



From “Pakem” to “Dibawa Kalem”: Negotiating Authority and Inclusivity in Keroncong Music Through Tabuhan Practice

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Abstract. *Tabuhan* is one of the primary modes of musical practice in keroncong performance, alongside rehearsal and stage performance. More than merely a space for gathering and social bonding, *tabuhan* functions as a cultural space where the production and reproduction, distribution, as well as consumption of musical knowledge and aesthetic values are negotiated across generations. This study examines the historical transformation of *tabuhan* practices in keroncong music, particularly the shift from adherence to “*pakem*”, as a musical rules and authoritative norms considered canonical, toward practices that are more flexible and inclusive. This research employs a parallel emic autoethnography method to position the researcher’s experiences, involvement, and reflections as both an insider and outsider within the *tabuhan* practices under study. Through the perspectives of cultural studies and ethnomusicology, this article explores how *tabuhan* functions as a space of oral transmission, participatory learning, and the negotiation of authority within keroncong communities. In earlier periods, *tabuhan* tended to be perceived as exclusive due to the dominance of seniority and rigid musical standards, often discouraging younger generations from participating. However, contemporary *tabuhan* increasingly accommodates intergenerational participation, diverse musical expressions, and broader public engagement beyond keroncong practitioners themselves. This transformation demonstrates that authority in keroncong music has not entirely disappeared, but continues to be renegotiated through communal interaction. The article argues that *tabuhan* practices play a significant role in sustaining keroncong as an intangible cultural heritage through a balance of continuity, adaptability, and inclusivity.

Keywords: Tabuhan Practice, Keroncong Music, Pakem, Cultural Negotiation, Inclusivity.

1 Introduction

Indonesia is recognized as megadiversity countries, possessing an exceptionally rich cultural diversity. One of its cultural treasures is keroncong music, an element of intangible cultural heritage that is currently undergoing the nomination process for inscription on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) List [1]. Historical accounts suggest that the origins of keroncong can be traced back to the sixteenth

century, intertwined with the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indonesian archipelago under the mission of gold, glory, and gospel [2]. Over time, *keroncong* spread throughout the archipelago and eventually beyond Indonesia through various sociocultural activities, including live performances and the expanding role of mass media [3]. To date, more than thirty varieties of *keroncong* musical expression have been identified, each adapting to and representing regional cultures as well as contemporary cultural trends [4].

The diversity of *keroncong* has not always been perceived as a positive indicator of the music's sustainability. Instead, it has frequently generated debates concerning the very identity of *keroncong*. What exactly is *keroncong*? Is it a musical genre, a musical instrument, a rhythmic pattern, an ensemble, or even an ideology? To date, no single definition has been universally accepted as adequately describing *keroncong* without creating misconceptions or privileging a particular cultural perspective. *Keroncong* originated in Kampung Tugu, flourished in Solo, and is now found throughout Indonesia in various localized forms [5]. Yet fundamental questions remain: Should music that is considered authentic *keroncong* necessarily possess a *ngroncong* quality? Is *keroncong* inherently associated with Javanese culture? These and many other questions continue to emerge as scholars and practitioners seek to understand the identity of *keroncong*.

Throughout its historical development, the diverse varieties of *keroncong* have not always been readily accepted, or even recognized, as legitimate forms of *keroncong*. This situation stems not only from the absence of a clear definition of *keroncong* itself, but also from the existence of *pakem* within the *keroncong* tradition. In this context, *pakem* refers to a set of standardized, binding, and authoritative conventions that determine what constitutes "correct" *keroncong* practice, both in terms of musicological principles and performance practice [6]. One such convention concerns the standard instrumentation of a *keroncong* ensemble, consisting of *cak*, *cuk*, cello, guitar, bass, flute, and violin [7]. Consequently, ensembles incorporating additional instruments, such as drums, saxophones, trumpets, or others, are frequently questioned and, by those who adhere strictly to established *pakem*, are sometimes dismissed as not being *keroncong* at all.



