

Cultural Interactions in Sunda Karawitan Vernacular Music Practice: Forms of Cultural Adaptations among the Chinese Community at Padepokan Pasundan Asih, Bandung, Indonesia

Asep Wasta*, Tjetjep Rohendi Rohidi, Agus Cahyono & Udi Utomo

* Arts Education Doctoral Degree Graduate Program, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Jalan Kelud Utara III Semarang 50237, Indonesia.

Email: asepwasta@umtas.ac.id

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Abstract

The Chinese ethnic community in Indonesia has long been an integral part of the cultural diversity in the country, reflected through various aspects, including traditional arts and music. One tangible example of this cultural integration is the practice of Sundanese karawitan music among the Chinese community, which can be found at Padepokan Pasundan Asih in Bandung and its surrounding areas. This research investigates the cultural significance and adaptation process of Sundanese karawitan music within the Chinese community at Padepokan Pasundan Asih.

The research employs a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences and understanding of individuals regarding cultural interaction in the practice of Sundanese karawitan music. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with community members and analysis of documentation related to karawitan music activities. The data analysis process involved open coding, thematic grouping, and identification of patterns emerging from the data.

It concludes that the practice of Sundanese karawitan music serves as a significant cultural expression and a means of social interaction for the Chinese community at Padepokan Pasundan Asih. The community adapts this cultural practice to fit their social identity, demonstrating their ability to interpret and integrate their cultural identity within the broader socio-cultural context of Bandung and its surroundings.

Keywords: Cultural Psychosocial Adaptation, Cultural Expression, Pasundan Asih Community, Bandung, Indonesia.

Introduction

As the largest archipelagic state in the world, Indonesia is greatly advantaged by its geographically strategic location, abundant natural resources, and diverse human resources with a wealth of cultural heritage from Sabang to Merauke (Bazzi et al., 2019; Tumonggor et al., 2013). With a population nearing 275 million people, comprising various ethnic groups dispersed across the islands, Indonesia exhibits a diverse array of ethnicities, cultures, and races (Cahyono et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2018; Utomo & McDonald, 2020). The largest ethnic groups reside on the islands of Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and other major islands, including the Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Betawi, and others, including Indonesian citizens of Indian, Arab, and Chinese descent. These ethnic groups coexist and intermingle, spreading throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

The historical entry of the Chinese people into Indonesia is uncertain, but ancient Chinese pottery artifacts found in West Java, Lampung, and West Kalimantan suggest early explorations during the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 22 BC). Historical records mention visits by Buddhist monks to Java and Sumatra in the early centuries AD (Riniwati Makmur, 2018). Over time, the Chinese community settled, spread, and adapted to the local environment, particularly on major islands such as Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan (Priwiratama, 2024; Reid et al., 2012, 2016).

Despite their long history in Indonesia, the Chinese community often faces discrimination and prejudice. As expressed by Joko Widodo, "The struggle of the Chinese community during the Dutch occupation in facing discriminatory behavior from various parties is evidence that they can survive and thrive even in difficult and oppressive conditions. The Chinese community can maintain their existence through economy and culture" (Widodo et al., 2021:124). This negative stigma often persists, fueled by perceptions of exclusivity and dominance in the economy. The Chinese are known for their perseverance and hard work, traits sometimes misinterpreted as materialistic and stingy (Riniwati Makmur, 2018).

Cultural adaptation among the Chinese community is evident in various aspects, including traditional arts and cuisine. Chinese cultural elements such as Barongsay, Wayang Potehi, Gambang Kromong, and Cap Go Meh have adapted to local cultures (Makmur et al., 2018; Meinarno, 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2022). In culinary terms, foods like Tofu, Siomay, Bakpao, and Cap Cay have become popular in Indonesia, showing cultural integration. In Singkawang, West Kalimantan, annual events like the Tatung Parade and Cap Go Meh parade are held, maintaining Chinese traditions (Putri & Dahlia, 2020).

These cultural adaptations illustrate the importance of preserving Chinese culture within Indonesia's multicultural framework. As Eko Punto Hendro stated in "Multiculturalism as an Indonesian Ethnic Integration Model," multiculturalism helps different groups participate in public spaces and ensures equal rights and opportunities for all citizens (Agus Salim, 2006). This approach fosters the sustainability of local wisdom and promotes living together in equality.

