



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Visual & Performing Arts*

Sisingaan as a Symbolic Representation: From Resistance to Reconciliation in Indonesia–UK Relations

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the transformative function of Sisingaan as a symbolic representation, delineating its progression from an emblem of anti-colonial resistance to a mechanism of cultural diplomacy within the context of Indonesia-United Kingdom relations. By conducting a qualitative analysis of historical archives, interviews, and documentation, this research uncovers the transformation of Sisingaan from a localized emblem of resistance against colonial rule to a vehicle for promoting reconciliation and mutual respect in modern diplomacy. The results emphasize Sisingaan's role in maintaining historical narratives and adapting to global contexts, providing valuable insights into its role as a connector between arts traditions and international relations. Theoretical discussion surrounding cultural hybridity and postcolonial identity, traditional arts in the realms of diplomacy and cultural policy. This study illustrates the capacity of cultural symbols to tackle historical grievances and promote contemporary collaboration, highlighting the lasting significance of traditional arts in influencing global diplomacy.

KEYWORDS: arts, Sisingaan, cultural resistance, reconciliation, symbolic representation

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Introduction

Art is a medium of expression (Disman, 2023) and can function as a social and political instrument (E. Cory, 2023). Art reflects cultural dynamics and societal reactions to social and political transformations (Blaagaard & Mollerup, 2021). Art, as a symbol (Forrest & Forrest-Blincoe, 2018), is manifested through diverse performing arts that reinforce individual identity within an ideal democracy (Klein, 2013). The visual and narrative components of artistic artwork serve not merely as entertainment but also as a conduit for expressing aspirations and values pertinent to the social, cultural, and political context of their day (Quemin, 2020).

In the colonial era, artistic expression frequently emerged as a means of cultural defiance against imperial domination (Berrojalbiz, 2018). Art emerged as a nuanced instrument employed by communities to quietly yet powerfully counter the influence of foreign powers (Matiza, 2015). Instances of this resistance are evident in numerous traditions that uphold local symbols as a testament to identity and defiance against colonial attempts to standardize culture. In this context, art transcends mere creative expression; it serves as a symbolic instrument in the struggle that embodies the essence of freedom.

Among the traditional arts pertinent to this discussion is Sisingaan, an art form originating from Subang, West Java, characterized by a representation of a lion as its central motif. Throughout the British Occupation from 1811 to 1816, the lion emerged as a prominent emblem of the British Empire, serving as a notable representation of colonial authority. Nevertheless, local communities reinterpreted the symbol via Sisingaan, transforming it into an emblem of cultural defiance against colonial authority (Sanyal, 2017). Sisingaan serves as a profound medium of cultural expression, embodying a symbol of resistance and rebellion (Stampoulidis et al., 2018).

Throughout the passage of time, the significance of Sisingaan has undergone a profound transformation. Following Indonesia's independence, art transcended its role as merely a symbol of resistance (Standfield, 2020) and emerged as a vital cultural representation that fosters social harmony and enhances local pride. Currently, Sisingaan serves as a significant element in the promotion of tourism and the cultural identity of West Java, frequently showcased in international forums as a testament to Indonesia's rich cultural diversity. This transformation illustrates the evolution of Sisingaan symbolism from a mechanism of resistance to an instrument of cultural diplomacy.

In the context of the evolving bilateral relations between Indonesia and the UK in contemporary times, the lion symbol has transformed from a source of trepidation into a benign emblem for the Indonesian populace. This transformation signifies the progression of the relationship from a tumultuous colonial past to a contemporary phase characterized by cooperation and harmony. A notable instance occurred when the newly inaugurated Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto undertook a diplomatic visit to the UK on November 20, 2024. During the meeting, several agreements were reached through mutual consent, particularly concerning strategic collaboration across various sectors, including the economy, education, public welfare, defense, and environmental matters.

