



Lengger Lanang Dance Culture From the Perspective of Muslim-Friendly Tourism

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Abstract:

Background, The Lengger Lanang Dance is a traditional Banyumas art form that possesses cultural, historical, and spiritual values. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that the performers are male dancers who appear to resemble women. In the context of the growing development of Muslim-friendly tourism, the existence of Lengger Lanang has generated various perspectives regarding its compatibility with Islamic values.

Aim, This study aims to analyze the Lengger Lanang Dance from the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism.

Methods, This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation.

Results, The findings reveal that the Lengger Lanang Dance is a cultural heritage that embodies historical, social, philosophical, and religious values. Islamic values are reflected in the *sindhenan* songs, dance movements, and symbolic meanings of the performance, which convey messages of piety, morality, patience, and harmonious relationships between humans, God, and fellow human beings. Although certain aspects, particularly the appearance of male dancers resembling women, may be considered sensitive within the framework of Muslim-friendly tourism, the dance should not be evaluated solely based on its visual representation. Instead, it should be understood contextually through its cultural significance and moral teachings.

Conclusions and From the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism, the Lengger Lanang Dance cannot be assessed merely by the appearance of male dancers who resemble women. A more comprehensive understanding is required, taking into account the cultural values, philosophical meanings, and moral messages embedded in the performance.

Keywords: Lengger Lanang Dance, Muslim-friendly tourism, cultural tourism, Banyumas



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INTRODUCTION

Art is an inseparable part of a society's culture. Culture is a crucial aspect of social life because it embodies values, norms, beliefs, and identities passed down from generation to generation. One element of culture that plays a crucial role in community life is art. Art not

only serves as a means of entertainment but also serves as a medium for cultural expression that reflects the character and identity of a region (Syakhrani & Kamil, 2022). As a cultural element, art is an important instrument for strengthening local identity and preserving the community's cultural richness (Saputra et al., in Iskandar et al., 2026). Indonesia, a country rich in cultural diversity, has various forms of traditional art that have developed in each region, including Central Java Province, which is known for its local traditions and arts that still survive today.

One form of art that has developed in society is dance. Dance is an art form that uses body movement as the primary medium to express certain meanings and messages. Dance is a form of expression of the human soul through beautiful rhythmic movements that pay attention to the elements of space and time (M. Thoyibi, 2003). In its early development, dance had a close relationship with community life, particularly related to the life cycle, traditional rituals, and local beliefs (Djokaho, 2013). Over time, dance has undergone developments in form and function, ranging from traditional and archipelago dance to creative and contemporary dance (Wijayanti, 2018). This shows that dance is not only a cultural heritage but also part of society's ever-evolving social dynamics.

Banyumas Regency is one of the regions in Central Java with a rich cultural heritage still maintained by the community. Amidst globalization and modernization, the Banyumas community continues to maintain the continuity of traditional arts as a regional cultural identity. One traditional art form that still survives today is Lenggèr Lanang (Iskandar et al., 2026). Lenggèr is a local culture that is unique because it contains various cultural values, such as aesthetic values, values of belief, values of struggle, values of humanity, and values of honesty. Over time, Lenggèr has become not only a form of entertainment for the community but also a ritual practice rooted in the traditions of the Banyumas agrarian community. This ritual is performed as a form of gratitude for agricultural produce and as a sign of respect for Dewi Sri, a symbol of fertility (Hartono, 2016).

For the Banyumas people, Lenggèr has long existed and developed as a folk art closely related to rural life. Unlike formal and exclusive palace arts, Lenggèr has developed as a more open and popular folk art form. Besides entertainment, Lenggèr is also used as a ritual medium for agrarian communities to convey offerings and hopes for safety and agricultural success. One distinctive characteristic of Lenggèr Lanang is that the dancers are male but wear clothing and makeup resembling women during their performances. This

uniqueness has become a distinct identity for the Lengger Dance and a cultural attraction that distinguishes it from other traditional arts (Iskandar et al., 2026).