In Bandung, the Chinese ethnic community plays a significant role, particularly in the economic sector. Historical traces of Chinese presence are evident in areas like Pasar Baru and Cibadak, marked by buildings and places of worship. Despite being a minority, their influence is substantial. Historical conflicts involving the Chinese community, such as the May 1988 Incident in Jakarta, highlight ongoing social tensions and the need for solutions to prevent recurrence (Makmur et al., 2018; Putri & Dahlia, 2020; Sanjaya et al., 2022).

The social sciences study human interactions as a collective living unit, with adaptation and assimilation occurring through various forms, such as intermarriage, religious conversion, and political engagement (Syarifuddin & Hafid, 2018). In Bandung, cultural figures like Tan Deseng, a maestro of Kecapi Suling music, have played a crucial role in promoting Sundanese arts among the Chinese community. Tan Deseng founded the Pasundan Asih Community, dedicated to preserving Sundanese cultural heritage through regular training sessions and performances.

This research investigates the adaptation of Sundanese karawitan music as a form of cultural expression and psychosocial adaptation within the Chinese ethnic community at

Padepokan Pasundan Asih in Bandung. It explores how this adaptation process helps the community establish their social identity and prevent social envy and division historically experienced in various regions. The study discusses the impacts and efforts of Tan Deseng and the Pasundan Asih community in using cultural arts as a means of social interaction and adaptation.

The aim of this research is to explore how the adaptation process of Sundanese karawitan music serves as a form of cultural adaptation within the Chinese ethnic community. The objectives are as follows.

1. To ascertain the cultural significance of Sundanese Karawitan music for the Chinese community,
2. To reveal the adaptation process undertaken by the community in integrating Sundanese arts into their social identity, and
3. To identify the contribution of the Pasundan Asih community in promoting cultural adaptation through Sundanese karawitan music.

Research Method

This research utilizes a qualitative method employing a descriptive-analytical approach to elucidate observed phenomena during the phenomenological research process, which refers to the subjective experiences of various subjects encountered (Berghofer, 2020; Borghmans & Laletas, 2023; Høffding et al., 2021). Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena (phenomenological) concerning what is experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception, motivation, actions, and others, holistically and descriptively in the form of words and language within a specific natural context, utilizing various natural methods (Tanwir et al., 2021; Zahavi, 2018). Phenomenological studies depict the meaning of a life experience for individuals regarding a concept or phenomenon involved in exploring the structure of consciousness of human life experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

For data collection, this research employs direct field observations, in-depth interviews, and the study of relevant documents (Nugrahani & Hum, 2014). Observations were conducted at Padepokan Pasundan Asih during training sessions and cultural performances to understand the process of cultural adaptation through karawitan music and Sundanese cultural arts. The observations included examining the training process, performances, social interactions, and their subsequent impacts.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key cultural art figures of Chinese ethnicity, including Mr. Tan Deseng, the Board members of the Pasundan Asih foundation, and Sundanese cultural figures and scholars in the city of Bandung. The interviews aimed to gather insights into their experiences and perspectives on the integration of Sundanese karawitan music within the Chinese community. Interviewees were chosen based on their involvement and expertise in Sundanese cultural arts and their role in the Pasundan Asih community. Each interview lasted between one to two hours, with follow-up sessions as needed for clarification and additional information. Document studies involved analyzing works related to karawitan music and Sundanese cultural arts, as well as documentation from the Pasundan Asih foundation. This included reviewing books, academic journals, online sources, and historical records that provide context and background information. The data analysis process involved three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification (Sugiyono, 2014). Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the data collected from observations, interviews, and document studies. Data display included organizing and assembling the information in a way that allowed for drawing meaningful conclusions. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through continuous comparison with the data and literature reviewed. This methodology ensures a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the cultural adaptation process of Sundanese karawitan music within the Chinese community, providing detailed and reliable insights into the phenomena under study.

