its aesthetic appeal and its cultural and historical significance.



**Figure 3** Fundamental components of Joget Serampang Laut

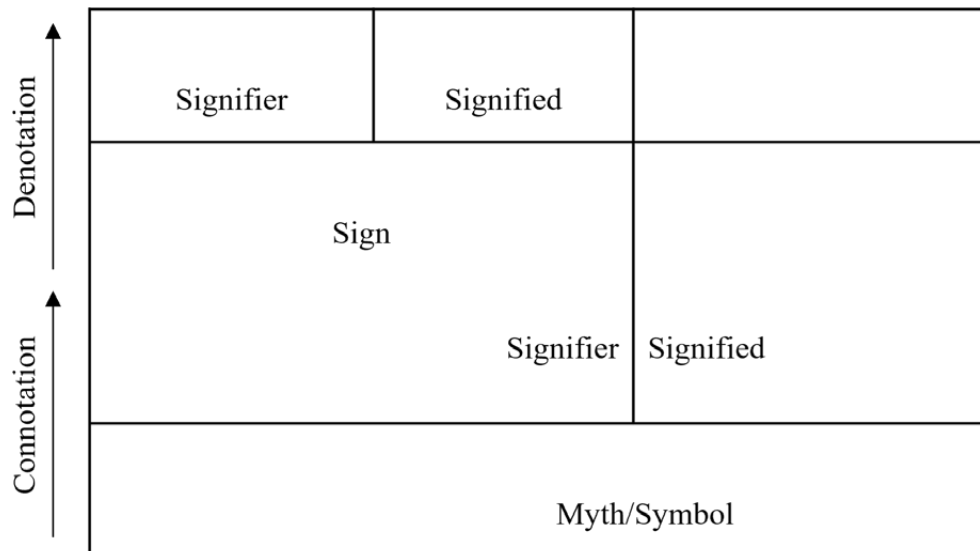
Source: Mohd Firdaus and Nur Zaidi (2023)

## Roland Barthes and Semiotic Theory

Semiotics studies how meaning is made through signs and symbols. Mumtaz Begum (2007) and Aleksandrovich (2016) explain that signs go beyond what is seen on the surface. They also carry cultural weight. Roland Barthes expanded this idea and described three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth.

Denotation is the direct meaning of a sign. Connotation adds the feelings and values that a community gives to it (Sobur 2012; Bouzida 2014). Myth goes deeper. When a sign is repeated often, it makes social ideas feel natural and unquestioned (Fisk 1990).

This approach is useful when studying dance. Movements are not just physical shapes. They also carry hidden meaning. A bow or a hand gesture can be recorded as a simple movement. Yet its associations reveal customs, beliefs, and emotions. When repeated over generations, such gestures take on the quality of myth, strengthening identity and moral order (Bouzida 2014; Fadly and Myrna 2020).



**Figure 4** Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory

In this study, Barthes' framework is used to analyse the 14 *ragam* of Joget Serampang Laut at each of these three levels. First, every *ragam* is described as a visible movement. Next, the gestures are read for their connotative value, such as respect, modesty, or unity. Finally, the *ragam* are understood mythically, where they signify broader principles of Islam, *adat*, and *adab*. Through this approach, ordinary gestures like bows, hand placements, and patterned pathways are revealed as signs that embody Malay etiquette, spiritual values, and collective identity (Mohd Firdaus and Nur Zaidi 2021; 2023; Muhammad Zaidee 2022).

## Semiotics and Dance

Dance scholars expand semiotic thinking by treating movement as a language of signs. Kaeppler (1985) shows how gestures and spatial patterns act as cultural signifiers, while Hanna (1987) and Desmond (1997) describe dance as a cultural text that carries identity and ideology. Bannerman (2014) and Koff (2000) also emphasise its communicative role, shaped by shared cultural codes. Together, these perspectives align with Barthes' ideas and make it possible to view Joget Serampang Laut not only as a performance but as a text that conveys Malay values.

This study applies Barthes' model alongside dance semiotics to examine how the 14 *ragam* create a coherent sign system. Through their movements, the *ragam* embody Islamic principles, *adat* (customs), and *adab* (manners), translating them into practice. In doing so, the dance sustains Malay traditions and reinforces collective identity across generations (Muhammad Zaffwan et al. 2017; Ooi 2011; Hazizon 2014; Yayasan Warisan Johor 2018).

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative interpretive approach to explore the cultural meaning of Joget Serampang Laut. The first aim was to trace the philosophical roots of the dance to understand Malay culture and heritage better. The second was to examine how its movements are represented, revealing deeper layers of meaning and cultural significance.