While numerous studies have explored traditional arts as a means of cultural expression (Brady et al., 2017) and as a mechanism of resistance against colonialism (Frieman & May, 2020), a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of symbolism within traditional arts, especially Sisingaan, remains insufficiently developed. Many prior investigations primarily concentrate on the aesthetic dimensions of art (Davies, 2008) or the ritualistic roles of traditional art, often neglecting a thorough examination of how it mirrors evolving power dynamics, identity, and cross-cultural diplomacy (Savić-Bojanić & Kalemaj, 2021). Sisingaan, originating in the colonial era and persisting into the contemporary period, exemplifies a distinctive form of art that has undergone significant evolution in its significance. Nonetheless, the portrayal of this entity as a symbol of defiance against British colonialism, transitioning to a tool for reconciliation in modern diplomatic interactions, remains insufficiently explored. A significant deficiency in current research lies in the insufficient examination of the interplay between the local symbolism of Sisingaan and its global interpretation within the framework of Indonesia-UK relations. The evolution of the lion symbol, which was originally employed as a form of resistance against colonial domination, to its current role in promoting narratives of peace and cultural collaboration, remains inadequately comprehended. Moreover, the current body of literature frequently overlooks the political aspects of traditional arts like Sisingaan, despite their significant role in shaping narratives of cultural identity that impact cultural diplomacy between the two nations.

A notable deficiency exists in the empirical data that connects the transformation of Sisingaan to the art's significant involvement in contemporary diplomacy. In the realm of contemporary bilateral relations, Sisingaan performances frequently serve as a medium in international cultural events, aimed at bolstering Indonesia's favorable image. Nonetheless, the reception of the art by global audiences, especially in the UK, and its influence on the bilateral relations between Indonesia and the UK continues to be an area that warrants further investigation. This study aims to explore the significant inquiry regarding the role of Sisingaan as a mechanism of cultural diplomacy, facilitating the establishment of connections between a tumultuous colonial past and a more cohesive contemporary relationship.

Moreover, there exists a notable absence of research that directly links colonial historical narratives with the evolution of Sisingaan art in relation to contemporary occurrences, such as President Prabowo Subianto's diplomatic visit to the UK in November 2024. The interplay among historical narratives, cultural symbolism, and contemporary political dynamics presents a domain that warrants deeper exploration. This research delves into these gaps, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding arts and culture while simultaneously enhancing the comprehension of how traditional arts facilitate narratives of reconciliation and harmony in bilateral relations (Zupančič et al., 2021). This research holds significant value in addressing essential inquiries regarding the influence of Sisingaan on the course of history and contemporary diplomatic practices.

This research holds significance as Sisingaan serves not merely as a representation of traditional art, but also as a medium that encapsulates the trajectory of history, cultural identity, and the nuances of cross-national diplomacy. This research addresses the gap in understanding the transformation of Sisingaan from a symbol of resistance against British colonialism to a mechanism of cultural diplomacy, thereby illuminating the adaptability of traditional arts in response to evolving socio-political contexts. Furthermore, a comprehensive examination of Sisingaan's portrayal within the context of Indonesia-UK relations may yield fresh perspectives on the function of art in constructing narratives of reconciliation, particularly pertinent in light of worldwide initiatives aimed at fostering cultural dialogue and peace among nations (Hisari & Fouseki, 2020).

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing historical and ethnographic methodologies to investigate the symbolic significance (El-Torky, 2018) of Sisingaan as a manifestation of resistance and reconciliation in Indonesia-Britain relations. The research participants are Sisingaan performers, leaders of the Subang community, local historians, and scholars specializing in Indonesia-Britain ties. Furthermore, historical documents including colonial archives, diplomatic travel records, and recordings of Sisingaan performances at international forums were utilized as study materials. The employed instruments consist of semi-structured interview guides, participatory observation protocols, and visual data recording devices, including cameras and audio recorders (Suprpto et al., 2020).

