

Revitalizing Javanese Gendhing for Karawitan Preservation and Local Wisdom Education

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aims to examine the forms of Javanese gendhing revitalization, identify the actors and media involved in its preservation, and analyze the local wisdom values embedded in Javanese karawitan practice.

Methodology - A qualitative descriptive approach was used through literature review, document analysis, field-oriented observation, and review of selected digital documentation such as recorded performances and cultural media content. The data were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring patterns related to preservation, revitalization, education, and local wisdom.

Findings - The findings indicate that revitalization occurs through ceremonial continuity, intergenerational education, digital documentation, creative adaptation, and institutional-community collaboration. Javanese gendhing transmits local wisdom values such as harmony, mutual assistance, respect, togetherness, patience, and social balance.

Originality - The study concludes that revitalization must position gendhing as a living cultural practice rather than a static heritage object. A sustainable preservation strategy requires integrated documentation, education, community performance, and responsible digital dissemination.

Keywords: Revitalization; Javanese Gendhing; Karawitan; Gamelan; Local Wisdom; Cultural Preservation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is not merely a collection of inherited objects, ceremonies, or artistic expressions. It is a system of meanings, practices, norms, and values that enables a community to define its identity and organize social life. In the Indonesian context, local cultural traditions have long functioned as sources of identity, ethical guidance, collective memory, and social cohesion. These traditions become especially important in periods of rapid modernization, when younger generations encounter global cultural products more frequently than local cultural knowledge.

Javanese karawitan is one of the most significant musical traditions in Java. It includes musical concepts, performance conventions, instruments, repertoires, vocal practices, and social values that are transmitted across generations. Within this tradition, gendhing refers to musical compositions or repertoires performed in relation to gamelan practice. Gendhing is not only an aesthetic form; it is also attached to rituals, ceremonies, theatre, dance, palace traditions, communal gatherings, and educational activities. Through these contexts, gendhing becomes a medium for transmitting Javanese values such as balance, refinement, patience, respect, and togetherness.

The preservation of Javanese gendhing is increasingly urgent because traditional performance arts now compete with popular digital entertainment, short-form media, and changing patterns of cultural participation. Younger audiences may recognize gamelan as a symbol of Indonesian culture, yet many do not understand the structure, meaning, or social function of specific gendhing repertoires. This situation requires revitalization, not in the sense of freezing tradition, but in the sense of keeping it meaningful, teachable, performable, and socially relevant.

A key problem in cultural preservation discourse is the tendency to conflate different heritage categories. UNESCO inscribed gamelan on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021 [1], [2]. This recognition applies to gamelan as a living musical tradition, including its

instruments, repertoire, performance contexts, transmission, and community practice. It does not mean that every individual Javanese gendhing has been separately inscribed as an independent UNESCO element. Likewise, Borobudur and Prambanan are UNESCO World Heritage sites, which belong to the category of tangible cultural heritage and monumental heritage, not intangible cultural heritage [3], [4]. This distinction must be clarified so that academic discussion remains accurate.

Previous discussions of Javanese culture often emphasize the importance of preservation in general terms. However, a stronger academic contribution requires a more focused analysis of how Javanese gendhing can be revitalized as a living practice and how its values can guide local wisdom education. Therefore, this article focuses on three research questions: (1) how is Javanese gendhing revitalized in contemporary cultural practice? (2) what actors, media, and strategies support the preservation of Javanese karawitan? and (3) what local wisdom values are transmitted through Javanese gendhing?

II. METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach is suitable for examining cultural practices because it allows the researcher to describe meanings, processes, actors, and social contexts in a detailed and interpretive manner [5], [6]. The object of the study was Javanese gendhing as a repertoire and cultural practice within Javanese karawitan. The analysis focused on revitalization, preservation strategies, and local wisdom values.

The data consisted of four main sources: scholarly literature on karawitan and Javanese cultural values; official cultural heritage documents, especially UNESCO documents related to intangible cultural heritage and gamelan; documentation of Javanese gendhing performances in community, educational, and ceremonial contexts; and field-oriented information from cultural practitioners, teachers, or community actors when available. Digital sources such as YouTube, TikTok, and online cultural archives were treated as supporting data, not as replacements for cultural interpretation.

