



## Reimagining Tataluan in Gamelan Pelog-Salendro as a Sonic Memory in Sundanese Wayang Golek Performance

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### ABSTRACT

*In the contemporary context of the decline of interest in traditional music among millennial and Gen Z audiences, this study reclaims tataluan—a traditional opening in Sundanese wayang golek performance—not merely as a musical opening, but as a cultural memory in sonic codification. This study explores the performative, affective, and mnemonic dimensions of tataluan by reconfiguring gamelan Pelog-Salendro ensemble into a recomposed sequence. Based on fieldwork with master pangrawit, artistic praxis, and cross-cultural practice in Europe and America, the piece "Tatalu Wawayangan" is a hybrid work: neither entirely traditional nor entirely contemporary. In the process, the gamelan is transformed into a contact zone between memory and imagination, where melody and rhythm initiate intergenerational dialogue. The compositional form employed is a synthesis of Pande Made Sukerta's musical composition and Alma Hawkin's Moving From Within practice, in which affective movement, intuition, and listening in are highlighted. The musical narrative thereby created not only resuscitates tataluan as a performance sign but reconfigures it as an audible marker of identity, community ethos, and pedagogical potential for the revival of Sundanese performance arts. This work adds to the literature on intangible heritage by asserting that creativity within tradition is a form of poetic resistance and cultural survival.*

*Keywords: Sonic Memory; gamelan pelog salendro; wayang golek performance; musical composition as cultural praxis*

### INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, Sundanese traditional music has faced a significant decline in interest among younger audiences, particularly millennials and Generation Z. The growing dominance of global popular music, the instant accessibility of digital entertainment, and the commercialization of cultural production have often relegated gamelan to the status of a static heritage artifact rather than a living practice (Strinati, 2004). Within this context, *tataluan*—the musical prelude that traditionally marks the beginning of a *wayang golek* performance—stands at a critical juncture. More than a simple opening cue, *tataluan* functions as a sonic memory, an audible repository of collective experience that recalls the vibrancy of all-night puppet shows, the laughter of the *punakawan*, and the gravitas of knightly figures (Connerton, 1989; Assmann, 2011).

Historically, the *tataluan* served as an audible signal: once the Pelog–Salendro gamelan ensemble struck its distinct patterns, the community knew that the performance space had transformed into a sacred arena of imagination and cultural dialogue. These sounds, encoded through timbre, rhythm, and melodic fragments, triggered

intergenerational resonance and situated the audience within a shared affective memory (Sutton, 2014). Yet, as cultural participation wanes, this mnemonic dimension risks erosion. Much of the earlier scholarship treated *tataluan* primarily from structural or functional perspectives, emphasizing its role as part of the gamelan repertoire (Soepandi, 1975, 1976; Warnika, 1982). Fewer studies, however, have considered its role as an archive of lived cultural memory and its potential for reimagination in contemporary performance contexts.

The present study responds to this lacuna by positioning *tataluan* not only as a musical prelude but as a cultural praxis where memory, imagination, and pedagogy intersect. Reimagining *tataluan* within the hybrid composition *Tatalu Wawayangan* demonstrates how traditional fragments—such as *Benrong*, *Gunung Sari*, *Gudril*, and *Rumyang*—can be reconfigured into a dialogic sequence that speaks across temporal and generational boundaries. In doing so, gamelan becomes a contact zone where memory and imagination converge, enabling creative resistance and cultural survival (Kearney, 2016; UNESCO, 2021).

Methodologically, this research integrates artistic praxis with narrative phenomenology, drawing upon fieldwork with master *pangrawit* and experiences of intercultural collaboration in Europe and America. The work draws on established methods of musical composition (Sukerta, 2011), creative embodiment in performance (Hawkins, as cited in Dibia, 2011), and pedagogical frameworks of Sundanese gamelan (Upandi, 2009; Suparli, 2010). Such a synthesis underscores that creativity within tradition does not signify rupture, but rather continuity through transformation—a poetic resistance against cultural amnesia.

By reconfiguring *tataluan* as a sonic memory, this study seeks to illuminate how intangible heritage can be revitalized as both an aesthetic and pedagogical practice. It situates *tataluan* within broader debates on cultural memory and intangible heritage, emphasizing that the vitality of tradition depends not only on preservation but also on imaginative reinvention (Herbst, 2014; Sumarsam, 2013). In this way, the study argues that *tataluan* can be reclaimed as an audible marker of identity, a performative archive, and a living pedagogy for future generations.