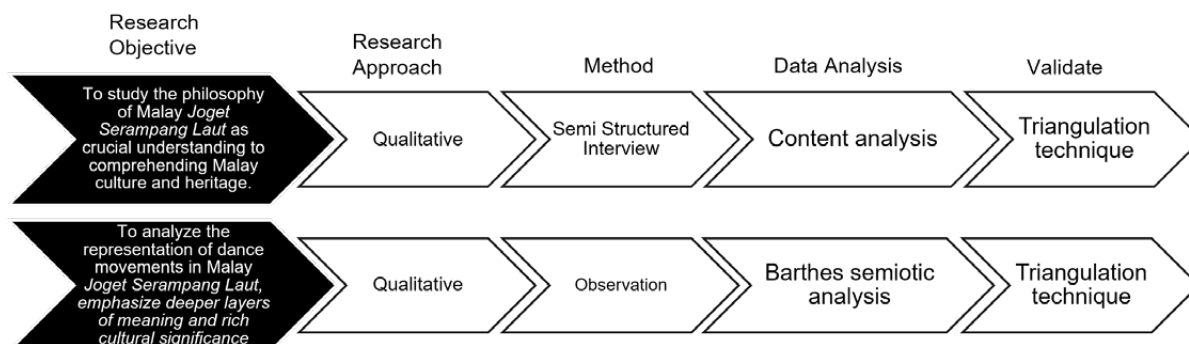


Figure 5 Conceptual framework of the research

## Data Collection

Primary data came from video recordings of Joget Serampang Laut performed by experienced practitioners. Direct observations were made during practice sessions and staged performances to document details of the movements. A semi-structured interview with Noriah Ahmad, senior practitioner at Institut Warisan Melaka (INSWA), provided valuable insight into the philosophy and symbolic meaning of each *ragam*.

Secondary data were taken from published studies on Malay dance heritage and philosophy (Ooi 2011; Muhammad Zaffwan et al. 2017; Yayasan Warisan Johor 2018; Muhammad Zaidee 2022; Mohd Firdaus and Nur Zaidi 2021; 2023). These sources were used to cross-check and strengthen the movement analysis.

## Data Analysis

The analysis applied Barthes' three-level semiotic framework to the 14 *ragam*. Each movement sequence was first transcribed visually to capture posture, gesture, orientation, and spatial patterns. At the denotative level, the *ragam* were described as observable actions; at the connotative level, these actions were interpreted in relation to Malay values such as modesty, respect, and communal harmony; and at the mythic level, repeated patterns were understood as naturalising Islamic principles, *adat*, and *adab* within social life. The interpretive coding was conducted by the researcher and reviewed with Noriah Ahmad to ensure cultural accuracy and to minimise subjectivity. Through this process, the *ragam* were analysed as layered signs that transmit Malay philosophical values across generations.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### The Philosophy of Joget Serampang Laut

According to Noriah Ahmad, the core philosophy of Joget Serampang Laut is deeply rooted in (1) the Islamic religious practices, (2) *adat* (custom), and (3) *adab* (manner), which guide behaviour, aesthetics, and social interaction in Malay society. These values shape the choreography, the etiquette of performance, and the symbolic meanings transmitted across generations.

**Table 1** The philosophy of Joget Serampang Laut (Islam)

Category	Meanings
Unity	Joget Serampang Laut is performed in a group, with dancers moving in a coordinated and synchronised manner, emphasising teamwork, togetherness, and union. Reflects the Islamic concept of <i>zakat</i> , promoting mutual respect and support. Creates a sense of unity and harmony.
Modesty	Modesty is highly valued and is reflected in Joget Serampang Laut through gentle hand gestures and controlled, delicate footwork while maintaining an upright posture. Attire such as <i>baju Melayu</i> , <i>baju kebaya</i> , and <i>baju kurung</i> reflects decorum and modesty. Highlights dignity and respect in every action.
Symmetry and balance	The dance floor pattern features repeating geometric shapes, reflecting the Islamic emphasis on symmetry and balance. Geometric shapes symbolise interconnectedness and balance in Islamic thought. Dance patterns like circles, squares, rhombuses, and triangles create harmony in the movements.
Symbolism	The dance places a strong focus on respectful interaction between male and female dancers. Repeated movements recall the practice of <i>zikr</i> , guiding the mind toward remembrance and creating a quiet spiritual connection. Nature is also present. Gestures mimic local plants and animals, adding beauty while linking the Malay community with the natural world around them.