Findings

The Process of Training and Art Performance by the Pasundan Asih Community Padepokan

Pasundan Asih has been established as a community hub for the ethnic Chinese community with a focus on socio-cultural activities, providing a space for its members to interact with the arts and culture, particularly the traditional Sundanese arts. Intensive training is conducted regularly, especially when preparing for specific events or occasions. The training encompasses various traditional Sundanese arts such as Degung Sunda music, Kecapi Suling (zither and flute ensemble), and Rampak Sekar (choral ensemble) accompanied by traditional instruments like Kecapi (zither) and Kendang (drum), utilizing the Salendro or Pelog notation with Sundanese lyrics. During the training process, participants not only engage in artistic practice but also directly and indirectly immerse themselves in the characteristics and culture of the Sundanese ethnic group, including the Sundanese language, customs, and general way of life.

The process undertaken by the Pasundan Asih Community can be understood as a pattern of adaptation through culture, as articulated by the initiator and art trainer, Tan Deseng, who stated: "*dimana tanah dipijak langit dijunjung*" ("As the proverb goes, Where the Earth is Stepped On, There the Sky is Held High) (When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do) the sky is revered.' We live and are raised in the land of Pasundan, thus it is only fitting that we uphold and cherish the culture of the place where we exist, even though we may come from different ethnic backgrounds and ancestries. Culture is a hallmark of a nation's independence; the vitality of a society's culture depends on the efforts of its people. In this regard, the Pasundan Asih Community and its extended family demonstrate a strong desire to participate in the preservation of Sundanese arts and culture. This sentiment was expressed by cultural officials in the welcoming remarks in the Pasundan Asih activity booklet, which appreciates the fact that the majority of the Pasundan Asih extended family, despite being of Chinese sub-ethnic origin, have proven their commitment to "*Kanyaah dirina kana kabudayaan diri jeung lingkungan masyarakatna*. ("preserving their own culture and community environment.") This demonstrates a love for their culture and community environment. Preserving traditional cultural arts in urban areas, characterized by a heterogeneous human population heavily influenced by the advancement of civilization and increasingly sophisticated technology, is quite challenging. Urban communities tend to seek change or new atmospheres due to the rapid flow of information and the ever-expanding, borderless world of globalization, which poses a significant obstacle to the existence of traditional values, especially among the Chinese ethnic community.

Various activities are carried out in different regions of West Java, Jakarta, and even abroad, including in China, promoting Indonesian culture, especially Sundanese arts. At that time, the Padepokan Pasundan Asih showcased and proved that Indonesia possesses a rich cultural heritage with high moral values. The performance represented Indonesia as a nation characterized by "Asih" (love and peace), as depicted through a diverse array of artistic presentations by the Padepokan Pasundan Asih troupe, the majority of whom were of Chinese ethnicity. This demonstrated that Indonesia is a nation embracing the philosophy of "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity), where despite the differences in ethnicities and cultures, there is a shared goal.



Fig. 1: Rampak Sekar Pasundan Asih

Source: Newspaper Clipping from Tribun Jabar, March 15, 2006

One of the ethnic groups, the Indonesian Chinese, organized an Indonesian cultural arts performance in front of ambassadors and representatives from 48 countries attending an event in Nanjing, China, showcasing that the Indonesian people cherish peace and live harmoniously. Consequently, they received direct appreciation and acknowledgment from the Chinese Ambassador (Lu Shu Ming). In 2004, they organized a Sundanese arts performance under the theme "*Sabilulungan Ngamumule Kabudayaan Sunda*" (Together Preserving Sundanese Culture), which was appreciated by the Governor of West Java and officials from the Ministry at that time.



Fig. 2: Pasundan Asih Performance in Nanjing and Shanghai, China

Source: Newspaper Clipping, 2002

The training process and subsequent performances serve as tangible expressions of the profound affection towards the traditional culture indigenous to the Sundanese region, thereby exemplifying a deep-seated reverence for the homeland.

The Form and Structure of Sundanese Karawitan Music

One of the musical compositions that underwent rehearsal and subsequently featured in an event organized by the Chinese community in the city of Bandung is a collaborative piece entitled "Komposisi Bunga Nusantara" (Composition of Archipelago Flowers). This composition is structured into two distinct segments: one serving as the musical accompaniment for the Butterfly Dance, which illustrates a traditional dance originating from West Java, and the other for the Fan Dance, representing a distinct style of Chinese dance.



