



## Wulangreh in performance: Philology, the traditional art of pitutur, and cultural transmission in Magelang

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### Abstract

The growing marginalization of traditional textual knowledge in the face of rapid socio-cultural transformation has exposed critical limitations in conventional approaches that treat texts as static and self-contained artifacts. Addressing this gap, this study reconceptualizes Wulangreh as a dynamic cultural system sustained through the interaction of textual plurality, performative practice, and community-based transmission. The study aims to develop an integrated analytical framework that explains how these dimensions collectively shape the sustainability of living textual traditions. Employing a qualitative interpretivist design, the research combines philological analysis of seven manuscript variants with performance ethnography across three pitutur communities in Magelang, Indonesia, supported by in-depth interviews, structured observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the endurance of Wulangreh does not depend on preservation in fixed textual forms but emerges through continuous social enactment, where communities actively construct and negotiate meaning. Textual variation is shown to follow structured patterns that reflect distinct transmission lineages, while performative practices selectively reorganize textual elements in response to contextual, aesthetic, and social considerations. These processes demonstrate that variation and adaptation are not indicators of instability but constitute core mechanisms of cultural resilience. This study is among the first to empirically integrate philological and performative perspectives into a unified model of textual sustainability, thereby extending the theoretical framework of performative philology. By positioning Wulangreh within the global discourse on living traditions, the study provides a new conceptual foundation for understanding how cultural texts endure in dynamic social environments and offers actionable insights for sustaining community-based knowledge systems.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, humanities scholarship has increasingly shifted from viewing texts as static artifacts toward understanding them as dynamic entities embedded within social practices and cultural performances. This transformation reflects a broader epistemological turn in which textual meaning is no longer considered fixed within manuscripts but is continuously reconstituted through interaction, embodiment, and context (Sekar, 2025). Within this paradigm, classical didactic texts are not merely preserved but actively reinterpreted as part of living cultural systems. This shift is particularly relevant in Southeast Asian contexts, where oral, performative, and textual traditions have long been intertwined rather than separated. In such settings, texts function simultaneously as repositories of knowledge and as scripts for social enactment. Consequently, the study of textual traditions requires an analytical framework that integrates philological rigor with performative sensitivity. This evolving perspective positions textual studies within a broader interdisciplinary dialogue that challenges the boundaries between literature, performance, and cultural practice.

The case of Serat Wulangreh provides a compelling empirical illustration of this transformation. Traditionally regarded as a courtly didactic text associated with Pakubuwono IV,

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Wulangreh articulates ethical teachings concerning leadership, social conduct, and moral discipline within the Javanese cultural framework. However, its contemporary relevance does not stem solely from its textual preservation but from its continued enactment within performative traditions such as *pitutur*. In regions such as Magelang, the text is actively transmitted through community-based performances that involve vocal delivery, musical structures, and audience participation, thereby transforming written verses into shared cultural experiences (Wahyudiono et al., 2022; Wikandaru et al., 2020). These practices demonstrate that textual meaning emerges through collective engagement rather than individual reading. At the same time, variations in performance intensity and distribution across different localities indicate that the continuity of the text is contingent upon the vitality of community networks. This empirical reality challenges the assumption that textual survival is primarily dependent on archival preservation. Instead, it underscores the central role of social practice in sustaining cultural knowledge.

The urgency of examining such phenomena becomes increasingly evident in the context of rapid socio-cultural transformation driven by globalization and digitalization. Traditional cultural practices are often subjected to processes of commodification, simplification, or marginalization, raising concerns about their long-term sustainability (Ballantyne & Paterson, 2020; Bogaerts, 2023). In this environment, only those traditions capable of adapting to new contexts while maintaining their core values are likely to persist. The performative transformation of Wulangreh suggests that adaptability is not merely a response to change but a fundamental characteristic of living traditions. Rather than preserving a fixed textual form, communities continuously reinterpret the text to align with contemporary social needs. This adaptive capacity highlights the importance of studying cultural transmission as a dynamic process that involves negotiation, reinterpretation, and contextualization. Without such an understanding, analyses risk reducing cultural traditions to static representations detached from lived experience. Therefore, investigating the mechanisms that enable texts to remain meaningful in changing contexts is both theoretically and practically significant.

From a theoretical perspective, the study of Wulangreh exposes a critical tension within existing scholarship between philological and performative approaches. Classical philology has traditionally prioritized the reconstruction of original texts, focusing on manuscript comparison, textual variants, and genealogical relationships (Malik & Müller, 2025a, 2025b). While this approach provides valuable insights into textual history, it often assumes that the text exists as a stable entity independent of its usage. In contrast, performance studies emphasize the role of embodiment, temporality, and audience interaction in shaping meaning, thereby treating texts as fluid and context-dependent (Winkielman et al., 2023; Wu & Lingel, 2025). This divergence creates an epistemological gap in which texts are either treated as fixed objects or as entirely mutable practices. Recent developments in performative philology seek to bridge this divide by conceptualizing texts as dynamic processes that are simultaneously structured and enacted (Allam et al., 2025; Khuder & Petric, 2026). However, empirical applications of this framework remain limited, particularly in relation to Southeast Asian textual traditions. As a result, the relationship between textual plurality and performative transformation has not been fully theorized.