The dance further expresses Islamic spirituality through unity, modesty, balance, and remembrance. Group formations move in sync, creating a sense of togetherness. This mirrors the spirit of *zakat*, which builds solidarity within the community. Gentle gestures and dignified attire reflect *maruah* (dignity) and modesty. The geometric floor patterns suggest Islamic ideas of symmetry and harmony (Muhammad Zaffwan et al. 2017). Repeated movements echo *zikr*, deepening the spiritual tone of the performance. Nature-inspired gestures strengthen the sense of human connection to the environment, reflecting Islamic respect for creation (Hidajat et al. 2021).

**Table 2** The philosophy of Joget Serampang Laut (*adat*)

Category	Meanings
Respect	Respectful movements of a dancer like “ <i>selangkah demi selangkah</i> ” symbolise how young people show respect in Malay homes. Elders are deeply respected as sources of wisdom. Younger generations express this through gentle words, kind gestures and seeking advice.
Modesty	Malay culture is living in balance and unity with family, community and the environment. It emphasises kindness, empathy and cooperation. Harmony is reflected in the synchronised movements of male and female dancers, symbolising togetherness and a strong relationship that promotes unity.

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**Table 2** (continued)

Category	Meanings
Humility	Behaviour and traditions; wear simple outfits, symbolising humility and simplicity. Graceful and modest movements that highlight harmony and simplicity. Flowing motions, gentle arm and wrist movements and subtle footwork.

*Adat* anchors the dance in cultural identity, reinforcing respect, harmony, and humility as social values. Movements such as *selangkah demi selangkah* illustrate deference of the young toward elders, reflecting the Malay emphasis on respect for wisdom and continuity of custom (Khalidah 2022). Harmony is expressed in synchronised movement between male and female dancers, representing balance in family and community life. Humility is conveyed through simple yet graceful gestures and traditional attire such as *baju kurung*, *kebaya*, and *baju Melayu*, which symbolise modesty and collective identity (Khalidah 2022).

**Table 3** The philosophy of Joget Serampang Laut (*adab*)

Category	Meanings
Politeness	Politeness means showing respect, compassion and good manners. The dance movement follows proper etiquette, avoiding inappropriate gestures. Male and female dancers perform with control and respect, avoiding physical contact to uphold dignity and cultural norms, and wear traditional and loose attire.
Discipline	Involves regular practice to perfect precise movements and convey the right message. Focus on complex steps, improving technique with dedication. Consistency in movements is key to a cohesive and visually pleasing performance, requiring practice and synchronisation to achieve perfection.
Maintenance	Proper posture is key to expressing emotions, with male dancers showing strength and charisma and female dancers displaying modesty and elegance. Preserving traditional movements is crucial to sustain cultural heritage and convey true emotions of the dance meaning and philosophy. Focus and concentration are needed for performing complex movements and creating a harmonious performance, requiring self-control.
Guidance	Guidance from a guru is essential for preserving traditional Malay folk dance. Teachers pass down their knowledge and skills. Dancers must show discipline and respect, following the guru's guidance and being open to feedback. Respecting the guru highlights the importance of <i>adab</i> in learning.

*Adab* provides the ethical framework for performance, reflected in politeness, discipline, posture, and guidance. Controlled movements and avoidance of direct contact between genders highlight modesty and propriety. Discipline is evident in the precision of steps and dedication to practice. Posture embodies strength for men and elegance for women, reinforcing cultural expectations of character and behaviour (Khalidah 2022). Guidance from the guru underlines respect for authority and the traditional transfer of knowledge, aligning with the principle that cultural mastery is inseparable from discipline and moral conduct (Khalidah 2022).

Taken together, Islam, *adat*, and *adab* form the philosophical backbone of Joget Serampang Laut. These three dimensions ensure that the dance operates not only as a performance but also as a system of cultural transmission. At the Islamic level, the *ragam* embody values of unity, modesty, symmetry, and spiritual remembrance, aligning movement with religious practice and ethical conduct (Muhammad Zaffwan et al. 2017; Hidajat et al. 2021). Through *adat*, the dance reinforces respect for elders, collective harmony, and humility, affirming the role of custom as

the foundation of Malay social life (Khalidah 2022). *Adab*, meanwhile, provides an ethical code of behaviour that governs how dancers move, interact, and learn from their guru, sustaining discipline and moral order within the art form (Khalidah 2022).

These three pillars are not separate but interdependent: *adat* gives form to cultural identity, *adab* guides conduct and transmission, while Islam anchors the entire practice in spiritual philosophy. This interconnectedness demonstrates how Joget Serampang Laut functions as a living text of Malay values, where gestures, floor patterns, and even costume choices are infused with meaning. Proverbs such as “*adat bersendikan syarak, syarak bersendikan Kitabullah*” and “*biar mati anak, jangan mati adat*” show how these values are naturalised in everyday life and preserved through embodied expression.