Fig. 3: Kipas Dance and Kupu-Kupu Dance
Source: Author

This composition is created to depict the harmonious fusion of Sundanese Karawitan art, specifically Ketuk Tilu, with classical Mandarin (Chinese) music. The composition of Bunga Nusantara is a musical collaboration between Titi Laras Salendro, using the pentatonic scale from Mandarin songs with the scale degrees 1-2-3-5-6 (do-re-mi-sol-la). Similarly, the dance is created with accompanying music, combined with the traditional Mandarin atmosphere and style, as seen by the costumes and props used, such as fans and the dancers' attire in the distinctive red and golden yellow colors, characteristic of the traditional Oriental Chinese culture. The introduction music begins with the sound of a flute playing pentatonic notes, accompanied by a zither that sets the atmosphere reminiscent of the traditional Chinese instrument Gu Zheng, played with a Sundanese zither plucking all its strings in a random and alternating manner, resembling the sound of flowing water or a gentle breeze.

The Musical Segment in the Composition "Komposisi Bunga Nusantara"

Komposisi Bunga Nusantara

Tan Deseng Pasundan Asih

♩ = 140

Flute

Vocal Alto

19

shen shen ti ching... ng yi mai chang zai we de xin... li hua yi qu

20

ni en shi ang... nu wo pai ni yu qing yi we...she mo yu

2

30

ching fu chien ni ti nu wei ying wo shi shi ke ke zai xiang nien ni

39

to shi wei liaw ai nu Shen shen ti ching yi mai chang zai we de xin

49

li hue yi qu ni en shi ang nu wo pai ni yu qing yi we she

60

mo yu ching fu chien ni ti nu wei ying wo shi shi ke ke zai

69

xiang nien ni to shi wei li - aw ai nu ka mi warga tiong hoa sewu nuhun Ka nu A gung

77

tak dir nu nang tu keun kami lahir di tatar Sun da Hi rup sa u yu nan man cen ga we nu ran ca

85

ge yu u rang pu pusti Ja wa Ba rat lem bur u rang hi rup sau yu nan man cen ga we nu ran ca

93

ge yu u rang pu pusti Jawa Barat lem bur u rang Shen shen ti ching yi

102

mai chang zai we de xin li hue yi qu ni en shi ang nu wo pai ni

112

yu qing yi we she mo yu ching fu chien ni ti nu wei ying

122

wo shi shi ke ke zai xiang nien ni to shi wei li - aw ai nu ka mi war-ga tiong

131

hoa se-wu nu -hun Ka nu A-gung takdir nu nang tu keun ka mé lahir di tatar Sun da Hi rup sa u yu

139

146

nan man cen ga we nu ran ca ge yu u rang pupusti Ja wa Ba rat lem bur u rang hi

rup sau yu nan man cen ga we nu ran ca ge yu urang pu pus ti JawaBarat lem bur u rang

Fig. 4: Partiture of Shen Shen Ti Ching Yi
Source: Author

"Shen Shen Ti Ching Yi" (Deep Love)
Mae cang zai wei di xin lie (Embedded in the deepest heart)
Hue ye cu nien siang nu (Remembering last year when I met you)
Wei I chi nien he ni wo tuey ni yu ching yi (At that time, I had feelings for you, had deep affection)
Wei se mo yu ching (But why, after meeting)
Fu chien ni ti nu wei ying (I see nothing, not even your shadow)
She she k eke wo chai xiang nien ni (But every moment, I miss you)
Tu she we liaw ainu (It's all because I love you)

We, the Chinese community, express our gratitude to the Almighty
Destiny has led us to be born in the land of Sunda
Living harmoniously, diligently contributing to society
Let us preserve West Java, our homeland

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Shen Shen Ti Ching Yi (Cinta Kasih Yang Mendalam)
 Mae cang zai wei di xin lie (tertanam di hati yang terdalam)
 Hue ye cu nien siang nu (Mengenang pada tahun lalu ketika aku bertemu dengan mu)
 Wei I chi nien he ni wo tuey ni yu ching yi (Ketika itu aku punya hati padamu, punya rasa cinta kasih)
 Wei se mo yu ching (Tapi kenapa sesudah bertemu)
 Fu chien ni ti nu wei ying (tidak melihat apa apa, bahkan bayangannya juga tidak ada)
 She she k eke wo chai xiang nien ni (tapi aku setiap waktu selalu merindukanmu)
 Tu she we liaw ainu (Itu semua gara gara aku mencintai kamu)