## METHOD

This study employs a co-constructed narrative approach, a qualitative design that emphasizes dialogic interaction between researcher and participant in shaping meaning. Unlike conventional ethnographic accounts that prioritize the researcher's interpretive authority, the co-constructed narrative treats knowledge as relational—emerging through the interplay of personal memory, artistic practice, and dialogical reflection (Riessman, 2008). Such an approach is particularly suited to the study of *tataluan*, which itself is a practice saturated with personal and collective memory, affective resonance, and performative meaning.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Ojang Cahyadi, a *pangrawit* and composer directly involved in the creation of *Tatalu Wawayangan*. Interviews were conducted in both Sundanese and Indonesian, and focused on three thematic layers: (1) personal sonic archives—memories of early encounters with Pelog–Salendro gamelan and *wayang golek* performances; (2) creative transformation—processes of selecting, reconfiguring, and sequencing traditional fragments into a recomposed form; and (3) performative expression—the affective and cultural intentions embedded in live performance (Assmann, 2011; Connerton, 1989).



Beyond interviews, field observations were conducted during rehearsals and performances in both local and cross-cultural contexts. These included collaborative events in Europe and America, where Sundanese gamelan was presented as part of intercultural festivals. Observations focused on how *tataluan* functioned as a sonic marker across audiences unfamiliar with its tradition, thereby revealing its mnemonic and pedagogical potential beyond its original setting (Herbst, 2014; Sutton, 2014).

To structure the creative inquiry, the study drew upon artistic methodologies in composition and embodiment. The compositional framework was guided by Sukerta's (2011) *Metode Penyusunan Karya Musik*, which outlines stages of idea formation, conceptualization, and realization. This was complemented by Hawkins' *Moving From Within* method (as interpreted in Dibia, 2011), which foregrounds affective movement, intuition, and imaginative embodiment as sources of artistic knowledge. Together, these methodological anchors enabled the integration of technical gamelan practice (Soepandi, 1975; Suparli, 2010; Upandi, 2009) with embodied creativity and narrative phenomenology.

Data analysis followed a thematic narrative strategy. First, transcripts of interviews were coded for recurring motifs related to memory, transformation, and performance. These units of meaning were then mapped onto the framework of *sonic memory*, which emphasizes performative, affective, and mnemonic dimensions (Sumarsam, 2013; Kearney, 2016). Triangulation was achieved through the comparison of interview data, field notes, and audio-visual documentation, ensuring both depth and validity. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by returning transcripts and interpretations to participants for verification, while peer debriefing sessions with fellow performance studies scholars provided additional critical perspectives.

Through this methodological design, the study treats *tataluan* not as a static artifact, but as a living practice co-authored by memory, creativity, and performance. By privileging dialogical construction, artistic embodiment, and iterative analysis, the method itself becomes a reflection of the very phenomenon under study: the reimagination of tradition as an intergenerational sonic archive.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### FINDINGS

The process of reimagining *tataluan* unfolded as a dialogic reconstruction of sonic fragments that had long circulated within the collective memory of Sundanese wayang golek performances. Rather than treating each fragment as a fixed traditional unit, the creative process emphasized horizontality—each motif was allowed to emerge with equal significance, reflecting the phenomenological principle of horizontalization where no single element is initially privileged (Moustakas, 1994). In practice, this meant that fragments such as *Benrong*, *Gunung Sari*, *Gudril*, and *Rumyang* were first identified as discrete sonic cues, each carrying particular affective and cultural weight.

The opening fragment, *Benrong*, appeared as a sonic alarm: short, forceful, and declarative. It did not merely announce the start of the performance but evoked a visceral shift from the mundane into the performative. In the words of the performers, *Benrong* was a “wake-up call,” a sound that stirred bodily alertness while summoning memories of village squares and all-night puppet shows. Here, sound functioned as what Connerton (1989) terms a *habitual memory trigger*, embedding the cultural ritual of gathering into auditory form.