## The Representation, Denotation, and Connotation of Joget Serampang Laut

Malay traditional dance exists not solely as an artistic next to the stage; it exists as a dynamic record that conveys story and memory across generations. With every dance step, motion, and position, dance embodies and can offer traces of previous time, contributing to the Malaysian identity of the contemporary moment.

Within this ambivalence, a traditional dance like the Joget Serampang Laut portrays time-bound *ragam* that are both stylish and considered. The 14 *ragam* carry value and memory, beyond entertainment, in connecting the performers and audience to their common past through values of equity and context of history. The dance created or experienced within engagement of this social vector expands the cultural thread of contemporary life; not the enlightenment of exploration but the experience of constructing somatic stories, inferred anew.




The *ragam* can be organised into two themes: human relationships and nature and symbolism. This thematic path highlights the enjoyment within a dance that partially or wholly considers the choreographic structure at various layers of abundance, portraying humans through the interrelationship of animate social lives transformed into graceful exchanges and subsequently into nature (waterways, vines, fireflies, and birds), carrying connotations of persistence, resilience, balance, rebuilding, and spirituality.

The significance of Joget Serampang Laut is cumulatively provable and ever-renewing cultural identity for Malaysian cultures in the present. Together, both themes propose that Joget Serampang Laut is not merely steps or what is said within the sequence of learning becomes an embodied memory, or lessons, in cultural politeness, community, and living in connected balance with nature.

## The Theme of Human Relationships in Joget Serampang Laut



The *ragam* linked to human relationships are *Ragam* 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7. They follow a path that starts with a greeting and ends with the union of two hearts. Bows, mirrored steps, and crossing paths set the tone. Each gesture reflects Malay values of modesty, respect, and harmony. Relationships grow from *maruah* (dignity) and *sopan santun* (courtesy), values at the centre of Malay life.

**Table 4** Representation of human relationships in Joget Serampang Laut

Dance steps (ragam)	Visual representation	Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
Ragam 1: Menyapa Kali Pertama		The male dancer tilts his head gently while placing his left hand at the waist and the right hand over it. Facing his partner, he crosses his legs in a controlled rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his head, body, and leg movements, distinguished by her left hand at the waist and her right raised gracefully to the shoulder.	The initial encounter between the male and female dancer signifies an important stage in the relationship. Their modest and restrained gestures reflect mutual respect and adherence to cultural tradition, framing the meeting as more than a physical exchange. It symbolises the beginning of a journey shaped by understanding, dignity, and the pursuit of unity.
	Sign	In Malay culture, friendship is founded on traditions of warmth and respect, with first encounters marked by the <i>salam</i> . This greeting signifies hospitality and equality before Allah, embodying humility, harmony, and dignity. Extending beyond new acquaintances to family and elders, the <i>salam</i> affirms goodwill and care across generations.	
Ragam 2: Kasih Bertaut		The male dancer tilts his head gently from side to side, bowing with each motion. He rotates his body left and right, lowering forward at a 45° angle, with the left hand at the waist and the right clasped over it. Moving left with alternating leg crossings, he completes a 360° turn to face opposite the female dancer while maintaining eye contact. The female dancer mirrors his head and leg movements, placing her left hand at the waist and her right on the shoulder, while lowering gracefully in rhythm.	This ragam symbolises the emergence of affection between a man and a woman. The increasingly fluid movements and refined hand gestures reflect a growing sense of closeness and emotional reciprocity. The sequence represents the transformation of strangers into companions, evoking a graceful progression towards intimacy and mutual understanding.
	Sign	<i>Silaturahmi</i> , derived from the Arabic concept of maintaining kinship ties, is central to Islamic teaching and Malay culture. It fosters unity and belonging across families, friends, and communities, strengthening bonds and promoting cohesion. Traditionally expressed in person, it now extends through digital communication, sustaining enduring connections and mutual support.	
Ragam 3: Salam Pertemuan		The male dancer faces his partner with steady eye contact and a slight bow. He extends his arms, clasping his palms while rotating his wrists to either side, with alternating tiptoe steps in rhythm. The female dancer mirrors these movements but keeps her hands closer to the body, aligned at the waist.	The encounter between the dancers conveys warmth and sincerity, with eye contact symbolising inner beauty and human connection. Their movements suggest cycles of separation and reunion, framed by gestures of respect and courtesy. By maintaining space and composure, the <i>ragam</i> affirms dignity and the value of each meeting.


