



From Cultural Tradition to Arts Industry: Development of The *Ondel-Ondel* as the Identity of the Betawi Community

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Abstract

This study discusses changes and developments in the *Ondel-ondel* cultural identity within the Betawi Community. *Ondel-ondel* is the cultural identity of the Betawi people, which was previously used in their rituals and is now found only in several creative industries. The research method uses a qualitative, ethnographic approach across the stages of object selection, investigation, and interpretation. The research aims to discuss the changes and management of *Ondel-ondel* cultural identity, and to provide an overview of the development of *Ondel-ondel* as an identity. The main focus is on analyzing changes in the industrial realm and how society and the government manage them. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and literature study. As the identity of the Betawi people and Jakarta, the development of *Ondel-ondel* is also influenced by several regional government policies. Now, *Ondel-ondel* is not only a cultural identity of the Betawi people but also an icon of the city of Jakarta. When the Betawi people no longer believe in rituals, they use and represent *Ondel-ondel* in other forms. Various forms of management are carried out on *Ondel-ondel* to make it a creative industry in society, including music, performing arts, craft products, and visual products. However, of course, problems and impacts occur through this management. This research is expected to provide an understanding of the management of *Ondel-ondel* culture, a form of the creative industry.

Keywords: cultural tradition; art industry; *Ondel-ondel*; identity; Betawi Community

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of identity for a region gives rise to various forms that can represent messages about people's lives. Identity representations typically draw on elements typical of a region or culture considered to represent the identity of the people in that place. Identity emerges when a community forms and develops an ideology (Anderson, 2016). *Ondel-ondel* is

one of the Betawi ethnic cultural products that can still be found in several places in Jakarta and its surroundings. Historically, *Ondel-ondel* is thought to have existed in Jakarta, where it was known as Barongan and was used by the Betawi people in 1605 (Purbasari et al., 2019). Although the Betawi ethnic group has long existed, it first came to public attention when Husni Thamrin founded the Kaoem Betawi association in 1918 (Chaer, 2015). This tribe

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was previously only known as a group of people who had lived and lived in Batavia (former Jakarta) for a long time. They were nicknamed Batavia and later became popular as the Betawi people.

The Betawi people are descendants of various tribes, given Batavia's history as the center of colonial trade and government. Cultural acculturation occurred between several immigrant ethnicities, such as Arabs, Chinese, Europeans, and indigenous ethnicities, which are thought to be the origins of these ethnicities, so that Betawi ethnic art is colored with various ethnic nuances. Acculturation occurs when each individual in a group expresses an interest in maintaining strong ties in daily life with their ethnic group or dominant group (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). This form of cultural acculturation can also be seen in *Ondel-ondel* art, which is influenced by several ethnicities that make up Betawi society, including the clothes worn on *Ondel-ondel* dolls adopted from Chinese and Sundanese clothing because they are made by the peripheral Betawi community, which is influenced by these ethnicities (Shahab, 2014). The accompanying music (Gambang Kromong) is a combination of music from several ethnicities, including Chinese (Tehyan Instrument), Sundanese (Sundanese Kendang), European (Tanjidor), and Javanese (Gambang).

As a cultural product, *Ondel-ondel* has been recognized by the wider community as the identity of the Betawi people in Jakarta and its surroundings. Because identity is used to explain the characteristics of certain group actions (Usman, 2012). The journey of *Ondel-ondel* toward becoming a cultural identity for the Betawi people is based not only on the community's role but also on the government's, especially in Jakarta. In their research, Bukhori & Salim (2018) stated that, as an icon of the city of Jakarta, *Ondel-ondel* is an art form that must be preserved in various ways, such as by using *Ondel-ondel* at every regional event. Then, research conducted by Wahidiat & Carrollina (2023) explained that the changes that occurred in *Ondel-ondel* were

not only in its function as a performance, but also in the visual form, such as costumes and accompaniment. Research by Yuwastina & Volodymyr (2021) explains that, currently, *Ondel-ondel* is a means of performing to find pleasure amid change and an inspiration for some people to create.