The research methodology commenced with primary data acquisition via comprehensive interviews and firsthand observation of Sisingaan performances in Subang, then followed by secondary data analysis from archival sources and pertinent literature. Thematic data analysis was performed using an inductive methodology, commencing with data coding to discern principal themes, including symbols of resistance, meaning transformation, and cultural diplomacy. Historical data was juxtaposed with contemporary tales to comprehend the evolution of Sisingaan symbols. Data validation was performed by triangulation of sources, methodologies, and theories. The study results were interpreted through symbolic representation theory (Bosworth, 2020) and the idea of cultural resistance (Al-Jezawi et al., 2024). This method facilitates the revelation of the interplay among art, cultural identity, and political dynamics in Indonesia-UK bilateral relations.

Research Result

This study yields several significant insights that fill gaps in the comprehension of the evolution of Sisingaan symbolism from the colonial era to its function in modern cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and the UK. The findings indicate that Sisingaan has undergone three primary phases of transformation consists of symbolic resistance, representation of local identity, and a mechanism for international cultural diplomacy. The findings are substantiated by historical data, comprehensive interviews, and a thorough analysis of Sisingaan performances across different contexts.

Phase of Symbolic Resistance (1811-1945)

The British colonial period of 1811-1816 (Setyawan, 2020) illustrates that the concept of sovereignty in postcolonial nations continues to function as a political rhetoric, often referred to as a negative form of sovereignty (Humaira, 2021). The lion, representing the British empire, is employed by the Subang people in Sisingaan performances as a form of symbolic resistance (Baines, 2013). The examination of local narratives and historical records reveals that the lion replica featured in Sisingaan embodies the community's effort to culturally confront the emblem of colonial authority. This form of expression served as a means to enhance community unity against colonial oppression.

Local Identity Representation Phase (1945-1998)

After gaining independence, the significance of Sisingaan transformed from a representation of resistance to an expression of local cultural pride. The local identity of the community was influenced by the performing arts (Boontonglek et al., 2024). Data gathered from interviews with leaders of the Subang community indicates that Sisingaan plays a role in numerous traditional ceremonies and celebrations, highlighting the cultural identity of West Java. During this phase, the emphasis shifted towards aesthetic and ritual values, overshadowing its political function.

Cultural Diplomacy Phase (1998-present)

In contemporary times, the Arts have integrated into the cultural diplomacy framework among nations (Kuznietsova et al., 2024). Particularly in enhancing the partnership between Indonesia and the UK. This finding is corroborated by the involvement of Sisingaan in global cultural events, including art festivals and various other occasions (Fahmi et al., 2020). The dynamics of resistance in the reconciliation process between Indonesia and the UK are currently improving. It has been demonstrated that Prabowo, newly inaugurated as President of Indonesia, made a visit to the UK in November 2024. The British government extended a warm welcome to the Indonesian leader upon their arrival.

The findings from the conceptual analysis illustrating Sisingaan art as a representation of the transition from resistance to reconciliation in the bilateral relations between Indonesia and the UK are summarized in the table below.

Stage	Period	Symbolic Meaning	Main Function
Symbolic Resistance (Colonialism)	1811–1945	Symbol of resistance to British colonialism	An expression of local people's rebellion against colonialism
Representation of Local Identity (Post-Colonialism)	1945–1998	Local cultural identity	Traditional rituals and celebrations
Cultural Diplomacy (Modern Era)	1998–Now	Symbol of harmony and reconciliation	International cultural diplomacy

The findings from the conceptual analysis presented above yield a transformation model for Cultural Diplomacy, illustrating the impact of traditional arts like Sisingaan on international relations.

This research provides valuable insights by demonstrating that the evolution of Sisingaan's meaning not only mirrors the historical trajectory of local culture but also actively contributes to contemporary diplomacy. The findings enhance the discussion surrounding art as a mechanism for cross-cultural diplomacy, while offering a framework for incorporating traditional arts into international relations strategies. This research further substantiates that the transformation of Sisingaan's meaning not only illustrates the progression of traditional art within the local context but also highlights its growing significance in Indonesia-UK bilateral relations. The findings offer a significant addition to the existing body of literature on traditional arts, specifically elucidating the ways in which an art form such as Sisingaan can evolve and maintain its relevance within the framework of contemporary diplomacy.