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Table 4 (continued)

Dance steps (ragam)	Visual representation	Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
Ragam 3: Salam Pertemuan	Sign	Malay custom places great value on politeness and respect, expressed in the phrase “ <i>sopan santun minta dikenali</i> ,” which highlights good manners and discipline in relationships. Politeness nurtures empathy, kindness, and dignity, preserving both personal modesty and collective harmony as foundations of a peaceful society.	
Ragam 5: Selayang Pandang		The male dancer faces forward, bowing slightly as he extends his arms and rotates his wrists with each step. He advances diagonally to the left, makes a half turn to face the female dancer, then retraces his path diagonally backwards to meet her gaze. On tiptoe, his legs alternate in a steady rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his movements but keeps her hands close to her body, aligned at the waist.	This <i>ragam</i> highlights the subtle exchange of glances between a man and a woman. The fleeting looks respect personal space and dignity while serving as a form of nonverbal communication. These gestures convey affection, passion, and the emergence of romantic feelings, framed within restraint and cultural propriety.
	Sign	In Malay culture, <i>maruah</i> (dignity) is preserved through respectful words, actions, and boundaries. The idiom “ <i>malu-malu kucing</i> ” conveys humility, while the proverb “ <i>malu itu tanda iman</i> ” affirms modesty as a sign of faith. These values guide ethical conduct and sustain respect and harmony within the community.	
Ragam 6: Senandung Kasih		The male dancer begins facing forward with a slight bow, extending his arms and rotating his wrists. He advances in an “S”-shaped pathway, forming a half-circle to the right before briefly meeting the female dancer’s gaze. Turning 180°, he moves backwards along another semi-circular path, maintaining eye contact until returning to the centre. On tiptoe, his legs alternate in a steady rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his movements while keeping her hands close to her waist.	Senandung Kasih symbolises affection and romantic connection between a man and a woman. Through graceful gestures, the dancers convey devotion and shared emotion, transforming movement into an expression of love. The <i>ragam</i> affirms the value of relationships as spaces for harmony, intimacy, and mutual appreciation.
	Sign	The concept of <i>jodoh</i> refers to a soulmate destined by Allah, yet its fulfilment requires human effort through trust, communication, and mutual understanding. The proverb “ <i>jodoh di tangan Tuhan</i> ” affirms marriage as a sacred gift shaped by fate and divine will, encouraging faith, love, and purpose in building lasting relationships.	

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**Table 4** (continued)

Dance steps (ragam)	Visual representation	Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
Ragam 7: Sehati Sejiwa		<p>The male dancer faces forward, turning his head to acknowledge the female dancer as they meet. He bows slightly, extends his arms, and rotates his wrists with each step. Moving diagonally left, he reaches the centre, turns backwards, and retraces the path to intersect with her. The sequence is repeated on the right, creating symmetrical intersections. On tiptoe, his legs alternate in measured rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his movements but keeps her hands close to her body, aligned at the waist.</p>	<p>This ragam symbolises the genuine love and union between a man and a woman. It represents the journey of two souls coming together, overcoming challenges to form a lasting bond built on harmony and mutual devotion.</p>
Sign	<p><i>Muhibbah</i> conveys love, friendship, and goodwill as foundations of social harmony. The proverb “<i>sehati sejiwa</i>” symbolises shared values and unity, while “<i>kalau hati tidak sama, mata pun tidak akan pernah sama</i>” reminds those common perspectives are vital for strong bonds. Together, they affirm the importance of unspoken connections that unite hearts and minds.</p>		

Ragam 1 (Menyapa Kali Pertama) and Ragam 3 (Salam Pertemuan) focus on greeting. Measured bows, careful hand gestures, and space between dancers reflect the saying “*sopan santun minta dikenali*” (good manners are how one is recognised). Ragam 2 (Kasih Bertaut) uses mirrored steps and steady eye contact to express *silaturahmi*, the kinship bond. These early ragam show that first meetings are moments of humility. They echo “*malu itu tanda iman*” (modesty is a sign of faith).




As the dance continues, admiration becomes affection, but restraint remains. Ragam 5 (Selayang Pandang) shows admiration through discreet glances. Ragam 6 (Senandung Kasih), with its flowing pathways, speaks of devotion and recalls the saying “*jodoh di tangan Tuhan*” (a soulmate is in God’s hands). Ragam 7 (Sehati Sejiwa) ends the sequence with diagonal steps that symbolise hearts meeting and shared purpose, expressed in the proverb “*sehati sejiwa*” (one heart, one soul).

Together, these ragam chart a journey from greeting to unity. They show that love and companionship in Malay culture are tied to modesty, respect, and harmony. Through these movements, Joget Serampang Laut becomes a living lesson on how relationships are formed and valued.