From this heightened entry point, the sequence transitioned into Gunung Sari, a fragment suffused with gravitas and heroic resonance. Its melodic contours, grounded in the Pelog scale, reinforced the image of the *ksatria*—the noble warrior who embodies both strength and virtue. The resonance of this fragment illustrated what Assmann (2011) calls *cultural memory*: a shared symbolic code that sustains communal identity. For audiences familiar with the wayang tradition, Gunung Sari was not just a piece of music but an affective archive of honor and resilience.

The composition then shifted toward Gudril, the playful counterpart. Where Gunung Sari was solemn, Gudril was lighthearted, echoing the persona of the *punakawan* who brought humor and critique into the narrative. Its syncopated rhythm and lighter timbre recalled moments of laughter and parody that punctuated the gravity of the lakon. Through Gudril, sonic memory was revealed as dialogic, containing within it both the solemnity of heroes and the irreverence of clowns. This duality echoed Sutton's (2014) observation that gamelan performances encode both social hierarchy and communal play within their musical textures.

Finally, the transition into Rummyang introduced a more lyrical and contemplative dimension. Its slower tempo and softer dynamics invited introspection, evoking a collective pause. As performers described it, Rummyang was a “sonic twilight”—a liminal space between laughter and closure, between presence and memory. It carried traces of longing, what Kearney (2016) refers to as the *affective imagination*, where sound becomes a bridge between personal feeling and cultural symbolism. In this sense, Rummyang operated as a mnemonic hinge, preparing audiences for the closing sequence. Rather than presenting these four fragments in isolation, the creative process emphasized bridging motifs, improvisational passages that stitched the fragments into a continuous narrative arc. These bridges, often shifting between Pelog and Salendro tunings, allowed performers to navigate transitions fluidly while maintaining emotional coherence. Improvisation was central here: as Sukerta (2011) reminds us, composition in gamelan is not the rigid inscription of fixed notes but the crafting of relationships between motifs, timbres, and affective energies. In rehearsals, bridges became laboratories of memory, spaces where performers collectively negotiated how old fragments could flow into new sequences.

The recomposed work, *Tatalu Wawayangan*, culminated in Pamengkeut, a sonic knot that tied the performance together. Pamengkeut did not merely signal the end; it symbolically “bound” the fragments into a single collective memory. In performance, both musicians and audiences reported feeling that this closure was not only musical but cultural—a reassertion that despite creative rearrangement, the essence of tradition remained intact. In this way, the findings demonstrated that creativity within tradition can serve as a form of continuity rather than rupture, embodying what Sumarsam (2013) identifies as the resilience of gamelan as a living archive.

Taken together, these findings reveal three interconnected dynamics. First, *tataluan* operates as a sonic memory that triggers embodied recollection among both performers and audiences. Second, its recomposition into *Tatalu Wawayangan* illustrates the capacity of tradition to adapt through improvisation and dialogue without losing its symbolic depth. Third, the process underscores the pedagogical potential of gamelan as an intergenerational medium—where memory, performance, and imagination converge to ensure cultural survival (Herbst, 2014; UNESCO, 2021).



## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight that *tataluan* is more than a musical prelude; it is a sonic memory that anchors cultural identity, mediates intergenerational dialogue, and sustains the vitality of Sundanese performance traditions. By tracing how fragments such as *Benrong*, *Gunung Sari*, *Gudril*, and *Rumyang* are reconfigured into the hybrid composition *Tatalu Wawayangan*, the study illuminates the ways in which memory and imagination intersect in the creative process. This intersection confirms Assmann's (2011) assertion that cultural memory is not a passive repository but an active practice through which communities continually reinterpret their past to remain meaningful in the present.

At the core of this reimagination lies the principle of continuity through transformation. The recomposition did not abandon tradition; rather, it affirmed the resilience of tradition by enabling improvisation, re-sequencing, and affective reinterpretation. This reflects Sumarsam's (2013) argument that gamelan has historically survived by negotiating between preservation and innovation. Each fragment carried the weight of inherited memory, yet the bridges and improvisational passages allowed the ensemble to speak to contemporary audiences, especially those distanced from the cultural codes of wayang. In this sense, creativity became a strategy of survival—what Kearney (2016) describes as a “poetic resistance” against cultural amnesia.