Fig. 1. Standard Keroncong Ensemble Form

Keroncong music encompasses at least three principal repertoire formats that have likewise become normative references in both composition and performance: *keroncong asli* (Kr.), *langgam keroncong* (Lgm.), and *stambul* (Stb.) [5]. Musicologically, each of these repertoire forms follows prescribed conventions regarding the number of measures, song structure, and harmonic progression. Instrumental performance practice likewise adheres to several established playing patterns, namely *engkel*, *dobel*, and *kotheek* [5]. However, the repertoire and performance practices found in *Keroncong Tugu* differ from these conventions. This raises important questions: Where do the boundaries of *pakem* in *keroncong* actually lie? Are these conventions truly immutable, permanently binding *keroncong* to a fixed set of rules that cannot be revised? For how long should such conventions continue to be maintained? This study seeks to trace the ways in which *pakem* has functioned in *keroncong* music across different historical periods.

The emergence and development of *pakem* in *keroncong* did not occur spontaneously. During the 1920s and 1930s, a codified set of conventions gradually began to take shape through the legitimizing influence of prominent Indonesian *keroncong* figures and the role of mass media [9]. These conventions were subsequently institutionalized and transmitted across generations, with earlier generations serving as custodians of authority, while successive generations were expected to understand, comply with, and eventually pass them on to their successors. This continuous cycle has ensured the enduring presence of *pakem* throughout the development of *keroncong*, despite persistent debates and controversies that have rendered it a longstanding issue within the tradition.

Although discussions of *pakem* are no longer as dominant in contemporary *keroncong* discourse as they once were, its significance has by no means disappeared. For some practitioners, *pakem* remains an essential reference for preserving the continuity of *keroncong*'s musical identity. Others, however, regard it as a flexible point of reference that may be interpreted contextually in response to changing times. Rather than being understood as a fixed and immutable set of rules, *pakem* may instead be viewed as a cultural construct that undergoes continuous processes of

reproduction, reinterpretation, and negotiation in accordance with the social contexts of its practitioners. Unfortunately, these dynamics remain relatively underdocumented and understudied in academic scholarship. Yet documenting such transformations is crucial, not only as part of the historical record of *keroncong*'s development but also as a means of reflecting upon how an element of cultural heritage sustains its continuity while retaining the capacity to adapt to social change.

This shift in the authority of *pakem*, from a rigid normative framework to the more relaxed notion of *dibawa kalem* (take it slowly), has unfolded alongside the increasingly adaptive and dynamic dialectic between the preservation and development of *keroncong* music [9]. Although *keroncong* no longer enjoys the level of popularity it once held during its golden age, it continues to thrive across both physical and digital spaces. Recordings, live-streamed performances, and various forms of creative *keroncong* content are now widely available on digital platforms, enabling audiences to access and enjoy *keroncong* anytime and anywhere [10]. Live *keroncong* activities likewise continue through various modes of musical practice, including *tabuhan*, rehearsals, and stage performances.

Among these practices, *tabuhan* has played a particularly significant role in the process of *pakemization* within *keroncong*. Unlike rehearsals, which are oriented toward performance preparation, or stage performances, which are embedded within the cultural industry, *tabuhan* constitutes a communal sociocultural practice that facilitates the transmission of knowledge and intergenerational negotiation in constructing values considered representative of *keroncong* identity. *Tabuhan* brings together musicians, singers, observers, audiences, composers, arrangers, and members of the wider community from diverse backgrounds to make music collectively within a relatively informal atmosphere. In contemporary terms, *tabuhan* may best be understood as analogous to a jam session. In practice, *tabuhan* functions not merely as an expressive musical activity but also as a cultural arena in which ideas concerning *pakem*, identity, musicality, and authority within *keroncong* are produced, maintained, questioned, and continually negotiated.