A growing body of recent research has explored various dimensions of Javanese cultural traditions, yet these studies tend to remain fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. Studies on *macapat* and vocal traditions emphasize the role of performance in transmitting moral and cultural knowledge, highlighting the importance of sound, rhythm, and communal participation (Alam et al., 2025; Hanif & Sri Maruti, 2024). Other works have examined the integration of digital media in cultural preservation, demonstrating how technology can extend the reach of traditional practices (Lian & Xie, 2024; Sun, 2025). Philological studies continue to provide detailed analyses of manuscript variants and textual transmission pathways, offering insights into the historical evolution of texts (Coladangelo & McCandless, 2024; McCollum & Turnbull, 2024). Meanwhile, cultural studies research underscores the role of local traditions in shaping identity and social cohesion within contemporary communities (Liu et al., 2025; Rakhoveio et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies affirm the ongoing relevance of traditional texts. However, they also reveal a dominant tendency to treat textual analysis and performative practice as separate domains of inquiry.

Despite these advancements, significant limitations remain in the existing literature. First, philological studies often overlook the ways in which textual variants are selectively mobilized in

contemporary performances, thereby neglecting the functional dimension of textual plurality. Second, performative studies frequently focus on aesthetic and social aspects without systematically linking them to underlying textual structures and manuscript traditions. Third, research on cultural transmission tends to assume a linear process of knowledge transfer, failing to account for the complex interactions between text, community, and performance. These limitations indicate a persistent fragmentation in the analytical treatment of textual traditions. Consequently, the field lacks a comprehensive framework capable of explaining how texts simultaneously operate as structured artifacts and performative practices. This gap is particularly evident in the case of Wulangreh, where textual diversity, community networks, and performative adaptation are deeply interconnected. Addressing this gap requires an integrative approach that moves beyond disciplinary silos.

In response to these challenges, this study aims to develop an integrated analysis of Wulangreh as a living textual tradition by examining its philological plurality, performative transformation, and community-based transmission within the context of pitutur practices in Magelang. Specifically, the study seeks to map the distribution of user communities, classify manuscript variants into coherent editions, and analyze how these textual forms are reconfigured in performance contexts. By doing so, the research advances the theoretical framework of performative philology through a grounded empirical case that demonstrates the dialectical relationship between text and practice. Furthermore, the study contributes to broader discussions on cultural sustainability by highlighting the role of community engagement in maintaining ethical and cultural values. Practically, it offers insights into how traditional knowledge systems can be integrated into contemporary educational and cultural initiatives. Ultimately, this research positions Wulangreh not as a static literary relic but as a dynamic cultural system in which text, performance, and community co-constitute meaning within an evolving social landscape.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist–constructivist epistemological stance, which assumes that meaning is socially constructed and continuously negotiated through cultural practices. The research integrates philology, performance ethnography, and cultural analysis within a performative philology framework, enabling a systematic examination of Serat Wulangreh as both a textual artifact and a living performative practice. This integrative design was selected because the research problem requires simultaneous attention to textual variation, embodied performance, and community-based transmission, which cannot be adequately captured through a single-method approach (Du et al., 2026; Samuelsson, 2025). By combining these perspectives, the study addresses the limitations of conventional philology that isolates texts from their social contexts, as well as performance studies that often overlook textual structure. The methodological approach is therefore positioned as an analytical bridge that captures the dialectical relationship between textual stability and performative fluidity. This positioning ensures that the study contributes not only empirically but also methodologically to the field of humanities research.

The research was conducted in Magelang Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, a region recognized for its active pitutur communities that utilize Wulangreh in performative contexts. The site was selected through theoretical sampling based on its relevance to the research objectives, particularly the presence of diverse community-based transmission practices. Fieldwork was carried out over six months, from January to June 2025, allowing for prolonged engagement and iterative data collection across multiple contexts. Observations were conducted in at least nine performance events, including routine gatherings, ritual ceremonies, and public cultural performances, ensuring variation in social settings and performance purposes. Each observation session lasted between 90 and 180 minutes, enabling detailed documentation of performative structures and audience interaction. In parallel, archival research was conducted in regional libraries and digital repositories to collect seven printed variants of Wulangreh, which served as the basis for philological analysis. This combination of field and archival contexts ensures a comprehensive dataset that reflects both textual and performative dimensions.