Data collection was conducted through document review, observation of performance documentation, and qualitative note-taking. When human sources were used, the informants were selected purposively because of their involvement in Javanese karawitan practice, teaching, performance, or cultural preservation. The use of purposive informants is appropriate in qualitative research because the goal is not statistical representation but the depth and relevance of cultural knowledge.

The data were analyzed thematically. The analysis began by identifying statements, practices, and examples related to gendhing preservation. These data were then coded into themes such as performance continuity, educational transmission, digital documentation, creative adaptation, community participation, and local wisdom values. The themes were interpreted in relation to the theoretical concepts of culture, intangible heritage, and revitalization. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing scholarly references, official heritage documents, performance documentation, and field-oriented observations.

This study has a clear limitation. It does not conduct musical transcription or technical analysis of melodic structure, pathet, irama, or garap in detail. Its focus is cultural preservation and value education. Future research may combine ethnographic interviews with musical analysis to produce a deeper account of specific gendhing repertoires.

Table 1. Data Sources and Analytical Function

Data Source	Content Examined	Analytical Function
Scholarly literature	Concepts of culture, karawitan, gendhing, local wisdom, and qualitative method	To establish theoretical and conceptual grounding
Official heritage documents	UNESCO documents on intangible cultural heritage, gamelan, and World Heritage sites	To correct heritage classification and avoid inaccurate claims
Performance documentation	Recorded performances, ceremonial uses, educational activities, and digital cultural content	To identify forms of revitalization and public dissemination
Field-oriented information	Notes from practitioners, cultural educators, and community actors where available	To connect textual analysis with living practice

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. The Position of Javanese Gendhing in Karawitan

Javanese gendhing must be understood within the broader system of karawitan. Karawitan does not only refer to the sound of gamelan instruments; it includes musical knowledge, ensemble discipline, vocal forms, repertoires, aesthetic principles, performance etiquette, and social relationships among musicians and audiences. Gendhing functions as a repertoire or composition that gives structure to musical performance. It is performed through the interaction of instruments, vocal parts, rhythm, tempo, pathet, and garap.

This understanding is important because gendhing cannot be separated from the community of practice that sustains it. A gendhing becomes meaningful when it is learned, rehearsed, performed, interpreted, and transmitted. It is therefore not merely a musical item but a cultural process. In Javanese communities, certain gendhing are associated with ceremonial events, welcoming guests, wayang performances, palace traditions, weddings, dance accompaniment, and moments of social gathering.

The repertoires often mentioned in relation to Javanese ceremonial and artistic practice include Ladrang Wilujeng, Ketawang Puspawarna, Kebo Giro, Gendhing Talu, and other classical pieces. These examples should be discussed carefully as part of the living gamelan-karawitan repertoire. They are culturally significant, but they should not be overstated as individually UNESCO-inscribed elements. The academic position of this article is that Javanese gendhing contributes to the sustainability of gamelan as intangible cultural heritage by maintaining repertoire, meaning, and practice.

B. Correcting the Heritage Framework

UNESCO's 2003 Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and associated instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage [7]. This definition stresses living transmission and community recognition. The value of intangible heritage is therefore not located only in official inscription, but in the way communities continue to practice and transmit it.

In 2021, gamelan was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity [1], [2]. UNESCO describes gamelan as a traditional Indonesian percussion orchestra consisting of instruments such as xylophones, gongs, gong-chimes, drums, cymbals, strings, and bamboo flutes. UNESCO also notes that gamelan is performed in rituals, ceremonies, traditional theatre, festivals, and concerts, and that it is passed on through formal and informal education [2]. This description supports the argument that gendhing revitalization should be connected to performance, transmission, education, and community practice.

At the same time, heritage categories must not be confused. Borobudur Temple Compounds and Prambanan Temple Compounds are UNESCO World Heritage sites, inscribed in 1991 as cultural properties [3], [4]. They should not be categorized as intangible cultural heritage. This correction is not a minor technicality. It affects the validity of the article's argument. If a manuscript discusses UNESCO recognition, it must distinguish between tangible heritage, World Heritage sites, and intangible cultural heritage. In this revised article, Javanese gendhing is positioned as part of gamelan and karawitan practice, while Borobudur and Prambanan are treated only as comparative examples of tangible heritage management.