Despite the continued existence of *tabuhan* within contemporary *keroncong* practice, scholarly discussions of this phenomenon remain relatively limited, particularly those that conceptualize it as a space for understanding the dynamics of authority, identity construction, and cultural production within *keroncong*. Most existing studies have concentrated on the music's historical development, musical structures, or innovations in performance, while the sociocultural processes embedded in the everyday practices of its practitioners have received comparatively little scholarly attention. Yet such practices are essential for explaining how a cultural tradition is simultaneously preserved and transformed. Addressing this gap, the present study examines *tabuhan* as a space in which authority and inclusivity are negotiated within *keroncong* music, focusing specifically on the shift from *pakem* to *dibawa kalem*. By doing so, this research seeks to contribute to the fields of music studies and cultural studies by offering a reading of musical practice as a site of meaning-making, while also enriching discussions on the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage as a process grounded not only in the preservation of tradition but also in the dynamic social practices through which tradition continues to evolve.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using parallel emic autoethnography, a methodological framework developed specifically for this research through the synthesis of the Parallel-Emic Research Model (PERM) and autoethnography. The development of this approach was motivated by the need to understand *tabuhan* as both a musical and a sociocultural phenomenon that cannot be separated from the lived experiences of its practitioners. Within the context of this study, an understanding of *tabuhan* cannot be adequately achieved solely through external observation or the researcher's personal experience. Rather, it requires an ongoing dialogue between the researcher's experiences and those of other participants who actively engage in *keroncong tabuhan*. Accordingly, parallel emic autoethnography was designed to generate richer data by integrating the researcher's autoethnographic reflections with the emic perspectives of participants in parallel.

This methodological approach also enabled the researcher to move reflexively between two positions: insider and outsider. As an insider, the researcher has been actively involved in *keroncong* music since the age of six and has participated extensively in *tabuhan* practices across various regions of Indonesia. This position provided privileged access to local terminology, community ethics, interactional patterns, and forms of knowledge that are typically transmitted orally. At the same time, academic inquiry requires critical distance to prevent personal experience from becoming unquestioned assumptions. Consequently, throughout the research process, the researcher consciously adopted an outsider perspective by critically reflecting upon personal experiences, comparing them with field data, and remaining open to perspectives offered by other participants. The continual movement between these two positions constitutes one of the defining characteristics of the parallel emic autoethnographic approach employed in this study.

The study was conducted through four principal stages: pre-research, preliminary research, main research, and post-research. These stages did not proceed in a strictly linear sequence but were interconnected through the principle of iterative analysis, allowing data collection, analysis, and reflection to occur repeatedly throughout the research process.

The first stage, pre-research, aimed to establish the conceptual foundation while preparing for the implementation of the study. During this stage, the researcher reviewed the literature on *keroncong* music, the concept of *pakem*, *tabuhan* practice, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, and relevant methodological references. The literature review was conducted not only to develop the study's conceptual framework but also to identify existing research gaps. In addition, this stage included the preparation of the research design, development of research instruments, logistical and administrative arrangements, and the process of obtaining permission from participants and other relevant stakeholders.

The second stage, preliminary research, was conducted to determine the primary research site. This phase involved preliminary observations of various *keroncong* communities across several regions, accompanied by communication with *keroncong* practitioners. Based on this initial mapping, the Solo Raya region was selected as the principal research locus. The selection of Solo Raya was based on two primary considerations. First, the region hosts *tabuhan* gatherings with relatively high

frequency compared to other areas, thereby providing a rich setting for observing diverse musical practices and intercommunity interactions. Second, Solo Raya is widely regarded as the epicenter of *keroncong* development, where *pakem* continues to serve as an important point of reference in various musical practices [1]. The geographical scope of Solo Raya as the main research locus is presented through an administrative map of the region, as shown in Figure 2. In general, the Solo Raya area comprises the City of Surakarta and the regencies of Karanganyar, Sukoharjo, Boyolali, Klaten, Sragen, and Wonogiri. The map is provided to clarify the spatial boundaries of the research location, rather than to compare *tabuhan* practices across the different regencies/city. Thus, this figure primarily serves as a geographical reference for understanding the scope of the fieldwork.



