Palembang Shadow Puppetry amid Modernization: Continuity, Adaptation, and Transformation, 2000-2025

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the documented continuity and transformation of Palembang shadow puppetry (Wayang Kulit Palembang) from 2000 to 2025. Drawing on a historical study based on heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, it analyzes written and visual records, observation at Sanggar Sri Palembang, and interviews with two key informants: third-generation puppeteer Kiagus Wirawan Rusdi (25 October 2025) and family member Yosi Evianti (20 October 2025). The evidence is derived from the authors' original undergraduate-thesis research corpus and includes dated photographs, event reports, and descriptions of performances and training. Five interpretive phases are identified: inactivity and early revival (2000-2006), fluctuation and reactivation (2007-2011), dynamic development (2012-2016), expansion (2017-2020), and adaptation and consolidation (2021-2025). These phases describe changes in documented activities, participation opportunities, media exposure, venues, and institutional networks rather than complete annual event totals. In 2025, the underlying study reported eleven activities, including broadcasts, workshops, rehearsals, and performances; the underlying figure captions identify examples, although item-level counts still require verification. Modernization simultaneously creates competition for attention and opportunities to make the tradition visible in schools, museums, media, and commercial spaces. Palembang Malay language, local repertoire, puppet design, musical conventions, and costume remain defining identity markers. The study extends earlier work by comparing historical continuity with the diversity of safeguarding arrangements in 2023-2025 while acknowledging uneven records and unverified apprentice outcomes.

Keywords: Palembang shadow puppetry; modernization; cultural existence; performing arts; cultural preservation

INTRODUCTION

Traditional arts are both artistic creations and social practices through which communities continually produce and negotiate knowledge, identity, collective memory, and intergenerational relationships. The 2003 UNESCO Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as practices, expressions, knowledge, skills, and cultural spaces that communities recognize as part of their heritage and continually recreate in response to their environment, history, and social change (UNESCO, 2003). A tradition's survival therefore involves not only artifacts but also practitioners, practical knowledge, functions, and transmission. Smith (2006) understands heritage as a process of making meaning than as a collection of inherited objects. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004) argues that the designation of intangible heritage itself chages how practices are represented, while (Lenzerini, 2011) emphasizes the role of communities in sustaining living culture. Such perspectives are especially pertinent to performance, which depends on interaction among performers, audiences, places, technologies, and social contexts. (Soedarsono, 2001) likewise situates changing performance practices within broader social and cultural conditions.

Modernization is a principal force shaping these changes. It involves social transformation toward an order regarded as more advanced, marked by changes in ways of thinking, technology, social organization, and patterns of life (Rosana, 2015). In everyday life, it also changes how people access entertainment and information. Television, popular music, modern performances, the internet, social media, and digital devices offer an expanding range of entertainment that is readily accessible, brief, and personalized. These changes can place

pressure on traditional arts as public attention shifts away from communal entertainment. Yet modernization does not necessarily lead to the decline of tradition. The same technologies can support documentation, promotion, learning, audience development, and the creation of more accessible performance spaces that do not always require audiences to be physically present. (Mrázek, 2005) argues that Javanese shadow puppetry has never stood apart from change: performance forms, audience experiences, economic and political conditions, and competition with other entertainment continually shape its practice. UNESCO similarly notes that *wayang* faces competition from video, television, and popular entertainment (UNESCO, 2008). These pressures encourage format changes that reduce some features of the performance. Modernization therefore needs to be understood both as a source of pressure on tradition and as a source of technologies for documentation, promotional media, new performance spaces, and learning opportunities. This ambivalence matters because preservation strategies focused exclusively on maintaining older forms may overlook the continual change inherent in living culture. The relationship between tradition and modernization is thus ambivalent: modernization can threaten cultural continuity while also providing new ways to sustain it (Yuwono et al., 2019).

Palembang shadow puppetry, or Wayang Kulit Palembang, provides a case for examining tradition, localization, and modernization. Its forms have been shaped by interactions between Javanese wayang practices and Palembang Malay culture (Laksana, 2018; Rochmiatun, 2021). The Kota Kapur inscription of 684 CE helps establish the wider historical context of interregional connections in the Sriwijaya period (Coedès, 2014), but it is not direct documentary evidence for the presence of shadow puppetry in Palembang at that date**.** The political history of the Palembang Sultanate during the early nineteenth century provides further context for understanding the region's historical development (Wargadalem, 2017). More specific claims about the origin and chronology of Palembang wayang must be grounded in evidence relating to puppets, performances, manuscripts, or later historical accounts. Localized characteristics are visible in language, figure design, color, music, titles, stories, costumes, and performance practices (Laksana, 2018; Rochmiatun, 2021).