C. Forms of Javanese Gendhing Revitalization

Professional photography facilitation provided significant added value for participants, as the photos. The revitalization of Javanese gendhing can be identified in several interrelated forms. First, revitalization occurs through performance continuity. A tradition remains alive when it is performed in real social contexts, not only stored in archives. Ceremonial pieces such as Ladrang Wilujeng or Kebo Giro maintain their social relevance because they are connected with welcoming, blessing, safety, and celebration. Their continued use in weddings, official events, artistic performances, and cultural gatherings helps sustain the relationship between music and social meaning.

Second, revitalization occurs through intergenerational education. Gendhing requires embodied learning. Students do not only memorize melodies; they learn listening discipline, ensemble sensitivity, timing, respect for senior musicians, and the ethics of collective performance. Formal education through schools and universities can strengthen this process, but informal learning through sanggar, family networks, community groups, and palace-related traditions remains equally important. The most effective preservation model is therefore not a single institution but a connected learning ecosystem.

Third, revitalization occurs through documentation and digital dissemination. Books, audio recordings, video documentation, notation, interviews, and digital archives are necessary because many repertoires risk becoming fragmented or forgotten. Platforms such as YouTube and TikTok can

introduce gendhing to younger audiences, although they cannot replace direct training. Digital media should be treated as an entry point that leads audiences toward deeper learning, not as a simplified substitute for karawitan practice.

Fourth, revitalization can occur through creative adaptation. New arrangements, collaborative performances, digital presentations, and cross-cultural projects may help make gendhing visible to contemporary audiences. However, innovation must be responsible. Adaptation should not remove the core musical identity of gendhing, including laras, pathet, garap, performance context, and ethical meaning. Revitalization fails when it turns tradition into decoration without knowledge.

Fifth, revitalization requires institutional and community collaboration. Government agencies, schools, universities, cultural communities, artists, and local leaders should not work separately. Preservation is most sustainable when documentation, education, performance, funding, and community participation are connected. In this sense, revitalization is not a one-time program but a continuous cultural cycle.

D. Local Wisdom Values in Javanese Gendhing

Local wisdom in Javanese gendhing is not limited to lyrical content or ceremonial symbolism. It is also embedded in the process of performance itself. Karawitan teaches musicians to listen to others, control their own sound, follow collective rhythm, maintain balance, and respect shared timing. These practices reflect Javanese social ideals such as harmony, restraint, mutual respect, cooperation, and communal responsibility.

Several values can be identified from the social function of gendhing. The value of harmony is reflected in ensemble balance, where no single instrument dominates the entire musical texture. The value of mutual assistance is reflected in the way musicians depend on one another to sustain tempo, structure, and musical expression. The value of respect is reflected in ceremonial use, especially in pieces used to welcome guests, honor elders, or accompany ritual moments. The value of patience is reflected in the gradual unfolding of musical form and the discipline required to perform it properly.

These values show that gendhing can contribute to character education. In educational settings, Javanese gendhing may be used to teach students not only artistic skill but also social awareness. Students learn that collective beauty requires self-control, listening, patience, and responsibility. This is why gendhing preservation should not be separated from local wisdom education.

Table 2. Local Wisdom Values Reflected in Javanese Gendhing Practice

Local Wisdom Value	Manifestation in Gendhing Practice	Educational Meaning
Harmony	Balanced interaction among instruments, voices, rhythm, and melodic structure	Students learn social balance and self-control
Mutual assistance	Musicians depend on one another to maintain tempo, transitions, and ensemble coherence	Students learn cooperation and shared responsibility
Respect	Gendhing is used in welcoming guests, ritual contexts, and formal ceremonies	Students learn etiquette, gratitude, and respect for others
Togetherness	Karawitan performance is collective rather than individualistic	Students learn that cultural work requires community
Patience	Musical forms unfold gradually and require disciplined listening	Students learn perseverance and emotional restraint
Cultural identity	Repertoire connects communities with inherited memory and Javanese aesthetics	Students develop awareness of local identity in a global era

E. Challenges in Revitalizing Javanese Gendhing

The revitalization of Javanese gendhing faces several challenges. The first challenge is the declining attention of younger generations. Many young people encounter local art only during school assignments or ceremonial events, while their everyday cultural consumption is shaped by popular

music and short digital content. This does not mean that young people reject tradition; rather, it shows that traditional arts must be introduced through more accessible and meaningful learning experiences.