Fig. 2. Map of the Solo Raya Region

The third stage constituted the main research, focusing on data collection, data analysis, and the establishment of data validity. All procedures during this stage were guided by the principles of parallel emic autoethnography, whereby understanding was developed through an ongoing dialogue among the researcher's reflective experiences, participants' lived experiences, field observations, and various documents related to *tabuhan* practice. Data analysis commenced from the outset of the research, enabling preliminary findings to inform subsequent data collection. This approach allowed the study to evolve dynamically in response to emerging field data.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: complete participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Complete participant observation positioned the researcher as an active participant within *tabuhan* practice. In this role, the researcher not only observed the activities but also participated directly as a *keroncong* practitioner, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of musical processes, interpersonal interactions, and social dynamics. Throughout the observation process, the researcher maintained field notes, reflective journals, and documentation, all of which constituted essential components of the analytical process.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations concerning issues related to *pakem*, musical practices, intergenerational relationships, and the changes they had experienced over time within *keroncong* culture. This interview format was selected

because it provided sufficient flexibility for the researcher to develop questions according to the flow of conversation while maintaining the study's analytical focus. Consequently, the resulting narratives not only addressed the research questions but also enabled the identification of emerging issues that arose throughout the research process.

Document analysis was employed as a complementary source of data. The documents examined included community archives, documentation of *tabuhan* activities, photographs, audio and video recordings, social media content, news reports, and various other materials related to the development of *keroncong* practices. These documentary sources enriched the field data while providing historical context for the transformations observed throughout the study.

Data analysis was conducted through an iterative process of thematic coding and analytical triangulation. The first stage involved data reduction to select information relevant to the research focus. The autoethnographic journal entries and field notes were reviewed and coded based on recurring themes relevant to the research focus. These codes were then compared with codes derived from participant interviews, participant observation, and documentary materials. Rather than treating the researcher's reflections as independent evidence, this analysis positioned them as one layer of data to be compared with participants' accounts and observed practices. For example, an experience initially interpreted by the researcher as a form of musical authority was re-examined when interview narratives and subsequent observations indicated a different understanding of the interaction. Such comparisons enabled the researcher to identify points of convergence, contradictions, and differences between personal experiences and participants' perspectives. Thus, this process functioned as analytical triangulation, in which findings were developed through dialogue among multiple sources rather than relying solely on the researcher's autoethnographic accounts. This procedure also served as a reflexive strategy to minimize personal bias while retaining the value of experiences gained from the researcher's position as an insider. The data were subsequently interpreted by relating the various field findings to the conceptual framework employed in the study. The validity of the research data was also maintained through the principles of credibility, reflexivity, and transparency.

The final stage, post-research, encompassed the evaluation of the overall research process, the preparation of the scholarly report, and the dissemination of findings through academic forums and scientific publications. This stage was considered an integral part of the research cycle, as it ensured that the findings would extend beyond academic knowledge production to contribute to broader scholarly discussions on *keroncong* music, *tabuhan* practice, and the dynamics of negotiating authority and inclusivity in the preservation of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage.

3 Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study on *tabuhan* as an arena of cultural production within *keroncong* music in the Solo Raya region. The discussion extends beyond musical aspects to encompass historical trajectories, social relations, cultural values, and everyday practices that shape how individuals understand and negotiate *pakem* in *keroncong* music.

3.1 *Tabuhan* as A Negotiation Space

Understanding *tabuhan* as comparable to a jam session provides a useful initial illustration of a musical practice characterized by spontaneity, expressiveness, and openness. However, *tabuhan* embodies a level of complexity that extends far beyond the domain of musicality alone. In this study, *tabuhan* is conceptualized as an arena of cultural production, where social relationships, musical knowledge, lived experiences, and meanings of *keroncong* are continuously constructed and reconstructed through interactions among participants. Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher encountered musicians, singers, music enthusiasts, academics, researchers, university students, private-sector employees, and local residents gathering within the same space for diverse purposes. Some came to perform music, others to learn an instrument, observe the social practices surrounding *keroncong*, or simply enjoy the atmosphere. Within this setting, social identities carried from outside, such as profession, socioeconomic status, or educational background, did not serve as the primary basis for establishing relationships. Instead, participants interacted on relatively equal terms as fellow practitioners engaged in *tabuhan*.