### The Theme of Nature and Symbolism in Joget Serampang Laut



The ragam in this theme take their inspiration from rivers, plants, fireflies, birds, and even the proud stance of a rooster. They show how Malay thought places humans within a wider moral and ecological order. On the surface, these movements copy the shapes and rhythms of the natural world. At a deeper level, they teach lessons about resilience, protection, unity, and courage. Nature here is more than a source of beauty. It becomes a guide, reminding dancers and audiences of the need for endurance, cooperation, and balance.

**Table 5** Representation of nature and symbolism in Joget Serampang Laut

Dance steps (ragam)	Visual representation	Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
Ragam 4: Bertemu di Muara		The male dancer begins with a slight bow, extending his arms and rotating his wrists. He steps backwards, turns left, advances, turns right, and faces the female dancer before repeating the sequence forward. They exchange positions, with the male completing a 360° spin while sustaining eye contact. On tiptoe, he alternates his legs in rhythm, followed by crossing steps and a 180° turn to switch positions again. The female dancer mirrors his movements but keeps her hands close to her waist.	This scene evokes the migration of fish moving in harmony along a river before uniting at an estuary. The estuary, where many rivers converge into the sea, symbolises unity, renewal, and the opening of new possibilities.
	Sign	In Malay philosophy, life is seen as <i>hijrah</i> , symbolising personal and spiritual transformation. The phrase “ <i>hidup bermuafakat</i> ” affirms harmony and cooperation, while the idiom “ <i>ilmu itu cahaya</i> ” highlights education as a guiding light in Islam and Malay culture, where learning and exchange shape a meaningful life.	
Ragam 8: Labah-labah		The male dancer tilts his head slightly left with a gentle bow, extending his arms with the left raised forward and the right behind. Both dancers trace a semi-circle while maintaining eye contact. The male then moves from right to left, completes a 180° turn, and returns toward the female dancer. They repeat the sequence in reverse before another 180° turn to face each other. On tiptoe, his legs alternate in a steady rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his movements, tilting her head to the right and keeping her hands near her waist, rotating her wrists softly with each step.	The spider serves as a symbol of protection, representing the man's role as guardian. The <i>ragam</i> highlights chivalry and responsibility, underscoring his duty to safeguard his partner's well-being and offer both emotional and physical support.
	Sign	The concept of <i>wali</i> refers to a guardian or protector, especially in marriage, where a man provides guidance and support. The spider ( <i>labah-labah</i> ) symbolises this protective role while reflecting Allah's creation and the ties between nature and the Malay community. Its web embodies unity and interdependence, reminding that every action shapes wider relationships.	
Ragam 9: Merpati dan Ayam Teleng		The male dancer faces forward, turning his head left and right before a slight bow. With each step, he extends his arms and rotates his wrists, moving backwards beside the female dancer while maintaining eye contact. He then advances diagonally, tracing semi-circular patterns until both align. On tiptoe, his legs alternate in a steady rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his movements, keeping her hands close to her waist.	This ragam evokes the image of doves fluttering together, symbolising love, peace, and fidelity. The presence of the <i>ayam teleng</i> adds humour and playful flirtation, underscoring the couple's affectionate bond and emotional closeness.




(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

Dance steps (ragam)	Visual representation	Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
Ragam 9: Merpati dan Ayam Teleng	Sign	The dove ( <i>burung merpati</i> ) symbolises peace, love, purity, and harmony, admired for its grace and linked to spiritual enlightenment. In contrast, the <i>ayam teleng</i> reflects shyness and playfulness in relationships, embodying joy and respect. Together, they affirm Malay values of <i>kesederhanaan</i> (simplicity) and <i>kesyukuran</i> (gratitude), celebrating happiness in modest pleasures and genuine bonds.	
Ragam 10: Merpati Dua Sejoli		The male dancer gazes at the female with a slight bow as he positions himself behind her. He extends his arms across her back, clasping his palms and rotating his wrists with each step. Standing side by side, they move backwards, complete a 180° turn, advance forward, turn left, and walk in reverse to the midpoint with another 180° turn. On tiptoe, their legs alternate in measured rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his movements, keeping her hands near her waist and maintaining her position in front.	This <i>ragam</i> symbolises the man's devotion and concern for his partner's well-being, reflecting his protective role. It also represents an inseparable bond, portraying the couple's lifelong journey of love, care, and unity.
	Sign	The dove symbolises peace, love, hope, and new beginnings, embodying unity central to Malay culture. Its gentle flight reminds individuals to nurture harmony in daily life. The proverb " <i>merpati dua sejoli</i> " portrays a resilient couple, while the concept of <i>rasa</i> extends beyond emotion to a deep awareness of the soul, fostering growth and meaning.	
Ragam 11: Lenggang Patah Sembilan		The male dancer faces forward with steady eye contact and a slight bow, extending his arms and swinging them alternately with each step. Standing side by side, the dancers move diagonally left, complete a 180° turn, and return to the midpoint. The male then moves diagonally backwards, turns 180°, returns to the centre, and completes a 360° turn opposite the female. On tiptoe, his steps alternate in rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his pathway while keeping her hands near her waist, swinging them alternately, and remaining in front.	Lenggang Patah Sembilan symbolises harmony with nature, with movements likened to flowing water and swaying trees. Through subtle footwork and graceful hand gestures, the <i>ragam</i> conveys emotion and narrative, illustrating how body language becomes a medium for storytelling and cultural expression.
	Sign	Lenggang Patah Sembilan symbolises the balance of feminine and masculine energies in harmony with nature. Flowing gestures reflect wind and water, while strong motions express power and resilience. Their balance fosters confidence, stability, and gentleness, celebrating diversity and affirming harmony as the foundation of purposeful living.	