The participants consisted of 15 individuals drawn from three primary pitutur communities: Pitutur Laras Madyo (Seganan Borobudur), Barisan Srumbung, and Adipura Kaliangkrik. A purposive

sampling strategy was employed to select participants with deep experiential knowledge of Wulangreh performance and transmission. The sample included five elders (as interpretive authorities), six vocal performers (penembang and gerong), and four supporting musicians (wiyaga), thereby capturing multiple roles within the performance system. Inclusion criteria required participants to have a minimum of three years of continuous involvement in pitutur activities and active participation in performances during the study period. Participants with only peripheral or occasional involvement were excluded to ensure data depth and reliability. The selection of multiple communities allowed for cross-case comparison, enhancing analytical robustness and transferability (Lefebvre & Legner, 2026; Yuan & Kim, 2025). This sampling design ensures that the findings reflect both shared patterns and local variations in practice.

Data were collected using three primary instruments: semi-structured interview guides, structured observation protocols, and document analysis matrices. The interview guide was designed to elicit participants' interpretations of Wulangreh, their experiential knowledge of performance practices, and their perspectives on cultural transmission. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The observation protocol was developed to systematically capture performative elements, including vocal delivery, musical structure, sequence of pupuh, use of bawa, spatial arrangement, and audience interaction. Observational data were recorded through field notes, audio-visual documentation, and performance mapping diagrams. The document analysis matrix was used to examine textual features across manuscript variants, including colophons, stanza structure, editorial variation, and textual omissions. These instruments were adapted from established qualitative and philological research frameworks to ensure conceptual alignment and methodological rigor (Han et al., 2022; Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). The use of multiple instruments enabled data triangulation and enriched the depth of analysis.

The validity and reliability of the instruments were ensured through multiple procedures. Content validity was established through expert review involving two scholars in philology and one expert in performance studies, who evaluated the instruments for conceptual clarity and relevance. A pilot study was conducted in a preliminary field visit to test the applicability of interview questions and observation protocols, leading to minor refinements in wording and structure. Reliability was strengthened through procedural consistency, including standardized interview procedures and systematic observation guidelines. In addition, inter-coder reliability was applied during the coding process by involving a second coder to independently code a subset of the data, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. Methodological triangulation was implemented by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and textual analysis to ensure convergence of evidence (Younas & Sundus, 2022). These procedures enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research.

Data collection followed a structured, multi-phase process. The preparatory phase involved literature review, instrument development, and obtaining access to research sites and participants. The fieldwork phase consisted of repeated observations of pitutur performances, in-depth interviews with selected participants, and concurrent collection of textual data from archival sources. Observations focused on capturing both macro-structures (sequence of performance) and micro-elements (intonation, repetition, interaction patterns). Interviews were conducted iteratively, allowing emerging themes to inform subsequent data collection. All data were systematically documented, transcribed, and organized using qualitative data management software. The documentation process included coding logs, reflective memos, and performance mapping to ensure traceability of analytical decisions. This structured procedure ensures that the data collection process is transparent and replicable.

Data analysis was conducted through a multi-layered qualitative analytical framework integrating philological, thematic, and interpretive analyses. The first stage involved philological analysis, including the comparison of colophons, identification of textual variants, and classification of manuscripts into three main editions based on structural and editorial consistency. The second stage employed thematic analysis following Ding & Aletta, (2024); Younas & Sundus, (2022) framework, involving open coding to identify initial meaning units, axial coding to organize categories, and selective coding to develop overarching themes related to performative transformation and cultural transmission. Coding was conducted using NVivo software, where nodes

were systematically developed to represent key analytical categories such as “text selection,” “performative adaptation,” and “audience interaction.” The third stage involved interpretive analysis, linking textual structures with performative practices and social functions within the community. Analytical rigor was ensured through constant comparison, iterative refinement of categories, and the use of analytic memos to document interpretive decisions (Ding & Aletta, 2024; Sheard, 2022). This layered analysis enables the study to generate both descriptive insights and theoretical explanations.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and were informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential use of the research findings. Anonymity was maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and all identifiable information was securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. The study also respected local cultural norms, particularly in relation to ritual performances and community practices. Audio-visual recordings were conducted with explicit permission, and participants were given the option to withdraw at any stage of the research. The research adhered to institutional ethical guidelines and principles of academic integrity, ensuring that data were used responsibly and transparently. By maintaining these ethical standards, the study ensures both the protection of participants and the credibility of the research outcomes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The findings of this study reveal that the sustainability of Wulangreh in Magelang is fundamentally shaped by an active and structured network of pitutur communities that function as the primary agents of cultural transmission. Rather than relying on textual preservation alone, the endurance of the text emerges from its continuous enactment within social practices that integrate performance, interpretation, and communal participation. The distribution of pitutur groups across districts demonstrates a patterned yet uneven configuration, indicating that cultural transmission is spatially differentiated and socially contingent. Districts such as Kaliangkrik and Borobudur exhibit a significantly higher concentration of active groups, suggesting that these areas function as cultural hubs where transmission mechanisms are more institutionalized and sustainable. This distribution pattern highlights a critical insight that challenges text-centered assumptions, namely that the survival of a cultural text is not determined by its archival existence but by the vitality of the communities that activate it. The empirical configuration therefore redefines textual sustainability as a function of social infrastructure rather than textual stability.