Although *tabuhan* has long become an integral part of *keroncong* musical life, no historical source has yet been able to determine precisely when the practice first emerged. Based on narratives collected from practitioners across multiple generations, *tabuhan* did not originate as a formally designed activity but instead evolved organically in response to changes within the *keroncong* musical ecosystem. During the period when *keroncong* orchestras (*orkes keroncong*) regularly rehearsed, musical activities were generally exclusive, being reserved for members of individual ensembles. As some of these ensembles gradually ceased their activities while practitioners still sought opportunities to continue making music, informal gatherings began to emerge that were no longer restricted by ensemble membership. It was from these circumstances that *tabuhan* developed as an alternative space, enabling anyone to continue participating in *keroncong* without being bound to the organizational structure of a particular orchestra.

In the Solo Raya region, this practice is estimated to have begun developing during the 1990s and continued to increase in both frequency and geographical distribution until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several participants even recalled a policy introduced by the municipal government of Surakarta encouraging each urban village (*kelurahan*) to host at least one *tabuhan* activity as a communal gathering space for *keroncong* practitioners. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused many *tabuhan* gatherings to cease, the practice did not disappear entirely. Instead, several *tabuhan* communities re-emerged as conditions gradually returned to normal, albeit with lower frequency and fewer participants than before the pandemic. This historical trajectory demonstrates that *tabuhan* has evolved in accordance with the changing social lives of its practitioners.

Another significant transformation in the history of *tabuhan* concerns the changing nature of participation. According to narratives shared by practitioners from different generations, *tabuhan* was not always as open and inclusive as it appears today. Although there were, in principle, no formal restrictions preventing individuals

from attending, participation was nevertheless strongly shaped by the musical authority of senior practitioners. Younger generations, particularly those who had not yet mastered the conventions of *keroncong*, often hesitated to participate out of concern that they might make mistakes while performing or singing. Several participants recalled that, during their early experiences, they spent more time observing than actively participating because they feared receiving reprimands or criticism, which were often perceived as quite harsh if their performances failed to meet the musical expectations of senior practitioners.

These accounts suggest that the openness of *tabuhan* during this earlier period remained relatively limited. Although opportunities for participation formally existed, access to meaningful participation was not experienced equally by all practitioners. As generational transitions occurred, however, this situation changed considerably. The present study found that *tabuhan* gatherings throughout Solo Raya have become increasingly receptive to newcomers, regardless of whether they possess prior experience in *keroncong* music. No formal selection procedures or assessments of musical competence were observed before individuals were invited to perform or sing. New participants are generally encouraged to choose freely whether they wish to play an instrument, sing, learn, or simply observe and enjoy the atmosphere. Musical corrections are still provided, but they are now more commonly offered as part of a learning process rather than as an assertion of authority.

This transformation indicates that the historical development of *tabuhan* is reflected not only in fluctuations in the number of gatherings but also in changing understandings of participation itself. Whereas, in earlier periods, legitimacy to participate was largely determined by one's mastery of *pakem* and recognition from senior practitioners, contemporary *tabuhan* increasingly positions participation as the primary gateway to learning and the development of musical experience. Inclusivity within *tabuhan*, therefore, should not be understood as an inherent or longstanding characteristic but rather as the outcome of an ongoing process of negotiation that has unfolded alongside changing intergenerational relationships within the social life of *keroncong* music.



Fig. 3. Intergenerational Participation in *Tabuhan*

This transformation is also evident in the composition of participants attending *tabuhan* today. The study found that *tabuhan* is no longer dominated by senior generations, as was frequently described by earlier practitioners. During a single gathering, the researcher observed musicians over the age of fifty performing alongside teenagers who had been learning *keroncong* for only a few months. At several venues, *tabuhan* gatherings were attended almost entirely by young participants. This situation suggests that intergenerational succession within *tabuhan* no longer follows a rigid pattern of transmission but instead occurs through more fluid forms of participation. Younger generations are no longer positioned merely as recipients of knowledge; rather, they are increasingly provided with opportunities to contribute, experiment, and develop their own ways of experiencing and interpreting *keroncong*. Nevertheless, this greater openness has not diminished the role of senior practitioners. Instead, intergenerational relationships have become more dialogical, with musical experience and authority continuing to be respected without restricting opportunities for younger participants to engage.