Previous research shows that Palembang *wayang* has characteristics that distinguish it from Javanese traditions. Through a study of the play Bambang Dharmojati demonstrates how Sanggar Sri Palembang continues to sustain performances despite declining audience interest (Fadilla, 2019). Palembang *wayang* has also been examined within the context of cultural acculturation and local heritage (Rochmiatun, 2021), while its continuity between 2000 and 2019 has been traced through the recruitment of new practitioners, globalization, and competition with modern culture (Nurhidayanti et al., 2022). The role of *wayang* in teaching values and developing character has also been identified, indicating that its continuity concerns cultural functions as well as performance itself (Nurgiyantoro, 2011). These studies provide an important foundation, but each addresses particular aspects, such as morphology and acculturation, plays, manuscripts, or the threat of disappearance. A more recent study also examines the role of Kiagus Wibawan in the development of Palembang *wayang* during 2004-2022 (Lestari, 2024). Therefore, extending the chronological coverage to 2025 alone is insufficient to establish research novelty. Few studies have brought together changes in performance spaces, the use of digital media, the growth of educational activities, and stronger institutional collaboration within a historical account extending through 2025. The present study addresses this gap by examining these developments across five historical phases, particularly during 2023-2025, while distinguishing increased public visibility from sustained intergenerational transmission. These developments require a more integrated explanation.

At the beginning of the study period, Palembang shadow puppetry faced serious problems of continuity. Accounts associated with Sanggar Sri Palembang describe a major disruption from 1986, including damage to collections and interruption of performances, followed by the deaths of senior practitioners and difficulties replacing them. Published reporting also describes deteriorating equipment and the challenge of maintaining the ensemble (ANTARA News Sumatera Selatan, 2012; Inge, 2019). These sources support an assessment of institutional and generational vulnerability, but they do not constitute a complete census of all performers or performances in Palembang. Consequently, the study traces changes in the available historical record rather than assuming that undocumented activity was absent.

The year 2004 is an important turning point in the accounts examined here. UNESCO's proclamation of wayang puppet theatre as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003 was followed by its inclusion on the Representative List in 2008 (UNESCO, 2008). This international designation concerned wayang puppet theatre broadly; it was not a separate UNESCO inscription of Palembang shadow puppetry. Ki Agus

Wirawan Rusdi recalled in an interview on 25 October 2025 that revival efforts included assistance consisting of 50 replica puppets and six iron gamelan instruments. Earlier reporting records a comparable account of support delivered in 2004 (ANTARA News Sumatera Selatan, 2012; Inge, 2019). His account also describes learning from recordings left by his father and reassembling musicians, while the reported 2006 performance in front of the Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum provides a visible milestone of renewed public presentation (Nurhidayanti et al., 2022). However, the currently identified material does not independently document the formal administrative chain, funding agreement, or direct causal link between UNESCO's proclamation and this particular transfer of equipment. These related developments should therefore be presented as a historically plausible sequence supported by oral testimony and published accounts, not as an independently verified institutional causal mechanism. The submitted historical account also assigns an organizing role to R. Dalyono of PEPADI South Sumatra and describes contacts with SENA WANGI; those institutional connections require a corroborating document or a clearly attributed interview before being presented as independently established facts.

Developments after 2006 show that the revival of a traditional art is neither automatic nor linear. The following years remained unstable, but during the 2010s, activities expanded through festivals, workshops, seminars, documentation, rehearsals at the *sanggar* (arts studio), and educational programs. By the late 2010s and early 2020s, performances were no longer confined to traditional cultural settings: *wayang* appeared in museums, palaces, parks, cafés, shopping centers, hotels, bookshops, schools, and universities. From a living heritage perspective, this movement into new spaces need not be regarded as a departure from tradition. (Poulios, 2014) emphasizes that a living heritage approach places communities and the continuity of practice at the center of conservation. (Holtorf, 2018) likewise argues that cultural resilience can increase when heritage responds to change. The central question, therefore, is not whether Palembang shadow puppetry changes, but which changes strengthen its continuity and which may weaken its identity or the transmission of knowledge. Broadcast and social media can also extend its presence beyond physical performance venues. These developments suggest that continuity depends not only on how often performances are held, but also on the tradition's ability to enter new social spaces and establish relationships with different publics.