From the research above, it can be seen that *Ondel-ondel* has become the identity of the Betawi people and continues to be preserved even though it has undergone various changes in function and form. However, no previous research on *Ondel-ondel* has discussed how the identity of the *Ondel-ondel* ritual tradition has been framed as a product of the Betawi people's cultural industry to date. In the past, *Ondel-ondel* was used as a ritual tool, but over time, *Ondel-ondel* has been used in various other forms, such as performance and visual branding. This raises the question, "How is the *Ondel-ondel* cultural identity managed from a ritual means to a cultural industry product?" So, the aim of this research is to examine the process of transforming the *Ondel-ondel* culture into a cultural product that serves as the identity of the Betawi people in Jakarta.

Several previous studies have served as references in the study of identity management and changes in cultural forms. Such as research by Akhtabi & Puryanti (2022), which explores the context of Javanese cultural identity in contemporary music as a product of the creative industry. This research illustrates that culture can be transformed into industrial products while still carrying that culture's identity. Research by Hani et al. (2012) states that the management of cultural identity in the creative industry successfully preserves this culture through various cultural products. Then, other research conducted by Ruiz Palacios et al. (2023) found that, when managing identity and its changes, people cannot determine whether these changes affect their cultural identity. However, the changes made resulted in centralized control and created an official identity.

This study attempts to bridge the

gap in previous research on *Ondel-ondel*. While previous studies have discussed the changing function of *Ondel-ondel* and the role of government, there has been no analysis of the aspect of identity management in each of its developments. Previous studies have examined the transformation of *Ondel-ondel's* form as a performance adaptation or a ceremonial instrument. None has yet explored in depth how *Ondel-ondel* transitioned into an art industry commodity in the management of identity. This study views *Ondel-ondel* not only as an art form but also as a community creative industry commodity that continues to develop through various management processes. The novelty of this research lies in its analysis of the Betawi people's strategy for preserving cultural traditions as an art industry to maintain identity.

Ondel-ondel's long journey representing the Betawi community in Jakarta makes the management of its cultural identity an interesting subject worth further research. The study of cultural identity and its management examines the process of identity formation, which is shaped by and connected to the cultural context. The shift from culture to a creative industry is evident not only from an economic perspective but also in problems of concern to cultural policy (O'Connor, 2010). The research uses the identity management theory proposed by Shin & Jackson (2003), the process of grouping elements based on existing identity sites, namely: 1) the way identity is formed, 2) the impact of identity, 3) identity as a marker of power and privilege, and 4) the problem of identity and its reconstruction.

The way identity is formed can be studied through a cultural approach. Culture is formed through cultural values embedded in the interactions of members in groups (G.-M. Chen, 2009). The impact of identity is primarily social, reducing group uncertainty (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986). Social impact in groups is influenced by the presence of significant others, is subject to negotiation, and becomes an ongoing, maintained process (Al Hazmi et

al., 2025; G.-M. Chen, 2009). Group identity is used to explain phenomena within ethnicities (Sen, 2007). express issues related to membership in the role of community reactions within groups, issues of justice and social injustice (Ting-Toomey, 2012). Thus, the novelty of this research lies in the objects and approaches that differ from those of previous studies. This research is expected to provide an overview of the development of *Ondel-ondel* as a cultural tradition into various forms of the creative industry and trace its current position as an identity.

METHOD

The research uses qualitative methods, with an ethnographic approach, to reveal the cultural events of community groups in depth. Reeves et al. (2008) stated that ethnographic research takes researchers into social interactions and reveals the various perceptions that arise within groups. Ethnography focuses on the qualitative exploration of values and meaning in the context of overall ways of life, such as cultural issues, lifeworlds, and identities (Barker, 2003)

Data collection and analysis were conducted in 4 ethnographic stages, following Kirk & Miller (2012). The first stage is choosing the object of research, especially those related to society and its culture (finding the field). In this research, the object of study is the management of *Ondel-ondel* as a Betawi cultural tradition, involving various groups, such as the general public, the government, and artists. The second stage involves carrying out investigations to find (discovery) and collect (getting) using in-depth observation and interview techniques. At this stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with various parties involved in identity management, such as the local government and the Betawi community. The Betawi people chosen as participants were those who lived in Jakarta, and the *Ondel-ondel* players they met. Semi-structured interviews have the potential to yield deeper knowledge and

provide an opportunity to follow up on important viewpoints (Brinkmann, 2013). Through semi-structured interviews, the meanings of the descriptions of the studied cases can be interpreted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019).