These changing intergenerational relationships have also transformed the way learning takes place within *tabuhan*. Unlike formal music education, which is generally structured around teacher–student relationships, knowledge transmission in *tabuhan* occurs situationally according to the practical demands of the moment. Individuals wishing to learn a particular instrument typically approach a more experienced player, observe their performance, ask questions, and attempt to play the instrument themselves whenever an opportunity arises. Musical feedback may be provided while a piece is being performed, immediately afterward, during breaks, or at the end of the gathering. Notably, this learning process rarely relies on musical notation as its primary medium. Instead, musical knowledge is transmitted predominantly through observation, imitation, embodied experience, and verbal interaction among participants.

These findings demonstrate that *tabuhan* functions not merely as a space for making music but also as an arena in which various forms of cultural capital are produced, exchanged, and negotiated. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu, *tabuhan* may be understood as a field possessing its own internal logic and rules of practice [12]. Significantly, cultural capital within *tabuhan* is not measured solely by technical musical proficiency but also by one's willingness to share knowledge, cultivate social relationships, and participate consistently within the community. Similarly, as argued by Christopher Small through the concept of *musicking*, the meaning of music resides not merely in the sounds produced but in the totality of relationships created through musical practice [13]. Within the context of *tabuhan*, playing, singing, listening, conversing, offering musical feedback, and even simply being present to enjoy the atmosphere all constitute integral components of the same musical practice. Consequently, the transformation of *tabuhan* from a relatively exclusive space into an increasingly inclusive one has not only altered who is able to participate but has also reshaped the ways in which knowledge, legitimacy, and authority are constructed within the social life of *keroncong* music.

The inclusivity of *tabuhan* is further reflected in the absence of an explicit set of rules governing how the gathering should proceed. Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher found no predetermined program, performance schedule, or formal allocation of roles established by organizers. A *tabuhan* gathering typically begins

only once sufficient *keroncong* instrumentalists have assembled to complete the standard *keroncong* ensemble. From that point onward, the activities unfold organically according to the dynamics of the participants. Singers freely choose the songs they wish to perform, instrumentalists may exchange instruments whenever they wish, while other participants are equally free to arrive, engage in conversation, enjoy refreshments, or simply observe the ongoing musical activities.

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this situation illustrates the operation of *doxa*, a set of assumptions accepted by members of a social field as self-evident and taken for granted [14]. Participants in *tabuhan* require no explicit instructions regarding when to take turns performing, how to respond to song requests, or how to welcome newcomers, because these practices have become embodied dispositions acquired through repeated participation in *tabuhan*. The orderliness of *tabuhan*, therefore, is not produced through externally imposed regulations but rather through a *habitus* that is continually constructed and reproduced through social practice itself.

Negotiation within *tabuhan* does not occur through formal meetings or explicit debates. Instead, it unfolds through the everyday practices repeatedly enacted by its participants. Every encounter, every change of performers, every learning process, and every act of welcoming newcomers gradually reshapes collective understandings of who is entitled to participate, how knowledge should be transmitted, and how authority ought to be exercised within *keroncong* music. In this sense, *tabuhan* not only reflects broader social transformations within the *keroncong* community but also serves as the very space in which those transformations are continuously produced, enacted, and negotiated.

3.2 *Pakem* Discourse in *Tabuhan* Practice

If the previous section conceptualized *tabuhan* as an arena of negotiation, one of the most frequently encountered discourses within this arena concerns *pakem*. Interestingly, this study found no uniform understanding of how *pakem* should be practiced. For some practitioners, *pakem* is understood as a body of knowledge that must be preserved in order to maintain the musical characteristics of *keroncong*. Others regard it as a product of historical construction that remains important to understand but need not be applied rigidly in every musical practice. These differing perspectives suggest that *pakem* is not a fixed or final concept; rather, it is continually produced and reproduced through the discourses that unfold within *tabuhan* practice.