This article asks: (1) how the documented presence of Palembang shadow puppetry changed between 2000 and 2025; (2) how its forms of practice, transmission, and public engagement intersected with social, cultural, technological, and institutional change; and (3) which local performance characteristics persisted across changing venues and media. Its analytical framework understands cultural heritage as a continuing practice (UNESCO, 2003; Smith, 2006), draws on living-heritage perspectives (Poulios, 2014), and uses cultural resilience to interpret the possibilities and limits of adaptation (Holtorf, 2018). In distinction from Nurhidayanti et al. (2022) and the single-practitioner focus discussed by Lestari (2024), the analysis brings together the original thesis's dated event descriptions, visual source captions, two oral histories, and observations to distinguish visibility, transmission opportunities, and continuing technical vulnerability.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses a retrospective historical method to reconstruct continuity and change in Palembang shadow puppetry between 2000 and 2025. Its stages comprise heuristics, internal and external source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, 1969; Kuntowijoyo, 2001; Sjamsuddin, 2012). The source corpus consists of the first author's undergraduate-thesis research, including documentary material, cited news and institutional accounts, recorded oral histories, and descriptions of field observation (Fitri, 2026). The original research also explicitly applied a sociological perspective to how wayang remained present in community life. Chronological claims were evaluated alongside the material and performance-related characteristics discussed by Soedarsono (2001). This is a historical and interpretive inquiry, not a representative survey of the Palembang public or a quantitative measurement of heritage survival.

The principal research site was Sanggar Sri Palembang, located on Jalan Pangeran Sido Ing Lautan, Lorong Cek Latah, Tangga Buntung, in 36 Ilir Urban Village, Gandus District, Palembang City. The sanggar was selected because it is a center for the preservation of Palembang shadow puppetry, maintaining the tradition, collections, knowledge, and practitioner networks relevant to the study period. The period 2000-2025 was chosen to capture two contrasting conditions. Its beginning represents the situation before revitalization efforts in 2004 and the

resumption of performances in 2006, while its endpoint encompasses the most recent developments, including the expansion of activities in 2025. This timeframe enables the study to trace change over twenty-five years rather than describe conditions at a single point in time.

The underlying study identifies two interview participants, Kiagus Wirawan Rusdi, aged 53, a shadow puppeteer and third-generation heir of Sanggar Sri Palembang, interviewed on 25 October 2025; and (2) Yosi Evianti, aged 42, as the puppeteer's spouse and a member of the Sanggar Sri Palembang family, interviewed on 20 October 2025. These are role-based key informants with direct involvement in the performance tradition and sanggar activities. The in-depth interviews addressed the history, origins, continuity, distinctive characteristics, and modernization of the tradition, and reports the existence of an interview guide and transcripts. The original fieldwork also examined the physical studio and its activities, puppet form and dimensions, repertoire, Palembang language, performance duration, puppeteering techniques, and musical instruments. Documentary material includes photographs, video, sound recordings, and written records; the literature search drew on the South Sumatra Regional Library, Universitas Sriwijaya Library, the faculty reading room, and Sanggar Sri Palembang's archives

Document selection for the present article prioritized sources concerning Palembang shadow puppetry within 2000-2025 whose content could be linked to an identifiable activity, period, venue, performer, or organizer. The underlying thesis reproduces or describes dated news reports, photographic captions, institutional records, studio collections, observation photographs, and interviews. For greater analytical transparency, this article uses five observational domains to explain the grouping: (i) the occurrence of documented performances or public events; (ii) continuity of practitioners, rehearsal, and training; (iii) diversification of venues and encountered publics; (iv) participation by cultural, community, government, and educational institutions; and (v) broadcast/digital documentation. Revival in 2004-2006, intermittent public evidence during 2007-2011, wider cultural and educational activities during 2012-2016, more diverse settings during 2017-2020, and overlapping learning/media/venue activity during 2021-2025 justify the descriptive labels. The boundaries are interpretive period markers based on qualitative patterns, not thresholds calculated from a complete annual database or statistically inferred change points.