**Table 1.** Distribution and Specific Terms of the Pitutur Art of Using Pakubuwono IV’s Wulangreh Texts

Distribution of the Wulangreh Text User Group (District)		Specific Terms in the Pitutur Art: User Text of the Wulangreh of Pakubuwono IV	Pitutur Group
1	Borobudur	Pitutur Jawa, Pitutur Laras Iromo, Pitutur Madyo Laras, Laras Madyo	5
2	Secang	Pitutur Laras Madyo	1
3	Srumbung	Pitutur Laras Madyo	3
4	Kaliangkrik	Laras Madyo	8
5	Salam	Pitutur Laras Madyo	2
6	Sawangan	Laras Madyo, Pitutur Jati	7
7	Candimulyo	Laras Madyo	1
8	Kajoran	Madyo Pitutur, Pitutur Gati	4
9	Windusari	Laras Madyo	2

Note: In other subdistricts, the Pitutur art form does not use the Wulangreh PB IV text, but instead uses the Pitutur text by R. Nitihardjo and KHR. Maksoem.

The variation in local terminology across pitutur communities further reinforces the adaptive nature of Wulangreh transmission. Terms such as pitutur Jawa, laras madya, and pitutur jati do not

indicate fragmentation but rather represent localized expressions of a shared textual tradition. This multiplicity of terms reflects a decentralized system of cultural reproduction in which meaning is preserved while modes of expression are contextually adapted. Such variation demonstrates that the diffusion of Wulangreh is not governed by standardization but by a process of selective localization that enables the text to remain relevant across diverse sociocultural settings. Importantly, this pattern reveals that flexibility is not a sign of textual instability but a mechanism of resilience, allowing the tradition to absorb contextual differences without losing its ethical core. This finding significantly advances the understanding of cultural transmission by showing that controlled variation is a prerequisite for long-term sustainability. Consequently, Wulangreh emerges as a dynamic system capable of negotiating continuity and change simultaneously.

At the structural level, the internal organization of pitutur communities reveals a highly coordinated system of role distribution that ensures both interpretive consistency and performative adaptability. Elders function as custodians of textual meaning, providing interpretive authority that anchors the tradition, while performers and musicians operationalize the text through embodied practice. This division of roles creates a dual mechanism in which stability is maintained through authoritative interpretation and flexibility is introduced through performance variation. The interaction between these roles demonstrates that cultural transmission is neither purely conservative nor entirely innovative but operates through a balance of preservation and adaptation. This finding provides a critical insight into the social mechanics of textual survival, emphasizing that the continuity of Wulangreh depends on collective agency rather than individual interpretation. The results thus establish that community structure is not merely a contextual factor but a central determinant of textual endurance.

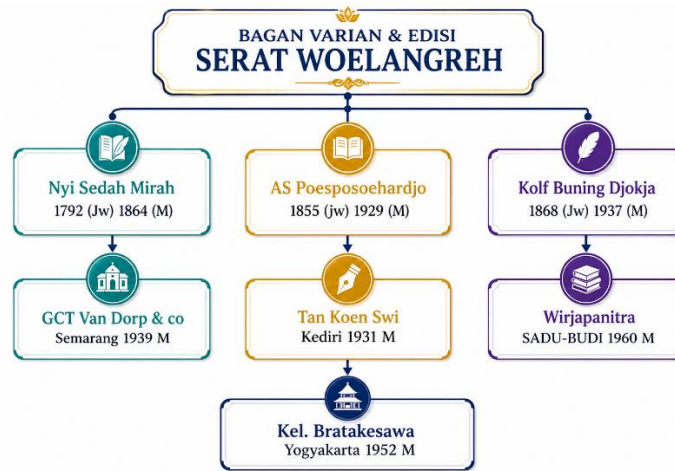
The philological analysis further reveals that Wulangreh exists as a plural textual tradition characterized by structured variation across manuscript editions. The comparison of seven printed variants demonstrates that textual diversity follows identifiable patterns rather than random divergence, enabling the classification of manuscripts into three major editorial groupings. These groupings are defined by consistent alignments in colophons, chronological indicators, and structural composition, indicating the presence of distinct transmission lineages. This finding challenges the conventional assumption of a singular authoritative text by demonstrating that plurality is an intrinsic feature of the tradition. The identification of these editions provides empirical evidence that textual transmission is governed by systematic processes of copying, adaptation, and reconstruction. As a result, the study repositions Wulangreh as a networked textual system rather than a fixed literary artifact.