Throughout the observations, discussions of *pakem* rarely appeared in the form of theoretical explanations or formal instruction. Instead, they emerged naturally through everyday verbal interactions—for example, when an instrumentalist corrected another player's performance pattern, offered suggestions regarding vocal technique, discussed chord progressions, or compared current practices with performance styles from earlier periods. Discussions of *pakem* also frequently arose during breaks between musical sessions. In this way, *pakem* is sustained as a form of living knowledge embedded in everyday conversation rather than codified through formal rules.

The researcher's own experience upon first participating in a *tabuhan* gathering in Solo illustrates how *pakem* operates in practice. After performing a song, several senior practitioners commented that the researcher's vocal style was perceived as too

forceful and contained excessive improvisation. The researcher was subsequently advised to perform *keroncong* with a gentler vocal character and to remain closer to the principal melody. This experience demonstrates that *pakem* does not function as a prohibition against artistic expression but rather as a frame of reference through which the musical aesthetics of *keroncong*, particularly the Solonese style, are discussed. This situation reflects the operation of cultural capital and symbolic power as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu [15]. The advice offered by senior practitioners derived its legitimacy not from any formal organizational authority but from their recognized experience, musical competence, and reputation within the *keroncong* community. At the same time, the findings of this study indicate that such symbolic power does not necessarily produce hierarchical or dominating relationships. Rather, musical authority is continually negotiated through everyday interactions, such that correction and differing interpretations of *pakem* are generally understood as part of an ongoing process of knowledge sharing.

Negotiations surrounding *pakem* are evident not only in the ways practitioners discuss *keroncong* but also in their musical practices during *tabuhan*. The researcher observed numerous forms of musical exploration that did not entirely conform to the conventional *keroncong* practices commonly described in the literature. Performers frequently introduced substitute chords, modified harmonic progressions, developed new instrumental patterns, sang in their own distinctive styles, and presented musical interpretations that differed from forms traditionally regarded as standard. These practices were not necessarily perceived as deviations but rather as part of a process of exploration accepted as a natural and collective dynamic within *tabuhan*.

For example, in the use of chords, chords conventionally played in major form may be creatively transformed into minor chords, or a chord may be replaced with an alternative chord. One example is the tonic chord (I), which within a single measure may be developed into I7, producing a different harmonic color without eliminating the chord's function within the musical progression. In the *langgam* repertoire, development can likewise be found in harmonic progressions through the use of various chord extensions, so that the progression performed is not necessarily realized in the same form at every *tabuhan*. Similar flexibility can be observed in instrumental playing patterns, particularly through rhythmic development, in which players may introduce variations of established playing patterns according to their musical expression and the interactions taking place during *tabuhan*. In vocal practice, there is no single rule that strictly determines the placement of ornamentation. For example, singers may freely place *gregel*, *luk*, or *cengkok* according to their interpretation, while singers who are still learning and whose singing style tends to lack such ornamentation are also able to participate. Thus, freedom of expression in *tabuhan* operates across various musical elements and allows each practitioner to bring their own musical interpretation into the collective process of music-making.

The spontaneous nature of such musical expression also creates limitations in representing *tabuhan* musical practices through fixed musical notation. The same song may produce different musical realizations when performed by different people, at different *tabuhan* gatherings, or even by the same person at different times. Such differences may emerge in chord choices, the development of harmonic progressions, rhythmic patterns, and the placement of vocal ornamentation. Therefore, a single notated transcription cannot be positioned as a definitive representation of how a song

is performed in *tabuhan*, because each musical realization is highly dependent on the performers, situation, interactions, and moment in which the music takes place. Even when the song and performer are the same, its rendition may differ on different occasions. Accordingly, this spontaneous and situational character is not merely a limitation of documentation but constitutes an important characteristic of *tabuhan* itself, in which musical expression is shaped through experience, interaction, and musical decisions made directly in the course of practice.