Despite the strong cultural and historical value of the Lengger dance, discussion of this art form from a Muslim-friendly tourism perspective remains relatively limited. To date, research on the Lengger dance has focused primarily on the cultural, ritual, and preservation aspects of traditional art, while studies linking the art form to Muslim-friendly tourism remain rare. Yet, current developments in the tourism industry demonstrate growing attention to Muslim-friendly tourism, which emphasizes the comfort of Muslim tourists in accordance with Islamic values. This is particularly true of the Lengger Lanang dance, which features men dressed and groomed like women, while in Islamic teachings, impersonating the opposite sex is prohibited. This situation creates dynamics and differing perspectives when the Lengger Lanang dance is placed within the context of Muslim-friendly tourism. On the one hand, the Lengger Lanang dance is a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved, but on the other hand, its religious values require attention in the development of Muslim-friendly tourism.

Therefore, it is interesting to examine in greater depth how the Lengger Dance is viewed from the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism, particularly regarding the role of traditional arts as a local cultural identity amid the development of Islamic-values-based tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lengger Art

Lengger Lanang is a traditional dance from Banyumas, Central Java, featuring male dancers who dress as and dance as women (cross-gender). This art form combines elements of performing arts, spirituality, and cultural preservation. Lengger is a unique local culture, encompassing cultural values such as aesthetics, belief in and devotion to ancestral spirits, struggle, humanity, and honesty. Lengger, which is oriented toward ritual worship, aims to perform traditional local cultural rituals. Rituals are performed as part of daily life and as a form of gratitude for nature's bounty as a source of life (Mulyana & Dwiningrum, 2024).

Over time, lengger has evolved beyond its traditional form, incorporating patterns similar to those of other social dances such as ronggeng, ledhek, and tandak. The differences lie only in the regional names, while its primary function remains associated with fertility rituals. Lengger dancers are often identified with the figure of Dewi Sri, a symbol of fertility.

The dancers' presence in the performance is seen as more than just dancing bodies; it is also a symbolic representation of the community's hopes for balance in nature and communal life (Nasution, 2026).

Muslim-Friendly Tourism

In the current global tourism landscape, a popular trend is Muslim-friendly tourism. This new market segment in the tourism industry aims to meet the needs of Muslim travelers by providing products and services that comply with Islamic sharia principles. Mohsin also explained that Muslim-friendly tourism is a type of tourism that adheres to Islamic principles, enabling Muslims to fulfill their obligations to worship Allah and consume halal food (Hasanah, 2020). From an Islamic legal perspective, travel must have a clear motivation. If the goal is to learn about the universe as God's creation, the trip can be both an act of worship and a form of recreation (Djakfar, 2019). According to M. Quraish Shihab, religion justifies travel destinations that do not lead to sin. Travelers also receive concessions in carrying out religious obligations, such as delaying fasting or combining and shortening prayer cycles (Mabrurin & Latifah, 2021).

The term Muslim-friendly tourism refers to Islamic tourism, Halal tourism, Sharia tourism, and Islamic hospitality. According to the Crescent Rating study in the Global Muslim Travel Index 2023, there is increasing interest among travelers seeking destinations, accommodations, and activities that emphasize environmental protection, ethics, and the well-being of local communities. Muslim travelers also tend to seek out eco-friendly options in accordance with their religious principles of responsible management and environmental preservation (Syaharani & Fahmi, 2024).

METHOD

The approach used in this study is qualitative descriptive, as the research aims to describe the Lengger Dance in depth from the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism. A qualitative approach is used to understand social and cultural phenomena holistically based on the views, experiences, and perceptions of informants regarding the existence of Lengger Dance as a traditional art associated with the concept of Muslim-friendly tourism. Moleong and Hardani et al. (2020) stated that qualitative research is research that aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, actions, and

motivations, in a comprehensive manner through descriptions in the form of words using scientific methods.

The research focused on art studios and cultural communities that continue to preserve Lengger Dance performances, especially Lengger Lanang, as part of the Banyumas cultural tradition.

This study used three data collection techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation as primary data. Interviews were conducted with academics, artists, and cultural figures who understand the development of Lengger Dance in the context of culture and tourism. Observations were conducted through direct observation of Lengger Dance performances and community cultural activities related to the art form. Documentation was conducted by collecting photographs, archival materials, cultural records, and literature relevant to the research.