The second challenge is limited documentation. Some gendhing repertoires are well known, but others are transmitted in restricted circles and may not be systematically recorded. Documentation must include not only the title of the gendhing but also context, function, musical features, performance setting, oral explanation, and community memory. Without adequate documentation, revitalization becomes superficial.

The third challenge is the risk of aesthetic simplification. Digital platforms can popularize gendhing, but they can also reduce it to short clips without context. This creates visibility without understanding. A responsible digital strategy should therefore combine short-form introduction with links to longer documentation, interviews, learning modules, and performance explanations.

The fourth challenge is the tension between preservation and innovation. Some communities fear that innovation will damage tradition, while some younger audiences may find strict preservation unattractive. The solution is not to choose one extreme. Revitalization should maintain core musical and ethical principles while allowing contextual adaptation. Tradition survives not because it never changes, but because change is guided by knowledge.

F. A Strategic Model for Sustainable Revitalization

Based on the analysis, sustainable revitalization of Javanese gendhing can be organized into five pillars. The first pillar is mapping and documentation. Communities, educators, and researchers need to identify important repertoires, record performances, collect oral explanations, and prepare accessible archives. The second pillar is education. Gendhing should be taught through schools, universities, community studios, workshops, and informal apprenticeship systems.

The third pillar is performance continuity. Gendhing must remain present in ceremonies, festivals, art events, and community gatherings. The fourth pillar is responsible creative adaptation. Artists may create new formats and collaborations, but they should preserve the musical and cultural logic of karawitan. The fifth pillar is institutional support. Government, universities, cultural organizations, and local communities need to coordinate funding, training, documentation, and dissemination.

This model shows that revitalization is not simply a matter of producing a book or uploading a video. Those activities are useful, but they are only part of a larger safeguarding cycle: documenting, teaching, performing, adapting, evaluating, and transmitting. When these elements work together, Javanese gendhing can remain relevant for contemporary society while retaining its cultural depth.

G. Implications for Cultural Education

The revitalization of Javanese gendhing has important implications for cultural education. First, it can strengthen students' understanding of local identity. Second, it can provide a practical model of character education through collective artistic practice. Third, it can help students understand that culture is not only inherited but also maintained through active participation. Fourth, it can encourage digital literacy by teaching students how to document, interpret, and disseminate cultural materials responsibly.

In higher education, the study of gendhing can be integrated into courses on cultural studies, arts education, ethnomusicology, local wisdom, and character education. In community education, workshops and public performances can build cultural awareness among young audiences. The goal is not to force tradition into modern life artificially, but to create meaningful encounters between young people and the cultural knowledge they inherit.

IV. CONCLUSION

Javanese gendhing is a vital repertoire within Javanese karawitan and the broader gamelan tradition. Its preservation is important not only because gamelan has been recognized by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage, but because gendhing continues to transmit cultural knowledge, social values, and communal identity. This article clarifies that UNESCO recognition applies to gamelan as a living tradition and should not be misrepresented as separate inscription of every individual gendhing composition. It also clarifies that Borobudur and Prambanan are World Heritage sites, not intangible cultural heritage elements.

The study shows that the revitalization of Javanese gendhing can be carried out through performance continuity, intergenerational education, documentation, digital dissemination, responsible creative adaptation, and collaboration among cultural institutions and communities. These strategies are necessary because gendhing must remain a living practice rather than a static cultural object.

The local wisdom values embedded in Javanese gendhing include harmony, mutual assistance, togetherness, respect, patience, and cultural identity. These values are not only conveyed through lyrics or ceremonial meanings but also through the collective discipline of karawitan performance. Therefore, Javanese gendhing has strong potential as a medium of local wisdom education and character formation.

Future preservation efforts should prioritize community-based documentation, cultural education, youth engagement, and responsible digital archiving. Future studies should include detailed interviews, musical transcription, and field observation of specific gendhing repertoires so that the relationship between musical structure, performance context, and local wisdom values can be analyzed more deeply.

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