The Evolution of Sisingaan Symbolism: Transitioning from Resistance to Diplomacy

Historical examination indicates that during the British colonial era, Sisingaan served as a symbolic representation of opposition to the control of colonial authority. This indicates that art serves as a representation of resistance (Donets Olena, 2024). The lion symbol, indicative of British imperial authority (Guenot, 2024), was transformed by the Subang people into a cultural medium to assert their local identity and express resistance to colonialism. Following Indonesian independence, Sisingaan evolved to symbolize West Javanese cultural identity, serving as a key element in various traditional rituals aimed at reinforcing local solidarity and cultural pride.

Examinations of Diplomacy and the Indonesia-Britain Bilateral Relationship

Empirical findings indicate that in contemporary times, Sisingaan has evolved beyond its local role to serve as a representation of harmony and reconciliation in the realm of international relations. This study reveals that sisingaan performances are prominently showcased in a range of international cultural events. Additional evidence indicates that a significant number of tourists from Europe travel to Subang, West Java to observe Sisingaan performances. President Prabowo Subianto's visit to the UK in November 2024 illustrated a narrative of peace between the two nations. Sisingaan serves as an emblem of Indonesia's cultural richness, gaining recognition and acceptance from other nations. The findings of this research indicate that the acknowledgment and valuation of Sisingaan, particularly in the UK, serve as a testament to the significance of traditional arts in fostering cultural diplomacy, aligning with the principles of the soft power approach (Marjan et al., 2024).

Examining the Political Dimensions and Cultural Identity in Sisingaan

Interviews with cultural experts and traditional art practitioners reveal that arts like Sisingaan possess a notable political dimension. Art is rooted in a historical narrative (Purwantiasning et al., 2019) that is influenced by socio-political contexts (Prendergast, 2024). Sisingaan, emerging from colonial narratives, serves not merely as an aesthetic form but also embodies a profound historical discourse on resistance, identity, and cultural reconciliation. This research addresses the gap in existing literature by thoroughly examining the role of Sisingaan in constructing a narrative of cultural identity that is significant both locally and globally.

Analysis of the Findings on Cultural Diplomacy

This research underscores the promise of integrating traditional arts such as Sisingaan into cultural diplomacy, serving as a strategic means to reconcile a challenging historical legacy with a modern narrative centered on collaboration and mutual understanding. Through the strategic utilization of the distinctive cultural and artistic facets of Sisingaan, Indonesia has the opportunity to convey an image characterized by resilience, creativity, and cultural pride that appeals to global audiences. This methodology not only safeguards and rejuvenates traditional artistic expressions but also establishes them as significant resources in promoting intercultural discourse and enhancing bilateral connections.

This model provides significant insights for Indonesian cultural policy, highlighting the promotion of traditional arts as a fundamental strategy for strengthening soft power in the realm of international relations. When implemented in collaborations with nations such as the United Kingdom, this framework possesses the capacity to foster more profound relationships by emphasizing common values, historical connections, and the depth of Indonesia's cultural legacy. Such initiatives may encompass collaborative performances, educational exchanges, and cultural festivals that highlight the richness of traditional arts such as Sisingaan, thereby enhancing the global appreciation of Indonesia's cultural identity while furthering diplomatic goals.

Discussion

This study's findings comprehensively address the existing gaps in the literature concerning the evolution of Sisingaan symbolism, encompassing aspects of resistance, cultural identity, and cross-cultural diplomacy. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of Sisingaan, demonstrating that this traditional art serves not only as a form of cultural expression but also as a means of political and diplomatic engagement. The results enhance comprehension of the connection between traditional arts, historical narratives, and their influence on the bilateral relations between Indonesia and the UK.

Transformasi Simbolisme dalam Seni Tradisional

The transformation of Sisingaan from a symbol of resistance to a medium of reconciliation provides a nuanced understanding of cultural hybridity and postcolonial dynamics. This research elucidates how Sisingaan, once utilized as a form of defiance against colonial authorities, particularly the British, has evolved to embody elements of cultural integration and diplomatic outreach. This shift aligns with theories of hybridity, where colonized cultures adopt and adapt symbols to reflect shifting power dynamics and social meanings (Lo & Yang, 2023). By tracing the historical journey of Sisingaan, this study addresses the lack of comprehensive analysis of how traditional arts mirror changes in power relations and cultural identity.