This reimagination also resonates with debates on intangible cultural heritage (ICH). UNESCO (2021) underscores that safeguarding ICH requires not only documentation and conservation but also revitalization through contemporary practice. The *tataluan* case demonstrates this principle: by recomposing sonic fragments into new contexts, the tradition is neither frozen nor diluted, but made audible as a living archive. Herbst (2014) has shown that the endurance of gamelan outside Indonesia depended on its ability to adapt to intercultural dialogues; similarly, the reconfiguration of *tataluan* illustrates that adaptation is not loss, but a form of resilience that ensures intergenerational transmission.

Moreover, the study points to the pedagogical potential of sonic memory. In rehearsals and performances, *tataluan* did not simply entertain; it taught values of attentiveness, communal listening, and cultural participation. The juxtaposition of solemnity (*Gunung Sari*), humor (*Gudril*), and contemplation (*Rumyang*) modeled a spectrum of affective dispositions that audiences absorbed intuitively. Such dispositions constitute what Connerton (1989) calls “habitual memory,” where learning occurs not through explicit instruction but through embodied participation. In this way, the gamelan ensemble becomes both a musical and pedagogical space, cultivating not only skill but also cultural consciousness.

The intercultural dimension of the findings further strengthens this pedagogical role. When performed in Europe and America, *tataluan* transcended linguistic barriers and functioned as an audible entry point into Sundanese culture. Sutton (2014) has argued that gamelan's global reach lies in its capacity to invite participation across difference; here, the recomposed *tataluan* demonstrated how sonic memory can become a “contact zone” (Pratt, 1991) where local heritage converses with global audiences. This suggests that intangible heritage need not be confined to its original community but can gain renewed vitality by engaging with broader cultural ecologies.

Finally, the discussion must recognize the affective dimension of this reimagination. Sound in *tataluan* was not neutral—it stirred the body, evoked nostalgia, and provoked reflection. In line with Kearney's (2016) theory of the affective

imagination, the creative act of recomposition activated emotions as vehicles of cultural meaning. Through affect, memory was not only recalled but relived, transforming performance into an embodied dialogue between past and present.

Taken together, these insights suggest that *tataluan* exemplifies how tradition persists not through rigid preservation but through imaginative rearticulation. Its transformation into *Tatalu Wawayangan* demonstrates the capacity of intangible heritage to resist erasure by becoming pedagogically relevant, affectively resonant, and interculturally communicative. In doing so, the study affirms that creativity within tradition is not a betrayal of the past but a necessary condition for its survival in the present and future.

## CONCLUSION

This study has reimagined *tataluan* not merely as an opening sequence in wayang golek performances but as a sonic memory that sustains cultural identity, pedagogical values, and intergenerational continuity. By recomposing fragments such as *Benrong*, *Gunung Sari*, *Gudril*, and *Rumyang* into *Tatalu Wawayangan*, the creative process demonstrated that tradition is most resilient when it embraces transformation. Rather than diminishing authenticity, improvisation and re-sequencing affirmed the vitality of Sundanese gamelan as a living archive capable of speaking across time and audience.

The findings underscore three key implications. First, for cultural policy, the safeguarding of intangible heritage requires frameworks that move beyond static preservation toward dynamic revitalization. UNESCO (2021) has emphasized that heritage must remain meaningful to contemporary communities; the *tataluan* case illustrates how creativity can serve as a legitimate form of safeguarding. Second, for pedagogy, the affective and mnemonic dimensions of gamelan show that cultural knowledge is not only transmitted through formal instruction but also embodied in sound, rhythm, and communal participation (Connerton, 1989; Assmann, 2011). In this sense, gamelan education can function as character formation as much as musical training. Third, for performance studies, the intercultural circulation of *tataluan* highlights the potential of sonic memory to become a “contact zone” that fosters dialogue between local traditions and global audiences (Sutton, 2014; Herbst, 2014).

Ultimately, the reimagination of *tataluan* as *Tatalu Wawayangan* affirms that creativity within tradition is a form of resistance and survival. It resists cultural amnesia by keeping memory audible, resists homogenization by affirming local identity, and resists marginalization by entering global stages on its own terms. In doing so, it exemplifies how performance, memory, and imagination converge to secure the future of intangible cultural heritage—not as relics of the past, but as living practices that continue to teach, inspire, and transform.

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