The third stage, interpreting the data with supporting materials such as books, papers, articles, archives, journal reports, and other research results, becomes very important, as it provides additional material to strengthen the findings from the field, making the data more accurate. And reliable. Fourth stage: explain saying goodbye and leaving the research location. As a rule, and in respect for upholding community culture, this stage is an important part of maintaining good relations between researchers and the community.

This study involved a total of 18 informants selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of the key stakeholders in *Ondel-ondel* identity management. Participants included six officials from the DK Jakarta Culture Service, six active *Ondel-ondel* performers and street artists, four Betawi community elders and cultural figures, and three batik craftspeople producing *Ondel-ondel*-themed products. Informants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) direct involvement in the production, performance, policy-making, or preservation of *Ondel-ondel*; (2) residence or active engagement in Jakarta for a minimum of five years; and (3) willingness to participate in recorded, in-depth interviews. Snowball referrals were also used to identify additional informants recommended by initial participants.

Fieldwork was conducted over approximately eight months, from January to August 2024, in Jakarta, Indonesia. Primary research sites included the Kemayoran area (home of the *Ondel-ondel* monument), the Kota Tua (Old Town) district, where street performances frequently take place, the Taman Ismail Marzuki cultural center, the Setu Babakan Betawi Cultural Village, and the offices of the DKI Jakarta Culture Service. These locations were chosen be-

cause they represent the key spatial nodes of *Ondel-ondel*'s, contemporary existence, from government-sanctioned performance spaces to sites of informal, community-led activity.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis following the interpretive phases outlined by Kirk & Miller (2012). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and then coded inductively in the first cycle of analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. In the second cycle, these initial codes were refined and grouped into broader thematic categories aligned with the identity management framework of Shin & Jackson (2003): (1) identity formation, (2) the impact of identity, (3) identity as a marker of power and privilege, and (4) problems of identity and reconstruction. Field notes from participant observations were triangulated with interview data and archival sources - including government regulations, cultural heritage documentation, and prior published research - to enhance the credibility and depth of the analysis.

As this research employs an ethnographic approach, it is necessary to clarify the researcher's positionality. The researcher enters this study as an academic with a background in cultural studies and visual arts, but without a personal Betawi ethnic identity. This outsider position offered certain analytical advantages, including the ability to approach community practices with critical distance. However, it also required particular reflexivity regarding potential gaps in lived cultural understanding. Before fieldwork, the researcher conducted preliminary visits and informal conversations with community members to build trust and reduce the social distance inherent in researcher-participant dynamics. Throughout the fieldwork process, the researcher was transparent about the study's academic purpose and sought ongoing consent from all informants. It is acknowledged that the researcher's presence - as an outside observer attending performances, community events, and government meetings - may have introduced

a degree of social desirability bias in participants' responses. This was mitigated through extended engagement in the field, cross-checking information across multiple informant groups, and by grounding interpretations in documentary and archival evidence wherever possible. Reflective journaling was maintained throughout the fieldwork to allow the researcher to monitor their own assumptions and their influence on data collection and interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forming Identity Within an Ethnic Group

The transformation of *Ondel-ondel* from ritual tradition to cultural industry can be understood through the identity management framework proposed by Shin & Jackson (2003), which examines four interconnected dimensions of identity sites. First, the way identity is formed reveals how *Ondel-ondel* emerged from the specific cultural practices of peripheral Betawi communities and gradually came to be recognized as a collective symbol through government intervention and artistic representation. Second, the impact of identity demonstrates how *Ondel-ondel's* recognition generated both social cohesion among Betawi people and economic opportunities through tourism and creative industries. Third, identity as a marker of power and privilege manifests in the government's authority to determine which cultural forms receive official recognition and support, while the Betawi community maintains its right, as cultural owners, to adapt and reproduce its heritage. Finally, the problem of identity and its reconstruction becomes evident in the ongoing tensions between preservation and modernization, in which *Ondel-ondel* faces challenges of commodification, spatial constraints, and shifting public perceptions, necessitating continuous negotiation between tradition and contemporary urban life. Negotiation within cultural traditions safeguards their core elements (Budiman, 2025).