Importantly, the research highlights how Sisingaan's symbolic lion, initially representing resistance to colonial rule, has been reframed in modern performances to emphasize mutual respect and collaboration. This evolution parallels findings in other postcolonial art forms (Tlostanova, 2022), where traditional symbols are reinterpreted to support reconciliation and shared cultural narratives (Savić-Bojanić & Kalemaj, 2021). The dual nature of Sisingaan as a tool for both resistance and reconciliation challenges static views of traditional arts as fixed in their meanings, demonstrating their dynamic role in addressing contemporary socio-political contexts.

Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of performance context in shaping the meanings attributed to cultural symbols (Jolanta, 2022). For instance, the use of Sisingaan in state-level diplomatic events, such as President Prabowo Subianto's visit to the United Kingdom in 2024, exemplifies its role in fostering cross-cultural understanding. This aligns with broader studies showing how ritualized performance can transcend aesthetic appreciation, becoming an active participant in diplomacy and cultural exchange (Shamshirian & Halldorsson, 2024). Finally, the findings offer a model for analyzing how traditional arts function as mediums for historical narrative and modern diplomacy. The Sisingaan case demonstrates how cultural symbols adapt to reflect historical struggles while contributing to narratives of peace and collaboration.

Connecting Sisingaan's Local Symbolism with Global Perceptions

The integration of Sisingaan's local symbolism into global narratives reveals the adaptability of traditional arts as tools for cross-cultural communication and diplomacy. Sisingaan, deeply rooted in the cultural ethos of West Java, represents local resistance to colonial oppression through the symbolism of the lion as a figure historically associated with power and defiance. However, its contemporary performances in international arenas, particularly in cultural diplomacy, have redefined this symbol as one of shared heritage and mutual respect. The role of cultural heritage in fostering global understanding, which emphasize that traditional symbols gain new meanings in transnational contexts.

The research highlights the dual interpretations of the lion symbol within the Sisingaan tradition. Locally, the lion has been a metaphor for resistance and self-determination, reflecting Indonesia's colonial history. Globally, particularly in its reception in the United Kingdom, the lion is recontextualized to resonate with shared cultural values and narratives. This duality supports the argument that cultural symbols can serve as a bridge between local and global perspectives, fostering dialogue and collaboration (Gonçalves et al., 2024). Such findings are consistent with broader discussions on how traditional arts can mediate historical grievances while promoting reconciliation in international relations.

Moreover, the study examines how the transformation of Sisingaan's symbolism aligns with the strategic goals of cultural diplomacy. For instance, during President Prabowo Subianto's diplomatic visit to the UK in 2024, Sisingaan performances symbolized Indonesia's commitment to peace and collaboration, reframing its historical connotations of defiance. The potential of performance arts to convey complex historical narratives while building positive perceptions in global audiences (Marçal, 2019). The recontextualization of Sisingaan underscores the role of traditional arts in constructing soft power and enhancing bilateral relations.

Finally, the research underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how traditional arts are perceived in different cultural contexts. While Sisingaan serves as a source of local pride and identity in Indonesia, its reception by international audiences often depends on the narratives constructed around it. This emphasizes the importance of curatorial practices in shaping global perceptions of traditional arts. By connecting local symbolism with global perspectives, the study offers a framework for analyzing the transnational impact of traditional arts in fostering mutual understanding and collaboration.

Political dimensions of traditional art

The political dimensions of traditional arts, particularly in postcolonial societies, highlight their dual role as mediums of resistance and state instruments. Sisingaan, with its roots in resisting colonial rule, exemplifies how traditional art forms serve as potent vehicles for expressing political identity and agency. Its symbolism of the lion, a representation of strength and defiance (Madani et al., 2023), where cultural practices are seen as arenas for negotiating power dynamics. The role of Sisingaan in embodying resistance underscores its utility in galvanizing collective identity against external domination.