In the source register, a putative event is assigned a year, name, location or organizer, evidence type, and source attribution where available. Multiple photographs of the same occasion are not automatically counted as separate activities; similarly, an undated reference to regular rehearsal indicates ongoing practice but not an additional countable event. This explicit presentation rule has been applied cautiously to the illustrative entries in Table 2. It does not retrospectively establish that the original thesis employed an identical event-coding protocol or that every entry in the reported annual total is distinct.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Changing Presence of Palembang Shadow Puppetry, 2000-2025

The findings show that Palembang shadow puppetry's continuity did not follow a linear course. It moved from inactivity to revival, experienced renewed fluctuations, then developed more dynamically, expanded, and eventually gained strength through adaptation to new social spaces and technologies. On the basis of shared characteristics within each period, this trajectory can be divided into five phases. These phases are not rigid boundaries, but an analytical tool for examining changes in activity levels, preservation practices, performance spaces, social functions, and adaptation strategies.

Table 1. Chronological evidence matrix and criteria for the five interpretive phases

Period	Interpretive phase	Events and historical markers	Source basis and qualifications
2000-2006	Inactivity / early revival	Report of 2004 replacement equipment; intergenerational learning from recordings; public performance outside Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum in 2006.	Rusdi interview (25 Oct. 2025)

2007-2011	Fluctuation / reactivation	Festival Wayang Indonesia II at Taman Budaya Yogyakarta, 13-15 Dec. 2008; arts-award program at Hotel Swarna Dwipa in 2011.	Tim Kompas (2008), Harian Berita Pagi Palembang (2011)
2012-2016	Dynamic development	Jakarta festivals (2012); Palembang Art Festival and workshop (2013); 2015 Cap Go Meh, ALSA school program, cultural seminar; RRI and studio rehearsals (2016).	Daniar (2012), Sriwijaya Post (2015), ALSA LC Unsri (2015), and Rizal (2016).
2017-2020	Expansion	Festivals and studio activities (2017); circumcision/aqiqah activities (2018); weddings/customary title ceremonies (2019); café and festival activities (2020).	Documentation
2021-2025	Adaptation / consolidation	Cultural-institution videos and radio (2021); mall/bookshop workshops (2022); museum and school learning (2023-2024); multiple broadcast, studio, and institutional activities in 2025.	Asia Wangi (2024), RRI Pro 4, TVRI Sumsel, UIN Raden Fatah, Sanggar Sri, and other credited images (2025). Eleven events reported, not yet fully

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Inactivity and Early Revival, 2000-2006

The early 2000s continued a period of inactivity that had begun in 1986. At this stage, Palembang shadow puppetry was at its most vulnerable, no performances were held, practitioners were few, successors were not being trained, and some equipment was damaged. This situation shows that a tradition can weaken not only through the loss of audiences but also through the breakdown of the social infrastructure that sustains performance. Wayang requires puppeteers, gamelan musicians, equipment, rehearsal spaces, repertoire knowledge, and networks capable of organizing performances. When several of these elements disappear at once, the survival of puppet artifacts alone cannot ensure the continuity of cultural practice.

Change became apparent in 2004 as attention to *wayang* increased following UNESCO's recognition in 2003. R. Dalyono of PEPADI South Sumatra initiated revitalization through his connections with SENA WANGI and UNESCO. According to Ki Agus Wirawan Rusdi, the assistance subsequently received included 50 replica puppets and six iron gamelan instruments. This material support was important, but the revival depended on more than objects. Ki Agus Wirawan Rusdi took responsibility for continuing the tradition, teaching himself through recordings of Ki Agus Rusdi Rosyid and reassembling a group of gamelan musicians. Revitalization thus involved both restoring performance equipment and rebuilding the group of practitioners. The turning point came in 2006, when Ki Agus Wirawan Rusdi performed as *dalang* in front of the Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum during a commemorative event organized by Kerukunan Keluarga Palembang. Although only one performance is documented for this phase, its significance was considerable: it marked the return of an inactive tradition to public life.