Secondary data were obtained from scientific journals, books, prior research findings, and other documents related to the Lengger Dance, Banyumas culture, and the concept of Muslim-friendly tourism. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that informants possess relevant knowledge, experience, and understanding of the research object. With this approach, the research is expected to produce a deep understanding of the position of the Lengger Dance from a Muslim-friendly tourism perspective without neglecting the cultural values and local identity of the Banyumas community.

DISCUSSION

History of Lengger

The history of Lengger is believed to have originated as a manifestation of the community's gratitude for a bountiful harvest. Furthermore, there are stories linking the birth of the lengger tradition to the lives of the agrarian community of Banyumas. At that time, wild boars frequently damaged residents' agricultural land, resulting in crop losses. To ward off the animals, the community made sounds while the women waved their hands as if chasing them away. This activity continued until it evolved into the lengger tradition (Nurfaiza, 2023).

Historically, the Lengger Dance has often been associated with the spread of Islam by Sunan Kalijaga. This art form is believed to be the result of an acculturation of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures, which Sunan Kalijaga utilized as a means of preaching to

spread Islamic teachings to the community. Lengger Dance was chosen because it was widely popular among the community, making it more easily accepted as a means of conveying religious values. Etymologically, the term "Lengger" comes from the words "le" and "ngger," meaning "elingo ngger marang Gusti Pangeran" or "remember God" (Widiaryotono, 2012).

Some also believe that the word "lengger" derives from "langgar," meaning "prayer room." In several folk tales, Sunan Kalijaga frequently appears in lengger performances and reminds people to pray when the time comes, saying, "elinga ngger iki wis wayahe sholat." Therefore, the Lengger Dance is not merely understood as entertainment but also contains moral messages and religious values that teach people to always do good and remember God (Noer & Zulfiningrum, 2022).

Over its development, the Lengger Dance has undergone various changes in accordance with the conditions of the society in which the art form thrives. Initially, lengger dancers were women, but during the Dutch colonial period, various indecent acts were committed by colonialists against female dancers. This condition prompted the community to replace female dancers with men who dressed like women as a form of protection for women and a strategy to deceive the colonialists (Nurfaiza, 2023). Another opinion holds that this change also aimed to demonstrate that men could express beauty and tenderness through dance. From this, the term Lengger Lanang was born, namely, Lengger art performed by men with feminine movements, expressions, and appearance like women. This uniqueness is the main characteristic of Lengger Lanang and distinguishes it from other traditional arts in Banyumas (Nurfaiza, 2023).

According to Sunaryadi in his book *Lenggeran: Tradition and Transformation*, a lengger dancer is required to possess a certain femininity, flexibility, and charm, so not everyone can become a lengger dancer. To become a lengger, there are special requirements, including an apprenticeship or being believed to possess an indang (a traditional musical instrument). A person with an indang is believed to have possessed special talents and characteristics since childhood without undergoing formal learning (Sunaryadi, 2000). In addition, prospective lengger dancers must also go through the midang stage, which involves visiting people's homes to dance with musicians voluntarily without any compensation. This stage serves as a mental test and social acceptance for prospective dancers. After undergoing the midang seven times, a person is considered a legitimate lengger dancer. Usually, this

success is celebrated through a special performance as a form of community recognition of their status as a lengger dancer (Sakbana, 2025).

In addition to their dancing skills, Lengger dancers are also required to undergo various spiritual practices and traditional rituals. They are required to fast, meditate, bathe in flower water, and adhere to various taboos passed down from their ancestors. On certain nights or before performances, the dancers typically hold a communal prayer accompanied by the recitation of verses from the Quran before proceeding with other rituals. In local beliefs, various symbols are associated with the presence of spirits or indhang lengger, such as rivers, trees, sacred graves, flowers, oil, midnight, and even certain ritual actions such as fasting and bathing (Nurfaiza, 2023). Through these symbols and actions, the Lengger community believes in the existence of supernatural powers that maintain the continuity of their traditions. This demonstrates that Lengger Dance is not only an entertainment dimension, but also rich in spiritual elements and local beliefs.