Kami warga Tionghoa, Sewu nuhun ka Yang Agung
 Takdir nu nangtukeun, kami lahir di tatar Sunda
 Hirup suyunan, mancen gawe nu rancage
 Yu urang pupusti, Jawa Barat lembur urang

Kami warga Tionghoa, sewu nuhun ka Yang Agung (Kami warga Tionghoa sangat bersyukur kepada Tuhan)
 Takdir nu nangtukeun, kami lahir di tatar Sunda (takdir yang menentukan kami lahir di daerah Sunda)
 Hirup suyunan, mancen gawe nu rancage (hidup rukun dan bekerja penuh semangat)
 Yu urang pupusti, Jawa Barat lembur urang (Mari kita lestarikan Jawa Barat tempat tinggal kita)

Shen Shen Ti Ching Yi Lyric :
 Shen Shen Ti Ching Yi (Deep Love)
 Mae cang zai wei di xin lie (grows in the deepest heart)
 Hue ye cu nien siang nu (Reminiscing about the last year when I met you)
 Wei I chi nien he ni wo tuey ni yu ching yi (When I had a heart for you, I had love)

Wei se mo yu ching (But why after meeting)
 Fu chien ni ti nu wei ying (don't see anything, not even the shadow)
 She she keke wo chai xiang nien ni (but I always miss you every time)
 Tu she we liaw ainu (It's all because I love you)

The song "Shen Shen Ti Ching Yi" portrays a profound and all-encompassing love that goes beyond basic romantic emotion between persons. It encompasses a great love for one's homeland, nature, and the environment. This composition is a fusion of a Mandarin song with Sundanese lyrics, complemented by traditional Sundanese music. At the conclusion, the song is blended with a conventional Sundanese melody employing the Salendro musical scale. The lyrics of the song capture the emotions of people of Chinese heritage living in the West Java region, particularly those of Sundanese ancestry. They live together peacefully, displaying a strong sense of determination and dedication, while also cultivating a deep affection for the country in which they currently live. This sentiment is depicted in the subsequent lyrics:

"We, the Chinese community, express our gratitude to the Almighty
 Destiny has led us to be born in the land of Sunda
 Living harmoniously, diligently contributing to society
 Let us preserve West Java, our homeland"



Fig 4: Sundanese and Mandrin Singer

Source: Author

From the elaboration and findings presented above, it can be inferred that art, when fulfilling its intended purpose, can make significant contributions to the processes of life and societal interaction. *“Sebagaimana dikemukakan oleh Clifort Geertz pula bahwa, seni adalah ungkapan social yang diwujudkan , jika kita perhatikan secara seksanma, jelas seni yang kita gunakan untuk berkesenian itu bagi kita mempunyai maksud untuk menyampaikan sesuatu pada orang lain. Sesuatu iu ada hubungannya dengan apa yang mereka ekspresikan . Sesuatu itu ada hubungannya denagan kepentingan sosialnya. “ . As posited by Clifort Geertz, art is a social expression that materializes; upon close examination, it becomes apparent that the art we utilize for artistic endeavours holds the intention of conveying something to others. This something is related to what they express. This something is related to its social significance. (Jajuli 2013: 294).*

Discussion

The findings of this research highlight the significant role of the Pasundan Asih Community in promoting cultural adaptation through the practice of Sundanese arts among the ethnic Chinese community in Bandung. The process of training and performing traditional Sundanese arts at Padepokan Pasundan Asih serves as a profound example of how cultural practices can foster social integration and preserve cultural heritage.