Another form of negotiation is reflected in the choice of repertoire. Although *keroncong asli*, *langgam*, and *stambul* continue to dominate *tabuhan* gatherings, participation is by no means restricted to these repertoire types. Popular songs, regional folk songs, and even original compositions are frequently performed with *keroncong* accompaniment. On many occasions, such repertoire serves as a space for exploring new musical possibilities through the idiom of *keroncong*. This demonstrates that the boundaries of what may legitimately be performed in *tabuhan* are considerably more fluid than those traditionally associated with *pakem*.

At the performative level, negotiations surrounding *pakem* are likewise reflected in how participants present themselves during *tabuhan*. Unlike formal *keroncong* performances, which generally continue to maintain standards of formal attire as part of their musical representation, *tabuhan* presents a far more relaxed environment. Participants attend wearing everyday clothing, including T-shirts, sandals, and shorts, without this affecting their acceptance within the musical gathering. Even individuals whose professional lives include careers as university lecturers, academics, or professionals from various fields participate in similarly casual attire. Their ways of sitting, standing, and interacting are equally informal, unconstrained by the etiquette typically associated with formal performances. Recognition within *tabuhan* is therefore based not on conformity to formal symbols or external social identities but on active participation in collective music-making. In this sense, one's identity as a *keroncong* practitioner within *tabuhan* is constructed primarily through participation rather than appearance, social status, or profession.



Fig. 4. Self-Presentation in *Tabuhan* Practice

The findings of this study suggest that the growing use of the expression *dibawa kalem* should not be interpreted as signaling the disappearance of *pakem* from *keroncong* practice. Instead, it reflects a transformation in the way *pakem* is enacted. Whereas *pakem* previously functioned primarily as an instrument for distinguishing between practices considered correct and incorrect, while simultaneously reinforcing the boundaries of participation, within contemporary *tabuhan* it increasingly serves as a shared point of reference for collective learning. This shift indicates a broader transformation in the regime of authority within *keroncong* music. Authority continues to function as a source of musical legitimacy; however, it no longer operates principally through mechanisms of exclusivity, but rather through dialogue, mentorship, and the sharing of experience. In this context, the expression *dibawa kalem* represents a changing understanding among *keroncong* practitioners of the relationship between tradition, authority, and innovation, without positioning these three elements as inherently contradictory.

4 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the transformation of *tabuhan* practice reflects a broader shift in the ways authority within *keroncong* music is constructed, exercised, and transmitted. Whereas *pakem* previously functioned primarily as a normative framework defining the boundaries of participation and musical legitimacy, contemporary *tabuhan* practices reveal that *pakem* continues to be maintained as an aesthetic point of reference while being enacted in more adaptive ways through dialogue, participatory learning, and intergenerational interaction. This transformation is encapsulated in the expression *dibawa kalem*, which does not signify a rejection or dilution of *pakem*, but rather a negotiation between continuity and change. The sustainability of *keroncong* music depends not only on preserving its musical conventions but also on maintaining the social practices that enable the reproduction of knowledge, the regeneration of practitioners, and the cultivation of more inclusive forms of participation. This study argues that *tabuhan* should be understood as a significant arena of cultural production for examining both the historical development and the social dynamics of *keroncong* music. Furthermore, it underscores that everyday practices such as *tabuhan* constitute an essential element in sustaining *keroncong* as a living, adaptive, and continually relevant form of intangible cultural heritage amid ongoing social change.

This study has a limited scope, focusing on *tabuhan* as a space for the negotiation of authority, participation, and cultural production in *keroncong* music. Therefore, it does not provide an in-depth musicological analysis of the various forms of musical development identified in *tabuhan* practice. The variations in chord use, harmonic progression, rhythmic patterns, and vocal styles observed in *tabuhan* require further study to be analyzed systematically from a musicological perspective. A more in-depth musicological examination of the forms, structures, and musical characteristics of these diverse expressions in *tabuhan* may therefore constitute an important direction for future research.

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