Fluctuation and Reactivation, 2007-2011

The revival in 2006 did not immediately establish continuity. No activities are documented for 2007, but in 2008 Palembang shadow puppetry appeared at the second Festival Wayang Indonesia, held at Taman Budaya Yogyakarta. Participation in this national forum was significant because it demonstrated renewed recognition of Palembang *wayang* as part of Indonesia's diverse puppetry traditions. In 2009 and 2010, however, no performances or preservation activities were documented. This pattern suggests that continuity at this early stage remained heavily dependent on external opportunities and was not yet supported by a stable schedule of activities.

Reactivation occurred again in 2011 through Malam Refleksi Seni dan Penganugerahan Seni Batanghari Sembilan, an evening of artistic reflection and arts awards organized by the South Sumatra Arts Council. Ki Agus Wirawan Rusdi performed Palembang shadow puppetry as part of a program themed "Building National Character through the Arts." Analytically, the period 2007-2011 reveals the distinction between reappearing and sustaining a continuing practice. Participation in festivals and cultural events conferred symbolic legitimacy, but did not automatically produce new practitioners, regular rehearsals, audience networks, or consistent support. This phase formed an important transition: the tradition was no longer entirely inactive, yet its institutional stability remained limited.

Dynamic Development, 2012-2016

The period 2012-2016 brought more consistent development. In 2012, Palembang shadow puppetry participated in Festival Wayang Indonesia at Taman Fatahillah in Jakarta's Old Town and in the Wayang Summit near the National Monument in Jakarta. These events increased its national visibility and brought it into contact with *wayang* traditions from other regions. Workshops, seminars, and other activities also began to develop during this phase, presenting *wayang* as a learning resource, a form of cultural representation, and entertainment. Participation in the Palembang Art Festival in 2013, cultural activities and documentation in 2014, and an increasingly varied program in 2015 all demonstrate a clearer transformation in function.

The year 2015 was a significant milestone, with Palembang shadow puppetry appearing at Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh festivals, Festival Sriwijaya, World Wayang Day, Universitas Sriwijaya's ALSA Goes to School program, and cultural seminars. Its presence at these different events shows that it was beginning to extend beyond its traditional functions. The art could now feature in tourism festivals, events involving different ethnic communities, school education, and academic forums. In 2016, involvement in Cakrawala Budaya Nusa at RRI Palembang, together with regular rehearsals at Sanggar Sri Palembang, demonstrated both stronger internal capacity and wider external engagement. Dynamic development in this phase is therefore evident not only in the number of performances, but also in diversified functions, expanding networks, and new training opportunities. The tradition acquired a broader support system than it had during the preceding phase of reactivation.

Expansion, 2017-2020

Between 2017 and 2020, continuity became more stable and the social settings of performance expanded. Activities in 2017 included regular rehearsals, an appearance at the twenty-sixth Festival Sriwijaya, participation in Wayang NKRI events, and documentation by government institutions. These activities reflect two dimensions of expansion: greater capacity within the *sanggar* and wider recognition beyond it. In 2018, performances took place at celebrations of circumcision and *aqiqah*, as well as at The Beauty of Culture event. This is significant because it shows that Palembang shadow puppetry could still fulfill a role in community rites while also representing local culture at modern events.

In 2019, its social functions broadened further through performances at customary title-conferral ceremonies and weddings associated with the Palembang Sultanate, media coverage, and more publicly accessible documentation. An interesting adjustment occurred in 2020, when performances featured in arts activities at Guns Café and Festival Seguntang. A café is a modern entertainment venue distinct from a traditional stage, museum, or palace. The presence of Palembang shadow puppetry in such a setting demonstrates that expansion was symbolic as well as geographical: the tradition was being situated within contemporary cultural consumption. The period 2017-2020 shows how its position strengthened as *wayang* fulfilled several functions as entertainment, customary practice, identity expression, a subject of documentation, and a means of cultural promotion.

Adaptation and Consolidation, 2021-2025

Adaptation to modernization became most apparent during 2021-2025. In 2021, video documentation by BPNB West Sumatra, discussion on the Charming Palembang Radio program, and a performance marking the anniversary of the Palembang Arts Council at Guns Café demonstrated how the tradition was sustained through

archives, broadcasting, and live performance. In 2022, its social and educational functions expanded through performances at a PDI Perjuangan party cadre education program, the third South Sumatra Customary

Culture Week, a week of artistic expression and appreciation at the Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum, the ninth JKPI National Working Meeting, Arafest at Palembang Icon, and a workshop entitled "Learning Moral Values through Wayang" at Gramedia bookshop. Appearances in shopping centers and bookshops marked an important shift from dedicated arts venues to everyday public meeting places.