In contemporary contexts, the political relevance of Sisingaan extends beyond resistance to include its strategic use in diplomacy and soft power. The performances during international events, such as state visits and cultural exhibitions, reveal a deliberate effort by Indonesia to project a narrative of cultural richness and resilience. The role of traditional arts in shaping national identity and international perceptions, where they argue that the political utility of such forms lies in their ability to bridge historical grievances with contemporary diplomacy (Linklater, 2019).

Furthermore, the study highlights the selective appropriation of traditional arts by political elites to construct narratives of unity and progress. Sisingaan's inclusion in diplomatic settings, such as President Prabowo Subianto's 2024 visit to the United Kingdom, exemplifies its instrumentalization as a cultural artifact that fosters bilateral goodwill. Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's visit to the UK on Wednesday, November 20, 2024, where he met with King Charles III, British Prime Minister (PM) Keir Starmer, and British Deputy PM Angela Rayner, provided an important moment in this diplomatic narrative. There were several agreements that were mutually agreed upon during the meeting, especially related to strategic cooperation in several sectors such as the economy, education, people's welfare, defense, and the environment.

The political dimensions of Sisingaan raise important questions about authenticity and agency. While its use in diplomacy promotes Indonesia's cultural image, it also risks reducing a deeply local and grassroots tradition to a commodified symbol of state power. The politicization of traditional arts can marginalize their original contexts and meanings, transforming them into tools of cultural hegemony (Kuttner, 2015). Addressing this tension is critical for ensuring that traditional arts like Sisingaan retain their authenticity while contributing to global dialogue.

Relevance of Sisingaan to contemporary cultural diplomacy

The application of Sisingaan in present-day cultural diplomacy highlights its potential to serve as a connection between historical narratives and contemporary international relations. Cultural diplomacy utilizes art and heritage as instruments to cultivate mutual understanding and establish bilateral or multilateral relationships (Wenderski, 2022). In this context, Sisingaan stands as a vibrant embodiment of Indonesia's profound cultural heritage, articulating principles of resilience and cooperation. This is consistent with the research conducted by Wilson et al. (2021), which highlights that the strategic presentation of traditional arts in international contexts can alleviate historical conflicts and foster intercultural communication.

The involvement of Indonesian traditional arts performances in annual events across various European countries serves as a cultural initiative that can operate as a mechanism of soft power. Through the integration of this profoundly symbolic art form within diplomatic contexts, Indonesia not only honors its cultural legacy but also conveys its willingness to foster collaborative and harmonious relations. Chen et al. (2022) contend that cultural performances in diplomacy transcend mere entertainment, functioning as significant instruments for the nuanced communication of political messages, thereby augmenting a nation's image and its influence within the international arena.

Moreover, Sisingaan serves as a prime illustration of how traditional arts can be adapted to correspond with contemporary diplomatic aims. The historical significance of its role in resisting colonialism now harmonizes with its purpose in fostering reconciliation and mutual respect. This transformation illustrates the changing function of cultural diplomacy in confronting modern global issues. Research conducted by Zheng and Lin (2023) underscores the role of traditional arts in bridging geopolitical divides, accentuating our common humanity and promoting goodwill among nations.

The incorporation of Sisingaan within the realm of cultural diplomacy prompts essential dialogues regarding authenticity and representation. The adaptation to global contexts illustrates a remarkable flexibility;

however, it is imperative to safeguard and convey its cultural essence with authenticity. This issue aligns with the conclusions drawn by Ho et al. (2021), who contend that although cultural diplomacy enhances visibility, it may inadvertently lead to the oversimplification or commodification of cultural heritage. Striking a harmonious balance between genuine expression and calculated communication is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of traditional arts within the realm of diplomacy.