Visually, the shape of *Ondel-ondel* is a

large doll played by someone from inside, made from a wooden or rattan frame, with a red or white face, wide eyes, and decorations called coconut flowers in the hair. In the records of intangible cultural heritage, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (2010) states that a British merchant named W. Scott, in the 1600s, wrote during his travels about the figure of *Ondel-ondel*, which still carries a mystical aura and is paraded throughout Batavia at times. Certain. Then *Ondel-ondel* was also displayed at the opening of the Hotel Des Indes in 1923, allegedly as a ritual to repel evil and ensure the hotel's success.

Ondel-ondel art presents a pair of large dolls which are paraded around, accompanied by Gambang Kromong music. Initially, *Ondel-ondel* was a tradition among the Betawi Pinggir (Udik/Ora) and Betawi Pesisir, namely the Betawi people who lived on the outskirts and along the coast of Jakarta. Meanwhile, for Betawi people living in urban areas, *Ondel-ondel* is only for entertainment. The emergence of the terms Peripheral Betawi, *Pesisir* Betawi, and City Betawi was due to the relatively small size of the Jakarta area, which led some Betawi people to live on its outskirts (Erwantoro, 2014). The *Ondel-ondel* visual symbolizes something great in humans, with characteristics between anger-courage and purity-kindness (Wahidiyat & Carrollina, 2023). *Ondel-ondel* is used as an exorcist of evil spirits and is featured in several important activities, such as slametans at weddings and other important events. *Ondel-ondel* or *barongan* is a ritual tool that has become part of the life of the marginalized Betawi community (Wahidiyat et al., 2022).

In this case, there are two problems that hinder the development of cultural identity originating from within and from outside the ethnic group. The problem within the group is that the *Ondel-ondel* ritual is performed only by the peripheral Betawi community, while urban Betawi people do not use *Ondel-ondel* because it is associated with beliefs that give rise to negative stereotypes within the group. The phenomenon of bad stereotypes is a thre-

at to identity formation (Benjamin et al., 2010). Negative stereotypes can be detrimental to an identity's performance within a group (Charness & Chen, 2020). Rituals in a tradition are important activities for identity because they present two or more different entities (Al Hazmi, 2023). Cultural differences within groups also pose a barrier to identity formation (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). Then, problems outside ethnic groups are the urbanization of the population. In line with Batavia's development, which was later named the nation's capital during independence, it brought changes to the city's face and the art that lives in it. Beliefs and ritual practices began to be abandoned. The urbanization of large numbers of people is increasingly crowding the capital city, causing the Betawi people to become increasingly displaced, and *Ondel-ondel* is gradually disappearing as an important ritual they believe in.

In the 60s, the first President of the Republic of Indonesia, Soekarno, concerned that Indonesian art was being considered westernized, began to develop an identity for it. He asked the Indonesian people to display traditional art as their own cultural identity, and from this, the experimental stage in managing identity began with the *Ondel-ondel* tradition. To establish an identity for all Betawi people, the Jakarta government made *Ondel-ondel* better known as a performing art. Based on the results of interviews conducted with the Jakarta Culture Service, it was stated that the term "performing arts" was more acceptable than "ritual arts" because it was not linked to belief and could represent Betawi society as a whole. *Ondel-ondel* art no longer belongs only to the Betawi Pinggir community but also to other Betawi communities that have become one. Culture focuses on typical cultural forms within a group (Shin & Jackson, 2003).

Through identity-building, several local artists emerged, including Waldjinah, Benyamin Sueb, Sam Saimun, and others. Artists from Betawi were present to strengthen Betawi cultural identity with rich works on the theme of *Ondel-ondel*.