**Table 2.** Indicators of Variations in the Date of Completion of the Wulangreh Manuscript

Varian	AS Poespo Soehardjo	Tan Khoen Swi	Kolf Buning Djokja	Nyi Sedah Mirah	GCT Van Dorp & Co	Keluarga Bratakesawa	Wirjapanitra
1	Ahad	Ahad	Ahad	Kamis	Kamis	Ahad	Ahad
2	Kliwon	Kliwon	Pon	Pon	Pon	Kliwon	Pon
3	19	19	18	20	20	19	18
4	Besar	Besar	Besar	Muharam	Muharam	Besar	Besar
5	Dal	Dal	Dal	Jimawal	Jimawal	Dal	Dal
6	8	8	8	7	6	8	8
7	Sancaya	Sancaya	Sancaya	Adi	Sancaya	Sancaya	Sancaya
8	Sungsang	Sungsang	-	Wayang	Wayang	Sungsang	-
9	1735	1735	1735	1741	1741	1735	1735
10	5 Februari	5 Februari	<b>Tidak sesuai</b>	13 Januari	13 Januari	5 Februari	<b>Tidak sesuai</b>
	1809	1809		1814	1814	1809	

Notes: 1) Day. 2) Pasaran (Market Day). 3) Date. 4) Sasi (Month). 5) Javanese Year Name. 6) Mangsa. 7) Windu. 8) Wuku. 9) Javanese Year. 10) Gregorian Year

The temporal variations presented in Table 2 reveal the existence of clustered manuscript production periods that correspond to distinct editorial traditions. These clusters indicate that the transmission of Wulangreh occurred through multiple centers of reproduction, each contributing to the diversification of the text. The consistency of certain chronological markers across variants strengthens the validity of the classification into three main editions. This pattern demonstrates that textual variation is not merely a byproduct of copying but reflects deliberate editorial decisions shaped by historical and cultural contexts. The findings therefore provide strong evidence that the genealogy of Wulangreh is both structured and dynamic. This insight significantly refines the understanding of manuscript traditions by highlighting the coexistence of stability and variation within a single textual system.



**Figure 1.** Chart of Variants and Editions of the Serat Wulangreh Manuscript

Figure 1 visually confirms that the relationships among manuscript variants cannot be fully explained through a linear genealogical model. While some variants exhibit clear descent patterns, others display hybrid characteristics that combine elements from multiple sources. This hybridity indicates that textual transmission involves processes of recombination in addition to replication, suggesting a more complex network model of textual evolution. The presence of such hybrid forms fundamentally challenges the notion of a stable textual lineage and instead supports the view of Wulangreh as a fluid and adaptive system. This finding represents a critical theoretical advancement, as it expands the analytical framework of philology beyond linear reconstruction. Consequently, the figure substantiates the argument that textual plurality is a structured and meaningful phenomenon rather than a deviation from an original form.

**Table 3.** Systematic Classification of Wulangreh Manuscript Variants

Classification	SAME						DIFFERENT					LOST		
	Dandhanggula	Kinanthi	Gambuh	Durma	Pangkur	Maskumambang	Megatruh	Mijil	Asmaradana	Sinom	Girisa	Wirangrong	Pucung	
I	Nyi Sedah Mirah	8	16	17	12	17	34	18	26	26	33	24	27	57
	GCT Van Dorp & Co	8	16	17	12	17	33	17	23	27	32	24	X	53
II	AS Poesposoehardjo	8	16	17	12	17	34	17	26	28	33	25	27	23
	Tan Khoen Swi	8	16	17	12	17	34	17	26	28	33	25	27	23
	Brata kesawa	8	16	17	12	17	34	17	26	28	33	25	27	23
III	Kolf Buning	8	16	17	12	16	30	17	25	28	33	25	27	22
	Wirja panitra	8	16	17	12	16	30	17	25	27	33	25	27	22

The structural comparison of pupuh across manuscript variants reveals a dual pattern of consistency and transformation that underpins the textual system. Core sections such as Dandhanggula, Kinanthi, and Gambuh remain stable across editions, forming a structural backbone

that ensures continuity. In contrast, variations in sections such as Maskumambang, Mijil, and Pucung indicate selective adaptation that reflects functional considerations. The redistribution of content, particularly the integration of Wirangrong into Pucung, demonstrates intentional editorial intervention aimed at optimizing the text for specific uses. This pattern reveals that textual modification is not arbitrary but guided by practical and cultural logic. The findings therefore establish that textual plurality operates within a framework of controlled transformation. This insight reinforces the argument that philological variation is a source of adaptability rather than instability.

The performative dimension of Wulangreh further reveals that textual meaning is actively constructed through performance rather than passively derived from written structure. In pitutur practices, the text is fragmented, reorganized, and recontextualized through vocal delivery, musical arrangement, and audience interaction, resulting in a non-linear and dynamic presentation. This transformation demonstrates that performance functions as a site of meaning production in which textual elements are selectively activated based on contextual needs. The findings indicate that the text is not reproduced in its entirety but reassembled into performative sequences that align with social, ritual, and aesthetic considerations. This process fundamentally redefines the relationship between text and performance, positioning performance as the primary medium through which textual meaning is realized. The results therefore highlight the central role of performative practice in sustaining the relevance of Wulangreh.