In 2023, preservation efforts increasingly extended into discussion, academic engagement, and revitalization. Wayang appeared at Palembang Expo and the fourth Customary Culture Week, while training at the Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum, community webinars, seminars, and workshops broadened knowledge of the tradition. In 2024, museum classes introduced participants to its history and the practice of manipulating puppets; studies involving communities and universities strengthened academic interest; and Wayang Day at SMP Negeri 11 Palembang brought the tradition into formal education, involving large numbers of students. This pattern suggests that knowledge transmission was beginning to extend beyond family relationships and apprenticeships at the *sanggar* to more inclusive learning activities.

The highest level of documented activity occurred in 2025. The research records eleven activities, including broadcasts on RRI Pro 4 Palembang, TVRI coverage, rehearsals, workshops, training, talk shows, seminars, and performances in various settings, including shopping centers such as OPI Mall. This figure represents the number of documented activities, not the total number undertaken, since routine rehearsals did not always leave written records or published reports. Nevertheless, the greater variety of activities, the involvement of university and school students, and collaboration among artists, communities, educational institutions, government, media, and commercial venues indicate a substantial strengthening of the tradition. Compared with the initial phase, which depended on restoring a single *sanggar* and on one puppeteer, this phase drew on a more diverse support network.

Modernization as a Threat and an Opportunity

Taken together, the five phases show how modernization has affected Palembang shadow puppetry across three interconnected domains: society, culture, and technology. Socially, the most fundamental change concerns competition for attention. Audiences now have more readily accessible, popular entertainment that offers immediate engagement, while *wayang* performances require practitioners, equipment, space, and collective preparation. This problem is not unique to Palembang. (UNESCO, 2008) notes that *wayang* more generally competes with video, television, karaoke, and other forms of entertainment.(Mrázek, 2005) likewise shows how economic changes, media, and audience preferences continually shape *wayang* as a social event. Palembang shadow puppetry faces the same tension between the ease of accessing modern entertainment and the collective effort required to stage a performance.

These pressures are associated with declining interest among younger generations and limited interest in becoming puppeteers or gamelan musicians. The shortage of successors worsened as many musicians of the older generation died in the years leading up to 2000 and some equipment deteriorated. Continuity subsequently depended heavily on Ki Agus Wirawan Rusdi as the principal puppeteer, although his students began to perform on some occasions. Public visibility, therefore, has not always meant that the succession of practitioners is secure.

In response to these social pressures, the tradition has expanded into new settings. Performances have entered museums, palaces, parks, cafés, hotels, shopping centers, bookshops, schools, university campuses, and government programs. This movement changes how people encounter *wayang*. Audiences no longer need to attend specifically to watch a traditional performance; *wayang* is brought to places where people already gather. This strategy helps connect the tradition with new audiences. School programs, museum classes, workshops, and student activities also shift participation from passive viewing toward learning through experience. In this sense, modernization encourages traditional arts to move from "waiting for audiences" toward "bringing performances into public spaces."

Culturally, adaptation is evident in presentation. Performances have become shorter, plots simpler, and language more accessible. These adjustments respond to changing rhythms of everyday life and to events that cannot always accommodate lengthy performances. A reduction in duration does not in itself mean the loss of

tradition. (Soedarsono, 2002) shows that performing arts continually adjust as they move between contexts. The central issue is whether these changes retain the symbolic structures and identity through which a performance is recognized as part of a particular tradition. In Palembang shadow puppetry, the evidence indicates that simplified presentation coexists with the retention of Palembang Malay, local characters and plays, music, colors, costumes, and distinctive narrative elements.

Cultural transmission has also changed. Previously, knowledge circulated mainly within puppeteer families, *sanggar*, and direct relationships among practitioners. Over the past two decades, these routes have expanded to include open training, workshops, museum classes, school activities, seminars, and digital documentation. This shift broadens access but also creates new challenges. Brief workshop sessions cannot fully replace the long-term training needed to become a puppeteer or gamelan musician. Public engagement in preservation must therefore be distinguished from the training of new practitioners. Educational activities can develop appreciation and attract potential learners, whereas technical continuity requires regular, progressive, and sustained instruction.