The Lengger Dance is known as a sacred dance, although in practice it can be performed anytime and anywhere. Before the performance begins, offerings of kantil flowers, jasmine, roses, and incense are usually prepared. According to some local beliefs, spectators wearing red clothing are not allowed to watch the performance, as it is believed to induce trance in the dancers. This belief further strengthens the Lengger Dance's position as an art form closely linked to the ritual and spiritual elements of the Banyumas community. In practice, the Lengger Dance is often performed at various traditional events such as village cleansing, dreadlock hair cleansing, wedding celebrations, circumcisions, and even at the closing ceremony before the holy month of Ramadan (Nur & Adriansyah, 2023). Interestingly, during Ramadan, lengger performances are usually suspended as a form of respect for the Muslim community who are focused on fasting, then performed again after Eid al-Fitr as a symbol of the reopening of community cultural activities.

As a folk art, Lengger Dance has diverse performance forms. It includes several types of dances, such as the Kinayakan Dance, the Sontoloyo Dance, the Jangkrik Genggong Dance, and the Gondang Keli Dance. The movements are varied, ranging from adeg-adeg, nyembah (worshipping), surfing, nindak (prostration), slamming hands, mondhong (prostration), nyindir (prostration), to pacak gulung (rolling) or tancep (prostration) (Noer & Zulfiningrum, 2022). Beyond the dance movements, the uniqueness of this art form is also evident in the attire of the dancers. Female dancers wear traditional attire complete with

scarves and crowns, while male dancers wear masks and specific makeup to complement their characters.

Amidst the currents of modernization and globalization, Lengger Lanang continues to exist as a culture that continues to be preserved by the Banyumas community. Its presence at various cultural events shows that this tradition still has a place and relevance in people's lives today. Research by Satyani and Enhar (2024) shows that Lengger Lanang's popularity has increased alongside the development of social media, artists' creativity in adapting performances, and the younger generation's openness to local cultural expressions. These conditions indicate that Lengger Lanang not only survives as cultural heritage but also continues to adapt to the social and cultural dynamics of modern society without losing its unique identity as a traditional Banyumas art form.

Table 1: Timeline of the history of the Lengger dance

Development Period	Development Period
Agrarian Period	Used as a Thanksgiving ritual for the harvest
Islamic Period	Served as a medium for Sunan Kalijaga's preaching
Dutch Colonial Period	Female dancers were replaced by men to protect women from colonial harassment
Modern Period	Becomes a cultural attraction and identity of Banyumas
Digital Era	Popularity increases through social media and cultural festivals

Source: Researcher (2026)

Lengger Lanang Dance from the Perspective of Muslim-Friendly Tourism

Discussions about dance and the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism are certainly related to Islam, the religion practiced by Muslims. Therefore, if examined more deeply, dance is closely tied to the body, its primary medium, which has sparked controversy due to its perceived public display of private parts, especially by female dancers. Soedarsono (1980), in Siswantari (2020), defines dance as a form of expression from within the human soul, expressed through beautiful, rhythmic movements.

Islam does not actually prohibit dancing; rather, it encourages people to engage in the arts to create beauty and draw closer to the Creator in order to achieve happiness in the afterlife. Because art is both a means of beauty and a means of spreading Islam, it can create meaningful, high-quality works while still adhering to religious values. Islam only prohibits dances that contain erotic elements and lack any inherent value. Meanwhile, dances that provide benefits and knowledge are still permitted in Islam (Siswantari, 2020).

The Lenggeng Dance, which researchers are currently studying, when analyzed from the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism, certainly requires caution, as Lenggeng has become a tradition inherent in the lives of the Banyumas community from generation to generation. Based on the results of interviews with informants, Lenggeng Dance is understood not only as a form of entertainment but also as a cultural heritage with historical, philosophical, and social value, as well as the cultural identity of the Banyumasan community. Informants explained that the Lenggeng Dance is part of the intangible cultural heritage, reflecting the continuity of local traditions and serving as a medium of expression for the Banyumas community. Therefore, the discussion of the Lenggeng Dance from the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism cannot be approached in a black-and-white manner as "appropriate" or "inappropriate", but rather requires a more contextual and academic cultural approach.