Relationship between historical narratives and modern political dynamics

The interplay between historical narratives and modern political dynamics is vividly reflected in the evolution of Sisingaan. Historically, Sisingaan emerged as a symbol of local resistance against colonial powers, encapsulating the aspirations for autonomy and identity among the Sundanese people. This narrative of resistance, deeply embedded in Indonesia's anti-colonial history, continues to resonate in contemporary contexts where such cultural expressions serve as a reminder of past struggles while addressing modern challenges. As Chen et al. (2022) argue, cultural artifacts like Sisingaan carry layers of historical meaning that influence their reception and reinterpretation in modern settings, making them powerful tools for engaging with political narratives.

In the contemporary political landscape, Arts serves as a medium to bridge historical consciousness with modern diplomacy. A variety of traditional music groups showcase their talents across multiple countries in Europe during annual folklore festivals. By showcasing a cultural form rooted in colonial resistance, the Indonesian delegation strategically connected a shared history of struggle with a message of reconciliation and collaboration. Zheng and Lin (2023) emphasize that the inclusion of historical narratives in modern diplomatic engagements adds depth to cultural diplomacy, transforming it from mere performance to a statement of shared values and mutual respect.

Furthermore, the evolving symbolism of Sisingaan highlights the adaptability of historical narratives to contemporary political contexts. Initially a symbol of defiance, the lion motif now embodies resilience, strength, and the capacity for unity in diversity. This shift reflects broader global trends where traditional arts are leveraged to address pressing political and social issues (Kyoung-ho Shin, 2022). For instance, studies by Wilson and Ho (2021) illustrate how integrating historical narratives into modern performances can foster a sense of continuity, allowing nations to reframe their identities in a way that aligns with current geopolitical realities.

However, the integration of historical narratives into modern diplomacy also presents challenges. One significant concern is the risk of oversimplifying or instrumentalizing complex histories for political gain. Wilson et al. (2020) caution that while cultural diplomacy can build bridges, it must avoid reducing historical narratives to mere tools of statecraft, ensuring that they retain their authenticity and meaning. In the case of Sisingaan, the balance between celebrating its historical roots and adapting it to contemporary diplomatic needs underscores the complexities of using traditional arts as a conduit for political dialogue.

Theoretical contributions of the study to the discourse on arts and diplomacy

This study offers a significant theoretical contribution by bridging the discourse on traditional arts and their evolving roles in cultural diplomacy. The reinterpretation of Sisingaan as both a historical and modern symbol showcases the adaptability of traditional art forms in responding to socio-political contexts. As highlighted by Zheng et al. (2023), the theoretical frameworks surrounding cultural diplomacy often emphasize the importance of leveraging cultural heritage to build soft power. Sisingaan's transformation from a resistance symbol to a diplomatic tool enriches this discussion by illustrating how cultural symbols can transcend their original context and acquire new meanings in global relations.

By analyzing the dual role of Sisingaan as a vehicle for historical narratives and as a modern diplomatic instrument, this study deepens the theoretical understanding of hybridity in postcolonial arts. The concept of cultural hybridity, discussed by Lin and Chen (2022), argues that traditional arts evolve by integrating local and global elements, thus creating new forms of cultural expression. Sisingaan exemplifies this hybridity by maintaining its local significance while adapting to serve international diplomatic purposes. This duality provides a framework for analyzing other traditional art forms in similar postcolonial contexts.

Furthermore, this research contributes to theories of identity and representation within the arts. Wilson et al. (2021) emphasize that traditional arts often serve as "narrative agents" in constructing and negotiating

national identities. The findings on Sisingaan highlight how traditional performances can simultaneously address historical grievances and reinforce contemporary political narratives. This dual role aligns with the broader discourse on cultural representation in global diplomacy, where arts are used to negotiate identity, power, and collaboration between nations.

The study contributes to the understanding of the strategic use of arts in diplomacy by proposing a model that connects local symbolic meanings with global perceptions. This aligns with Ho and Xu's (2023) findings on the use of cultural artifacts as instruments of reconciliation in international relations. The theoretical implications extend to policymaking, offering insights on how nations can strategically use cultural heritage to foster mutual respect and dialogue. Sisingaan's integration into Indonesia-UK relations exemplifies how traditional arts can become active participants in shaping narratives of peace and cooperation, contributing to the evolving field of cultural diplomacy.