Technologically, modernization provides important visibility resources. Online news, television, radio, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook are used for publicity, promotion, documentation, and information circulation. Media enable performances to reach audiences who are not physically present, extend an event's life beyond the stage, and create archives for subsequent generations. Video documentation by cultural institutions, media coverage, and radio and television broadcasts extend the tradition's presence from live events to recorded forms that can be circulated. For a cultural practice that has experienced prolonged inactivity, documentation is particularly valuable because it reduces the risk of losing knowledge when skill transmission is disrupted.

The effects of modernization therefore cannot be classified simply as positive or negative. Technologies that make modern entertainment more competitive also provide promotional channels for *wayang*. Commercial venues often associated with popular culture can become new stages for traditional performance. Shortening a performance may reduce parts of its structure, but it also allows *wayang* to enter event formats that were previously unavailable. Successful adaptation thus depends on practitioners' ability to decide which elements can change and which must be retained. Modernization becomes a threat when it weakens successor training and erodes core knowledge; it offers opportunities when it broadens access, documentation, and participation while preserving the tradition's defining identity.

Palembang Identity in Performance

This capacity to adapt does not mean that Palembang shadow puppetry has lost its local character. Palembang identity provides the basis for change without the tradition being absorbed into another form. Visually, the puppets remain rooted in Javanese traditions but differ in their colors and cutwork. Copper-yellow, green, and red are prominent, while plant-scroll motifs and cutwork tend to be simpler than in some Javanese *wayang* styles. Certain figures also differ in the arrangement of ornamentation and their more limited use of color. These visual characteristics are more than aesthetic variations; they reflect a long process of localization that has shaped the identity of Palembang *wayang*.

Language is a particularly strong distinguishing feature. Dialogue is delivered in Palembang Malay, allowing puppeteers and the audience to communicate through local cultural codes. Characters' titles and forms of address also reflect Palembang's social structure, including Kiagus, Kemas, Masagus, Nyimas, Masayu, Nyayu, and Wak, alongside titles retained from the broader *wayang* tradition. These adaptations show that acculturation proceeds through social translation rather than the wholesale reproduction of another tradition. Stories drawn from the world of *wayang* are situated within language and social relationship patterns familiar to Palembang audiences.(Rochmiatun, 2021) identifies such processes as central to the cultural acculturation of Palembang *wayang*.

Local elements are also evident in characters and plays. The research records Bambang To Seno, described as Arjuna's son, and the plays Gatot Tetak Puset for *aqiqah*, the slaughter of an animal to mark a child's birth, and Gatot Penganten for weddings. The association of particular plays with community events shows that the

repertoire connects *wayang* to the life cycle and provides a body of stories. This helps explain its continued presence during the expansion phase at circumcisions, *aqiqah* celebrations, weddings, and customary title-conferral ceremonies. The performance acquires relevance through its place in continuing social practices, rather than serving solely as a representation of the past.

Differences are also apparent in musical and performance structures. Performances may open with Gending Sriwijaya or Setabik, immediately connecting the stage with the musical symbols of South Sumatra. Gamelan patterns are adapted to local traditions, and the *kecrek* is played by someone other than the *dalang*, who usually performs this role. The tradition does not use *suluk* or *pesinden*, as commonly found in some Javanese *wayang* traditions, and the arrangement of puppets does not follow the same hierarchy. Its shorter, condensed performance format, known as *pakeliran padet*, allows greater flexibility across events. Puppeteers and musicians wear Palembang attire, including *tanjak* and *songket*, although some clothing styles have also been adapted in recent years. Together, these elements show that identity resides in a combination of features rather than in any single characteristic.

From a performing arts perspective, this finding is important because a change of venue or medium does not necessarily entail a change of identity. A performance in a shopping center, café, school, radio broadcast, or digital platform can remain Palembang shadow puppetry as long as its relevant distinguishing structures are present. Historically, this flexibility has sustained the tradition. Complete withdrawal from changing social spaces risks further isolation, while unrestricted change can erase local character. Evidence from 2000-2025 reveals a position between these extremes: adjustments in duration, medium, location, and promotion coexist with the retention of language, repertoire, symbols, music, and Palembang identity.