The training process at Pasundan Asih is intensive and regular, especially in preparation for specific events or occasions. Members of the community engage in various traditional Sundanese arts, including Degung Sunda music, Kecapi Suling (zither and flute ensemble), and Rampak Sekar (choral ensemble). These activities not only enhance their artistic skills but also immerse them in the Sundanese culture, including its language, customs, and way of life. This immersion facilitates a deeper understanding and appreciation of the local culture, exemplifying the proverb "dimana tanah dipijak langit dijunjung" ("As the proverb goes, Where the Earth is Stepped On, There the Sky is Held High") articulated by Tan Deseng. This practice of cultural engagement reflects a commitment to preserving and cherishing the culture of the Sundanese region, despite the participants' diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The Pasundan Asih Community's activities extend beyond local performances, reaching audiences in various regions of West Java, Jakarta, and even abroad, including China. These performances, such as the one themed "Sabilulungan Ngamumule Kabudayaan Sunda" (Together Preserving Sundanese Culture), demonstrate Indonesia's rich cultural heritage and the principle of "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity). The community's efforts in promoting Sundanese arts internationally, as seen in their performance in Nanjing, China, highlight the universal appeal and cultural diplomacy potential of traditional arts. This was acknowledged by the Chinese Ambassador, further validating the significance of their cultural contributions.

A notable example of their cultural synthesis is the musical composition "Komposisi Bunga Nusantara" (Composition of Archipelago Flowers), which blends Sundanese Karawitan music with classical Mandarin elements. This composition includes segments for the Butterfly Dance and the Fan Dance, symbolizing the harmonious fusion of Sundanese and Chinese cultural elements. The use of traditional instruments and musical scales from both cultures creates a unique and cohesive artistic expression. The lyrics of the song "Shen Shen Ti Ching Yi" (Deep Love) further exemplify this fusion, combining Mandarin and Sundanese language and sentiments to convey a deep affection for both cultural identities and the homeland.

The discussion of these findings underscores the importance of cultural arts in fostering social interaction and preserving cultural identity. The Pasundan Asih Community's efforts illustrate how traditional arts can serve as a medium for cultural adaptation and social integration, providing a platform for expressing and preserving cultural heritage in a multicultural society. This aligns with Clifort Geertz's view that art is a social expression intended to convey significant messages related to social interests and values. In conclusion, the Pasundan Asih Community's activities demonstrate the powerful role of cultural arts in bridging cultural divides and fostering a sense of unity and appreciation among diverse ethnic groups. Their commitment to preserving and promoting Sundanese arts serves as a model for cultural adaptation and integration, highlighting the potential of traditional arts to contribute to societal cohesion and mutual understanding in an increasingly globalized world.

Conclusions

Findings of this research conclude, there are specific mechanisms and practices through which the Chinese ethnic community enhances social interaction, expresses their cultural identity, and adapts within the broader Indonesian society by preserving and promoting Sundanese arts. The Pasundan Asih Community conducts regular and intensive training sessions in various traditional Sundanese arts, such as Degung Sunda music, Kecapi Suling, and Rampak Sekar. These training sessions not only develop the participants' artistic skills but also immerse them in the Sundanese culture, language, and customs, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the local culture.

The community actively participates in regional, national, and international events, showcasing their cultural heritage. These performances serve as a platform for expressing their cultural identity and promoting Indonesian culture globally. Notable performances include the "Sabilulungan Ngamumule Kabudayaan Sunda" event and international showcases in China, which highlight the community's commitment to cultural preservation and the principle of "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity).

The creation of collaborative musical compositions, such as "Komposisi Bunga Nusantara," which blends Sundanese Karawitan music with classical Mandarin elements, exemplifies cultural synthesis. These works demonstrate how traditional arts can be adapted to reflect and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of the community members. By engaging in cultural activities and performances, the community fosters social interaction and integration. This engagement not only strengthens their cultural identity but also promotes mutual understanding and appreciation among different ethnic groups within Indonesian society.

Through their cultural activities, the Pasundan Asih Community contributes to the promotion of national values such as patriotism and nationalism. Their commitment to preserving and promoting Sundanese arts reflects a deep-seated reverence for the homeland and a desire to contribute positively to the broader society. These practices illustrate how the Chinese ethnic community in Bandung uses cultural arts as a medium for social interaction and adaptation, enhancing their cultural identity and fostering a sense of unity within the diverse Indonesian society. The research underscores the importance of cultural preservation as a means of promoting social cohesion and mutual understanding in a multicultural context.

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