**Table 4.** Number of Stanzas and Verses Excerpted from the Wulangreh Text of the Pitutur Community

SISTEMATIC OF WULANGREH (AS Poesposoehardjo Version)			Number of Verses Used by Each Group			Order of Songs in Each Group's Performance		
No	PUPUH	NUMBER OF VERSES	Seganan	Barisan	Adipura	Seganan	Barisan	Adipura
1	Dandhanggula	8	3	3	7	1	1	1
2	Kinanthi	16	5	3	8	2	2	2
3	Gambuh	17	5	5	8	12	3	3
4	Pangkur	17	5	3	8	11	4	4
5	Maskumambang	34	5	3	11	13	5	5
6	Megatruh	17	6	X	8	3	X	6
7	Durmo	12	4	3	7	7	6	7
8	Wirangrong	27	5	3	8	4	7	8
9	Pucung	23	4	3	10	6	8	9
10	Mijil	26	3	3	8	5	9	10
11	Asmaradana	28	5	3	8	8	10	11
12	Sinom	33	5	3	7	10	11	12
13	Girisa	25	4	3	8	9	12	13
TOTAL		283	59	38	106			
Prosentage (%)		100%	21%	13%	37%			

The quantitative data presented in Table 4 reveal that only a fraction of the total textual corpus is utilized in performance, with usage levels varying significantly across groups. This selective appropriation indicates that performative practice is governed by strategic choices rather than comprehensive reproduction. The omission of certain sections, such as Megatruh, reflects cultural considerations related to emotional resonance and contextual appropriateness. At the same time, the variation in pupuh selection demonstrates that performance is shaped by both aesthetic preferences and social functions. These findings provide strong evidence that textual authority is negotiated within performance contexts rather than imposed by the text itself. Consequently, Wulangreh operates as a flexible resource that can be adapted to diverse situations while maintaining its ethical core.

The integration of performative elements such as *bawa*, *tembang*, and audience interaction further illustrates how textual meaning is co-constructed within a shared experiential space. The use of *bawa* as an opening element establishes the emotional and tonal framework of the performance, while variations in delivery reflect group identity and interpretive agency. Audience participation plays a critical role in shaping the flow of the performance, indicating that meaning emerges through interaction rather than unilateral transmission. This interactive dynamic transforms the performance into a collaborative process in which performers and audiences jointly construct meaning. The findings therefore underscore the importance of embodiment and interaction in understanding textual transformation. This insight significantly expands the analytical scope of textual studies by incorporating performative dimensions.

**Table 5.** Differences in Text Variants Across Pitutur Groups and Printed Editions  
**A Comparison of Editorial Variations Among Groups vs. Three Printed Editions of the Serat Wulangreh**

VS	AS POESPO SOEHARDJO	NYI SEDAH MIRAH	KOLFF BUNING
<b>Seganan Pitutur's Group</b>	Megatruh Bait 6 (LOST)	THE SAME	Maskumambang Bait 3 dan Megatruh Bait 6 (LOST)
<b>Barisan Pitutur's Group</b>	THE SAME	THE SAME	Maskumambang Bait 3 (LOST)
<b>Adipura Pitutur's Group</b>	Maskumambang Bait 3 (LOST)	Maskumambang Bait 3 dan Megatruh Bait 6 (LOST)	Pangkur Bait 8, Maskumambang Bait 3 dan Maskumambang Bait 12 (LOST)

The comparison between performed and printed variants presented in Table 5 reveals that communities actively modify textual structures to align with performative requirements. The omission and alteration of specific stanzas demonstrate that textual adaptation is guided by practical considerations rather than strict adherence to written forms. This pattern indicates that communities exercise interpretive authority in shaping the text, thereby transforming it into a living cultural resource. The findings highlight that cultural transmission involves negotiation between tradition and context, resulting in a dynamic interplay between continuity and change. This insight provides a nuanced understanding of how texts function within living traditions. As a result, textual plurality emerges as a mechanism of cultural resilience.



**Figure 2.** Pitutur Arts Performance Display

Figure 2 illustrates the spatial and performative configuration of pitutur practices, emphasizing the integration of performers, instruments, and audiences within a unified experiential environment. The arrangement reflects a collective mode of engagement in which meaning is generated through interaction rather than isolated interpretation. This spatial configuration

reinforces the argument that performance is not merely a medium of delivery but a constitutive element of textual meaning. The figure also highlights the embodied nature of cultural transmission, which extends beyond textual representation into lived experience. This visualization strengthens the conceptualization of Wulangreh as a performative system embedded within social practice. Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that the sustainability of Wulangreh is driven by the dynamic interplay between text, performance, and community, redefining textual tradition as an evolving cultural system rather than a static literary form.