From Static Preservation to Adaptive Cultural Resilience

These changes indicate a shift in preservation from a relatively static model toward adaptive cultural resilience. In the initial phase, continuity depended primarily on the tradition's heirs, performance equipment, and the capacity to revive the *sanggar*. Support subsequently extended to festivals, government, communities, media, schools, universities, museums, and commercial venues. A broader range of participants creates more routes through which the tradition can be sustained. Festivals confer recognition, educational institutions provide access to younger generations, media create visibility and archives, and modern public spaces bring the tradition into contact with new audiences. Cultural resilience in this case does not mean that the tradition is entirely secure, but that it has more ways to remain present and be sustained than it did in the early 2000s.

The evidence also reveals the limits of this resilience. The training of new puppeteers and gamelan musicians remains a vulnerability, while continuity still depends heavily on key individuals committed to preservation. More events do not automatically produce enough new practitioners with substantial technical expertise. Dependence on festivals or institutional invitations can also make activities episodic unless they are supported by internal rehearsals. Increased visibility therefore needs a more systematic approach to succession. Regular rehearsals at the *sanggar*, repertoire documentation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and learning opportunities that allow sustained practice are necessary if broader public engagement is to develop beyond superficial appreciation.

The study's analytical contribution is to show that the continuity of Palembang shadow puppetry is better understood as a spectrum than as a choice between "survival" and "extinction." In 2000-2006, the tradition had a limited presence, but memories, artifacts, and heirs remained, making revitalization possible. In 2007-2011, its presence was tangible but unstable. Activities and functions developed in 2012-2016; social spaces expanded in 2017-2020; and media, education, and collaboration extended its reach in 2021-2025. This trajectory shows that a tradition can endure by changing some of the ways in which it exists. Selective adaptation connects continuity with transformation.

These findings also extend the work of (Nurhidayanti et al., 2022), which documents the tradition's continuity through 2019. The period 2020-2025 brought new developments: greater use of digital and broadcast media, more educational activities, wider engagement with schools and museums, and a peak in documented activity in 2025. Modernization has thus become part of preservation strategies, as well as an external context that

pressures the art. Digital media, educational institutions, and modern public spaces are used to sustain a practice whose identity remains traditional. Here lies the central paradox of Palembang shadow puppetry: to endure as a tradition, it needs to move and adapt to global culture. Wahyudi (2025) further argues that advances in technology and digital media create opportunities for global audiences to enjoy shadow puppet performances.

CONCLUSION

Palembang shadow puppetry maintained its presence between 2000 and 2025 through a non-linear historical process. This study identifies five phases: inactivity and early revival (2000-2006), fluctuation and reactivation (2007-2011), dynamic development (2012-2016), expansion (2017-2020), and adaptation and consolidation (2021-2025). Changes across these phases show that continuity depends on a combination of practitioners, rehearsals, equipment, documentation, institutional networks, performance spaces, media, and successor training, rather than on performances alone. The revival in 2004-2006 restored the basic foundations, while subsequent phases gradually broadened the functions and social settings of Palembang shadow puppetry.

Modernization has had a dual effect. Competition from modern entertainment, changing consumption patterns, limited succession, and deteriorating equipment pose tangible threats. At the same time, radio, television, online news, social media, museums, schools, universities, shopping centers, and modern public spaces provide new means of promotion, documentation, education, and audience development. The response has been one of selective adaptation. Duration, venue, medium, and presentation may change, while Palembang Malay, local characters and plays, colors, music, costumes, titles, forms of address, and distinctive performance structures remain markers of identity.

The continuity of Palembang shadow puppetry is therefore best understood as adaptive cultural resilience. The tradition endures through practitioners' and supporters' continuing negotiation of the relationship between inheritance and change. Although developments through 2025 indicate a substantial strengthening of the tradition, the training of future puppeteers and gamelan musicians remains a central concern. Future sustainability requires a balance between greater public visibility and long-term technical training, so that the expansion of performance spaces leads to knowledge transmission as well as an increase in the number of events.

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DECLARATION OF AI USE

The authors made substantial intellectual contributions to the conceptualization of the study, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and development of the manuscript. Grammarly and ChatGPT were employed exclusively as supplementary tools to improve grammatical clarity and ensure consistency in reference formatting during the revision process. The authors retain full responsibility for the manuscript's accuracy, academic integrity, and final content.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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