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Table 5 (continued)

Dance steps (ragam)	Visual representation	Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
Ragam 12: Naik Junjung/ Lilit Kacang		The male dancer turns his head slightly toward the female, maintaining eye contact with a gentle bow. His arms extend with the left raised slightly higher in front and the right behind, both making smooth wrist rotations with each step. Standing side by side, the pair move in a zigzag pattern until reaching the midpoint. On tiptoe, their legs alternate in a steady rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his pathway but keeps her hands close to her waist, maintaining her position in front.	<i>Lilit kacang</i> , which spirals upward around a pole or branch, symbolises progress, perseverance, and determination within a relationship. Its upward climb reflects reliance on support for growth, representing the couple's shared commitment to embrace challenges and overcome obstacles together.
	Sign	In Malay philosophy, nature embodies spiritual values. <i>Lilit kacang</i> symbolises adaptability, unity, and resilience passed through generations. The proverb “bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita roboh” stresses solidarity, while the principle of gotong-royong affirms that collective effort sustains harmony, resilience, and communal stability.	
Ragam 13: Kunang-kunang Mabuk		The male dancer faces forward, bowing his head slightly as his body bends with each step. His left hand rests at the waist while the right clasps over it. At intervals, he bows at a 45° angle before moving left, completing a 180° turn, retracing his path, and shifting right with a 360° turn to face the female dancer. On tiptoe, his legs alternate in a steady rhythm. The female dancer mirrors his pathway, lowering her body at the same intervals, with her left hand at the waist and her right on the shoulder.	This <i>ragam</i> evokes the luminous flight of fireflies, with dancers moving in unpredictable and enchanting patterns. The erratic motions symbolise the human journey, where couples face challenges, navigate unexpected paths, and embrace new beginnings.
	Sign	Fireflies ( <i>kunang-kunang</i> ) symbolise beauty, lightness, and elegance in Malay culture. Their glow in darkness signifies hope and enlightenment, linking light with knowledge and guidance. The idiom “kehidupan seperti kunang-kunang, kecil dan lemah tapi mampu memberikan cahaya di tengah kegelapan” compares life to their gentle radiance: though fragile, fireflies embody resilience and the power to inspire hope in adversity.	
Ragam 14: Taji Ayam		The male dancer begins facing forward, straightening his body and bowing at a 45° angle while moving his right leg. His left hand rests on the waist with the right clasped over it. Facing the female dancer, he alternates his legs before moving the right forward and back on tiptoe and heel, completing a 180° turn to switch positions. He then moves left, bowing at intervals before another 180° turn to face away. The sequence ends with a 360° turn and alternating steps. The female dancer mirrors his pathway, lowering her body gently with her left hand at the waist and her right on the shoulder.	<i>Taji ayam</i> , the sharp spurs fitted to a rooster's feet, symbolise strength and readiness for combat. In the dance, the vigorous and rapid footwork reflects both the challenges and joys of a relationship, suggesting that couples must face each moment together with resilience and unity.

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**Table 5** (continued)

Dance steps (ragam)	Visual representation	Signifier (denotation)	Signified (connotation)
Ragam 14: Taji Ayam	Sign		Taji ayam is a powerful symbol in Malay culture, representing strength, courage, and masculinity. It embodies modesty, perseverance, and integrity, tied to <i>martabat</i> (dignity), <i>kehormatan</i> (honour), and <i>kekuatan</i> (strength). In Malay philosophy, the family is the foundation of society, with marriage viewed as a lifelong commitment that preserves unity, harmony, and cultural heritage.