## Discussion

The findings reveal that the sustainability of Wulangreh is fundamentally anchored in the existence of socially embedded pitutur communities, thereby challenging the dominant assumption that textual endurance primarily depends on preservation mechanisms such as archiving and documentation. Instead, this study demonstrates that sustainability emerges through continuous social enactment, where meaning is collectively constructed and reproduced within communal practices. This finding aligns with sociocultural theory, which posits that knowledge is inherently situated and co-constructed through interaction (Liu et al., 2025), yet it extends this perspective by empirically showing how textual traditions operate as socially sustained systems rather than individual cognitive assets. While prior studies have emphasized the role of communities in preserving intangible heritage (Bogaerts, 2023; Rakhoveio et al., 2025), they often treat social engagement as a supporting factor rather than a constitutive mechanism. In contrast, this study positions community structure as the primary condition of textual survival. This reconceptualization offers a critical theoretical shift by reframing textual sustainability as a relational and process-driven phenomenon. From a global perspective, this finding contributes to ongoing debates on cultural resilience in non-Western contexts, particularly by demonstrating how Southeast Asian traditions sustain themselves through participatory ecosystems rather than institutional preservation. Consequently, the study advances a new conceptual proposition that cultural texts endure not because they are preserved, but because they are continuously performed and socially negotiated.

The observed variation in local terminology across pitutur communities further indicates that cultural transmission operates through adaptive localization rather than uniform replication. Rather than signaling fragmentation, these variations function as mechanisms that enable the text to remain contextually meaningful across diverse sociocultural settings. This finding resonates with the concept of glocalization, which highlights the interplay between global cultural forms and local reinterpretation (Sun, 2025; Lian & Xie, 2024), yet it also challenges the implicit assumption that standardization enhances cultural continuity. Previous studies have suggested that cultural adaptation supports resilience (Hanif & Sri Maruti, 2024; Alam et al., 2025), but they often frame variation as a secondary outcome rather than a central process. In contrast, this study demonstrates that controlled variation is structurally embedded within transmission practices and actively contributes to sustainability. This suggests that stability in cultural systems does not arise from uniformity, but from the capacity to accommodate difference without losing core meaning. Such a perspective provides an important theoretical refinement by positioning variation as a stabilizing mechanism rather than a source of instability. Moreover, the findings highlight that cultural transmission is inherently negotiated and context-sensitive, reflecting broader global patterns in the adaptation of traditional knowledge systems. Therefore, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how cultural continuity is maintained in dynamic social environments.

The internal organization of pitutur communities reveals that cultural transmission is mediated through a structured system of roles that balances interpretive authority and performative flexibility. Elders function as custodians of textual meaning, while performers and musicians enact the text through embodied practices, creating a dynamic interplay between preservation and innovation. This finding is consistent with performance theory, which emphasizes the role of embodied action in meaning-making (Winkielman et al., 2023; Wu & Lingel, 2025), yet it extends this framework by demonstrating that such processes are institutionally structured rather than purely emergent. Existing studies on traditional performance systems have acknowledged the importance of role differentiation (Allam et al., 2025), but they often overlook how these roles shape epistemological authority. This study reveals that interpretive control is not evenly distributed but is mediated through social hierarchy, which influences how textual meanings are constructed and

transmitted. Such a finding introduces a critical dimension by linking cultural transmission to power relations within communities. Furthermore, it suggests that sustainability depends not only on participation but also on the organization and regulation of that participation. From a broader theoretical standpoint, this challenges simplistic notions of community-based transmission by emphasizing the structured nature of collective agency. As a result, the study provides a deeper understanding of how social organization underpins the continuity of cultural traditions.

The philological analysis demonstrates that Wulangreh exists as a plural textual system characterized by structured variation across manuscript editions, thereby challenging the long-standing assumption of a singular authoritative text. While classical philology has traditionally focused on reconstructing an original version (Malik & Müller, 2025a), recent developments in performative philology argue for a more dynamic understanding of textuality (Khuder & Petric, 2026). The present study empirically supports this shift by showing that textual plurality is not random but follows identifiable patterns linked to specific transmission lineages. Previous research has acknowledged manuscript variation (Coladangelo & McCandless, 2024), yet often treats it as deviation rather than as a constitutive feature of textual systems. In contrast, this study demonstrates that variation is systematically organized and historically embedded, indicating a network-based rather than linear model of textual evolution. This finding provides a significant theoretical contribution by integrating structural and dynamic perspectives within philological analysis. It also offers a critical revision of genealogical models, suggesting that textual transmission involves recombination as well as replication. From a global perspective, this aligns with emerging interdisciplinary approaches that seek to bridge textual studies and cultural practice. Ultimately, the study advances a reconceptualization of philology as a field that accommodates both stability and transformation within living traditions.

The performative dimension of Wulangreh further reveals that textual meaning is actively produced through performance, rather than passively derived from written structure. This finding supports the central premise of performance theory, which posits that meaning emerges through embodied and interactive processes (Winkielman et al., 2023), yet it also extends this perspective by demonstrating that performance fundamentally reshapes textual organization. The selective fragmentation and reassembly of textual elements indicate that performance functions as a primary site of meaning production. While previous studies on oral traditions have highlighted the adaptive nature of performance (Liu et al., 2025; Sun, 2025), they often treat textual and performative dimensions separately. This study bridges that divide by showing how textual structures are actively reconfigured within performance contexts. Such a finding challenges the dichotomy between text and practice, suggesting instead a dialectical relationship in which each continuously informs the other. This has important implications for the study of cultural transmission, as it positions performance not as a derivative activity but as a constitutive process. From a theoretical standpoint, this contributes to a more integrated framework for understanding how meaning is generated within cultural systems. Consequently, the study advances a critical perspective that situates performance at the core of textual analysis.