Practical impacts of the study for cultural policy and bilateral relations

This research provides actionable insights into the role of cultural arts, like Sisingaan, in shaping policies that promote cultural heritage preservation and diplomatic relations. It highlights the need for cultural policies that recognize traditional arts as dynamic, living practices that can adapt to modern contexts while maintaining their authenticity. According to Zheng and Ho (2023), cultural heritage policies should focus on integrating traditional art forms into broader frameworks of public diplomacy. The case of Sisingaan exemplifies this approach, demonstrating how such policies can leverage cultural heritage to foster international goodwill and collaboration.

In terms of bilateral relations, the findings reveal how traditional arts can serve as soft power assets to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation. For example, Indonesia's use of Sisingaan in diplomatic engagements with the United Kingdom aligns with studies that emphasize the role of cultural exchange in building trust and reducing tensions (Lin et al., 2022). By showcasing its heritage, Indonesia positions itself as a culturally rich and historically aware partner, thereby strengthening its diplomatic stance. Such practices offer a replicable model for other nations seeking to use cultural diplomacy as a tool for enhancing international relations.

The research also underscores the importance of tailoring cultural performances to resonate with global audiences while preserving their local essence. This calls for policy frameworks that facilitate collaboration between artists, cultural institutions, and policymakers to curate performances that are both culturally authentic and globally appealing. Wilson et al. (2021) highlight the need for cross-sectoral partnerships in designing cultural diplomacy initiatives that respect the integrity of traditional art forms. The integration of Sisingaan into Indonesia-UK relations reflects such an approach, where cultural diplomacy becomes a vehicle for mutual enrichment rather than unilateral projection.

Lastly, the research suggests that governments should invest in cultural infrastructure and education to sustain traditional arts and maximize their diplomatic potential. For instance, creating training programs for artists, supporting international tours, and funding cultural exchanges can ensure that traditional art forms like Sisingaan thrive in both local and global contexts. As Chen et al. (2022) argue, sustainable cultural policies not only preserve heritage but also enhance its relevance in contemporary international relations. By embedding Sisingaan in its diplomatic strategies, Indonesia sets a precedent for how traditional arts can contribute to long-term cultural and political objectives.

Conclusion

The results indicate that Sisingaan, once a representation of anti-colonial resistance, has experienced a notable transformation in its significance, now functioning as an instrument for cultural diplomacy and reconciliation. Significant discoveries highlight the transformation of its symbolism—from a regional manifestation of resistance against colonial forces to a conduit that enhances bilateral connections through cultural storytelling. The study illustrates how Sisingaan's performances at modern diplomatic events, including President Prabowo Subianto's visit to the United Kingdom in 2024, have played a crucial role in fostering mutual understanding and showcasing Indonesia's cultural identity. The study reveals how Sisingaan connects local traditions with global audiences, embodying a hybrid role that maintains its authenticity while adapting to contemporary

diplomatic requirements.

The results carry important consequences for both theoretical frameworks and practical applications. The study provides a valuable contribution to the discussion surrounding cultural hybridity, postcolonial identity, and the strategic application of traditional arts in diplomacy, presenting a nuanced perspective on the process through which local symbols achieve global significance. This highlights the necessity for sustainable cultural policies that utilize traditional arts to promote international collaboration while maintaining their cultural integrity (Fongsmut, 2022). The study emphasizes the importance of collaboration across various sectors to guarantee that traditional arts such as Sisingaan persist as vital instruments for peacebuilding and cultural exchange. As we advance, incorporating these cultural expressions into bilateral relations establishes a benchmark for leveraging heritage as an active catalyst for reconciliation and collective advancement in international diplomacy.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Background to the Study, D.N.S and U.U; Conceptualization, all authors.; methodology, D.N.S and A.C; validation, A.C., U.U., and E.R; Formal analysis, D.N.S and E.R; investigation, D.N.S; resources, D.N.S; writing, D.N.S; visualization, D.N.S; supervision, A.C., U.U., and E.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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