Ragam 4 (Bertemu di Muara) shows rivers meeting at an estuary. It is a picture of joining and change. This moment reflects the Malay idea of *hidup bermuafakat* (living in consensus), where strength is found in agreement. The proverb “*hilang satu, terbit seribu*” (lose one, a thousand appear) adds the sense of renewal and resilience.

Ragam 8 (Labah-labah) forms lines like a spider’s web. It carries the idea of guardianship and alertness. Its meaning is tied to the wali (guardian), reminding that care and protection belong to everyone in the community.

Several *ragam* speak to the themes of companionship and emotional unity. Ragam 9 (Merpati dan Ayam Teleng) uses playful gestures to suggest affection tempered with humility, recalling the values of *kesederhanaan* (simplicity) and *kesyukuran* (gratitude). Ragam 10 (Merpati Dua Sejoli) continues this idea with side-by-side movements that embody loyalty and togetherness, much like the proverb “*merpati dua sejoli*” (an inseparable pair). In Malay thought, these gestures evoke the idea of *rasa*, a deep emotional and spiritual connection that goes beyond outward appearance. Ragam 11 (Lenggang Patah Sembilan) adds to this interpretation, its sweeping pathways balancing masculine and feminine energies and suggesting harmony between strength and gentleness.

Other *ragam* move toward lessons of perseverance and courage. Ragam 12 (Lilit Kacang) follows winding, climbing paths that evoke determination and mutual support, resonating with the spirit of *gotong-royong* (collective effort) and the saying “*bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita roboh*” (united we stand, divided we fall). Ragam 13 (Kunang-kunang Mabuk) takes inspiration from the firefly, a fragile but luminous creature, turning it into a symbol of hope and endurance in times of hardship. Ragam 14 (Taji Ayam) closes this sequence with vigorous, grounded footwork that suggests courage and self-respect, a reminder of the strength needed to guard *martabat* (dignity) and *kehormatan* (honour).

Ragam, which is inspired by nature, turns pictures of the world around us into moral messages. They stand for strength, vigilance, companionship, and bravery. Nature is used over and over again as a guide, instructing us through its shapes and patterns. Joget Serampang Laut highlights how nature affects how people think about and live their values.

## Synthesis of Human Relationships and Nature in Joget Serampang Laut

Joget Serampang Laut goes beyond choreography, according to theme analysis. Each movement has a Malay cultural meaning in this language of signs. Ragam 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 focus on human interactions and communicate respect, modesty, and harmony through bows, spacing, and crossing paths. These deliberate actions emphasise *sopan santun* (politeness), *maruah* (dignity), and *muhibbah* (goodwill), showcasing the ethical nature of the Malay social life.

The *ragam* inspired by nature, *Ragam* 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, draw on rivers, vines, fireflies, birds, and roosters. Nature here becomes a teacher, showing resilience, guardianship, loyalty, and courage. The dance links human experience to the wisdom of the natural world, suggesting that people and nature are deeply connected.

When both strands are considered together, Joget Serampang Laut emerges as a living text of Malay philosophy. Proverbs such as “*sehati sejiwa*” (one heart, one soul), “*hidup bermuafakat*” (living in consensus), and “*bersatu kita teguh, bercerai kita roboh*” (united we stand, divided we fall) root these meanings in daily life. Seen this way, the dance becomes a bridge between art, ethics, and nature, showing that performance can carry Islamic principles, *adat*, and *adab* across generations.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that the Joget Serampang Laut is not just a performance. Through its 14 *ragam*, the dance captures Malay culture and makes it part of a living experience. *Ragam* that addresses human relationships communicate respect, humility, and social harmony. *Ragam*, inspired by nature, communicates resilience, guardianship, and bravery. Together, they give the dance the quality of text; Islam, *adat* and *adab* are not just ideas, rather a value in motion.

This study has important ramifications. Joget Serampang Laut is a cultural and physical discipline that may be taught in schools. Students will learn technique as well as moral and spiritual qualities. In this way, training becomes a cultural literacy activity that links meaning to the body. Using the *ragam* through semiotics is a methodical technique for recording and archiving in the context of cultural conservation. Future generations' capacity to learn, perform, and comprehend the *ragam* will be aided by the digital recording of the movements and their assigned meanings. Semiotics and Malay philosophy open up new research directions for scholars studying Southeast Asian and Malay dance styles, highlighting the value of interdisciplinary and cross-comparison studies.

Finally, the Joget Serampang Laut should be viewed as a location between the past and the present, a memory in motion, as well as an artistic tradition. In order to better establish a knowledge of Joget Serampang Laut as a live site of identity and cultural sustainability, future research may broaden the scope of this conversation by utilising digital techniques like motion capture or immersive media.

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