The selective use of textual content in performance indicates that cultural transmission is governed by strategic adaptation rather than comprehensive reproduction. Communities do not reproduce the text in its entirety but selectively mobilize elements that are contextually relevant, reflecting a process of active negotiation. This finding aligns with the concept of selective tradition (Bogaerts, 2023), yet it extends this framework by providing empirical evidence of how selection operates in practice. Previous studies have acknowledged the role of context in shaping cultural expression (Hanif & Sri Maruti, 2024), but they rarely examine the mechanisms through which textual elements are curated. The present study demonstrates that selection is guided by aesthetic, emotional, and social considerations, indicating a complex decision-making process. This suggests that cultural transmission involves agency and intentionality rather than passive inheritance. Moreover, the omission of certain sections reflects not loss but adaptation, reinforcing the idea that flexibility is integral to sustainability. From a broader perspective, this finding contributes to a dynamic understanding of tradition as a continuously evolving system. It also highlights the importance of context in shaping how cultural knowledge is reproduced and transformed.

Taken together, the integration of textual plurality, performative transformation, and community-based transmission demonstrates that Wulangreh operates as a complex cultural

ecosystem in which meaning is co-constructed through interaction. This finding challenges reductionist approaches that isolate text, performance, or community as separate analytical units. While systems thinking has been applied in various fields to understand complex interdependencies (Du et al., 2026; Samuelsson, 2025), its application to cultural transmission remains limited. This study addresses that gap by proposing an integrated framework that conceptualizes textual traditions as dynamic systems. Such a framework not only explains how cultural elements interact but also provides a basis for understanding their resilience in changing contexts. Importantly, the study acknowledges that its findings are situated within a specific cultural setting, and further research is needed to explore the applicability of this model in other contexts. Nevertheless, by positioning Wulangreh within a global discourse on cultural sustainability, the study offers a novel contribution that extends beyond regional analysis. Ultimately, this research establishes that cultural texts endure through the interplay of structure, practice, and community, offering a new paradigm for the study of living traditions in contemporary society.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to reconceptualize Wulangreh not as a static textual artifact but as a living cultural system shaped by the dynamic interaction between text, performance, and community. The findings demonstrate that the sustainability of Wulangreh is fundamentally driven by socially embedded practices, where pitutur communities function as active agents of cultural transmission. Rather than relying on textual preservation alone, the endurance of the text emerges through continuous performative enactment and collective negotiation, confirming that cultural continuity is inherently relational and process-oriented. This insight challenges conventional text-centered approaches and provides empirical support for a sociocultural and performative understanding of textual traditions.

The study further reveals that textual plurality, adaptive localization, and selective performance are not signs of fragmentation but essential mechanisms that enable the tradition to remain relevant across changing sociocultural contexts. By demonstrating that variation is structured and purposeful, the research advances a critical shift in philological thinking, moving beyond the search for a singular authoritative text toward a network-based understanding of textual evolution. At the same time, the integration of performative practices shows that meaning is actively produced through embodied interaction, positioning performance as a central mechanism in the realization of textual significance. These findings collectively establish that Wulangreh operates as a flexible yet coherent system in which continuity and transformation coexist.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of performative philology by providing an empirically grounded framework that integrates textual analysis, performance theory, and sociocultural perspectives. It offers a conceptual advancement by proposing that textual sustainability is best understood as an emergent property of interconnected social and cultural processes. This perspective not only extends existing theories but also challenges disciplinary boundaries that traditionally separate text from practice. In doing so, the study positions itself within the broader global discourse on cultural resilience, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving social environments.

Practically, the findings provide important implications for cultural preservation and education by highlighting the need to support community-based practices rather than focusing solely on documentation and archiving. Efforts to sustain cultural traditions should therefore prioritize the strengthening of participatory ecosystems, where knowledge is actively enacted and transmitted. While the study is situated within the specific context of Wulangreh in Magelang, its conceptual framework offers broader applicability for understanding other living textual traditions. Ultimately, this research affirms that cultural texts endure not because they are preserved in fixed forms, but because they are continuously reinterpreted, performed, and embedded within the social life of communities.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Rozib Sulistiyo conceptualized the study, developed the research design, conducted fieldwork and data collection, performed the primary data analysis, and drafted the original

manuscript. Abdullah Idi contributed to the theoretical framework development, supervised the analytical process, critically reviewed and refined the interpretation of findings, and provided substantial revisions to enhance the intellectual content of the manuscript. Endang Rochmiatun contributed to methodological validation, supported the philological analysis, assisted in data interpretation, and participated in manuscript editing and final approval. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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