In the interview results, informants also emphasized that the concept of Muslim-friendly tourism is not essentially aimed at eliminating local culture, but rather at creating harmony between the needs of Muslim tourists and the preservation of regional culture. This is reinforced by the findings of Nurfaiza (2023), who explained that the Lenggeng Dance contains various Islamic educational values, both in the *sindhenan* songs and dance movements. In the songs *eling-eling* and *sekar gadung*, for example, there are teachings to always remember God, fear God, be patient and sincere in facing trials, and warnings to always be wary of God's punishment. In addition, there are also moral and practical values such as the encouragement to extend greetings to fellow Muslims, keep promises, and the spirit of struggle in living life as contained in the songs *Brendong Kulon* and *Sekar Gadung* (Nurfaiza, 2023). These findings indicate that behind the image of the Lenggeng Dance as a traditional art, there are elements of Islamic preaching and moral values that are still inherent in its performances.

Islamic values are also reflected in the movements of the Lenggeng dance. According to Nurfaiza (2023), the worship movements in the Lenggeng Dance convey the etiquette of welcoming and respecting guests, while the *seblak sampur* movements convey the message of *amar ma'ruf nahi mungkar*. In addition, the floor pattern in the Lenggeng Lanang performance represents the values of worship and *muamalah* related to the relationship between humans and Allah (*hablun min Allah*) and the relationship between humans and others (*hablun min annas*). In this context, the Lenggeng Dance cannot be viewed solely from the visual aspect of the dancers, who are played by men with appearances resembling

women, but also needs to be seen in light of the symbolic meaning and moral messages contained in each element of the performance. Informants stated that these educational and philosophical aspects have the potential to be an important part of the development of Muslim-friendly cultural tourism, especially when conveyed through appropriate cultural interpretation for tourists.

On the other hand, the issue of male dancers dressing up as women is indeed a sensitive aspect from the perspective of Muslim-friendly tourism. However, Ahwadzy (2025) explains that from a fiqh perspective, dance is essentially a series of movements that follow a certain rhythm and can be considered legally valid as long as it does not contain excessively graceful elements (*takaşsur*) or behavior that negatively resembles *mukhannis*. This perspective shows that the assessment of dance art cannot be based solely on the external appearance of the performance but must also consider the substance, values, and purpose of the art. In line with this, researchers believe that the Lengger Dance remains relevant to Islamic values because it contains moral, educational, and spiritual messages that can be accepted by Muslim tourists. With adaptive, educational management that respects the authenticity of local culture, the Lengger Dance has the potential to evolve into an inclusive, Muslim-friendly cultural performance without losing its traditional identity.

Table 2: Analysis of Lengger Lanang Dance from the Perspective of Muslim-Friendly Tourism

Muslim-Friendly Tourism Dimensions:	Conditions of the Lengger Lanang Dance	Analysis
Educational Value	High	Contains moral and religious messages
Cultural Preservation:	High	Maintains the local cultural identity of Banyumas
Spiritual Value	High	Contains elements of da'wah and reminds us of God
Comfort for Muslim Tourists	Moderate	Requires appropriate cultural interpretation
Male Dancer's Appearance Resembling a Woman	Sensitive	A factor that has sparked debate
Potential for Muslim Cultural Tourism	High	Can be developed through an educational and interpretive approach

Source: Researcher (2026)

CONCLUSION

The Lengger Lanang dance is part of the cultural heritage of the Banyumas people, possessing strong historical, philosophical, social, and spiritual values. This art form serves not only as entertainment but also as a local cultural identity, passed down from generation to generation and still persisting amidst changing times. The existence of Lengger Lanang demonstrates the Banyumas people's ability to maintain traditions while adapting to social and cultural changes. From a Muslim-friendly tourism perspective, the Lengger Lanang dance cannot be judged solely by the appearance of male dancers who resemble women; it needs to be understood more comprehensively through its inherent values. Research shows that the Lengger dance embodies various Islamic values, reflected in its songs, dance movements, and philosophical meaning, such as piety, morality, respect for others, patience, and the relationship between humans and God. These values demonstrate that traditional art can serve as a medium for education and for delivering moral messages relevant to Islamic principles.

Implication

This study suggests that traditional cultural performances should be assessed not only by their visual appearance but also by their cultural, educational, and spiritual values. The findings support the development of more inclusive Muslim-friendly cultural tourism that balances Islamic values with the preservation of local cultural heritage..

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