Various Betawi accompaniment songs, such as Gambang Kromong, began to enter the popular music industry. Seeing social phenomena that occur is an interesting reference for Benyamin Sueb in his work. In 1971, the song *Ondel-ondel* was composed in a witty yet meaningful style, using typical Betawi poetry. Apart from that, the visual form of *Ondel-ondel* is also featured in various craft products, such as souvenirs, batik motifs, t-shirts, and other items. Souvenirs featuring *ondel-ondel*, such as miniature figures, keychains, and decorative items, are widely available at tourist attractions across Jakarta. For example, in the National Monument area, *ondel-ondel*-themed merchandise has become a popular souvenir among tourists.

The original *Ondel-ondel* is still performed as a traveling show in the Jakarta area. With the change in function, *Ondel-ondel* reappears with a new atmosphere, devoid of any elements of ritual and belief. *Ondel-ondel* is a creative industrial product managed by various businesses and the government.

Since *Ondel-ondel* began to be represented in various forms, it has become a unique dish because it carries a theme unlike the usual one. However, precisely because of this, *Ondel-ondel* has become popular and known to all Indonesians, not just the Betawi people. The popularity of *Ondel-ondel* has affected artists. *Ondel-ondel*, whose function is starting to recede, seems to have room to reappear in a different form. In line with Yin's (2018) opinion, cultural traditions are not defined as something fixed or pure because they can change over time. For example, the song *Ondel-ondel*, composed by Benyamin Sueb, is a mandatory song played when *Ondel-ondel* is paraded. In fact, most of the general public knows art from its visuals and songs. From the *Ondel-ondel* song, various *Ondel-ondel* dance creations emerged, which were performed without the presence of the original *Ondel-ondel*. Music and songs are part of society's expression as a medium of communication to the wider community through the identity they

form. Even without the presence of two large puppets, the visual works and songs featuring the *Ondel-ondel* theme can represent *Ondel-ondel* art in its entirety and are recognized as part of Betawi cultural identity by all Indonesians. Through visual representation and song, it is a good start in bringing back *Ondel-ondel*, whose existence has almost faded. This is the stage of identity compatibility, in which general cultural features have emerged and people have developed a general understanding of each other (Imahori & Cupach, 2005).

In 2017, the Jakarta Provincial Government designated *Ondel-ondel* as one of eight Betawi cultural icons under Governor Regulation No. 11 of 2017. This designation aims to preserve *Ondel-ondel* and make it an officially recognized identity by the state. However, prior to that, on January 17, 2014, a large *Ondel-ondel* monument was inaugurated by the Kemayoran Complex Management Center in collaboration with the Jakarta Provincial Government.



Figure 1. *Ondel-ondel* Monument in the Kemayoran area (source: personal document, 2024)

The *Ondel-ondel* monument measures 9 meters and stands on a 4-meter-high foundation. It was later named the largest *Ondel-ondel* ever built and earned a MURI record. This monument demonstrates the government's continued contribution to the development of the *Ondel-ondel* identity in Jakarta. Therefore, collaboration is a crucial part of identity management. The realm of "culture" is understood as a process in the space where culture mediates

between the present and the past (Bhabha, 2012). Traditional arts have contributed to shaping the image of Indonesian national identity in each region. Traditions are part of a culture that emerges and is collectively maintained as a society's identity (Chen, 2014). Therefore, almost every region or city is hunting for a local culture to make an icon. Designating an object as an icon requires a correlation of meaning, represented by metaphor or allegory, namely, its relationship to related elements, concepts, or meanings (Panofski, 2009). *Ondel-ondel* has emerged as one of Jakarta's icons for a reason.

Based on the findings in this discussion, we have demonstrated how *Ondel-ondel*, as an art form, has been developed into an identity, from a cultural tradition to a cultural industry. Art has an important role in enhancing people's cultural identity through forms of expression (Saad, 2017). Through the song *Ondel-ondel*, Benyamin was very persuasive in making this art interesting and known to the public. This legendary artist's efforts to introduce Betawi arts and culture have produced very satisfying results. Apart from Gambang Kromong, a characteristic of Betawi music, the figure of *Ondel-ondel* has also become closely linked to the identity of the Betawi people in the city of Jakarta, with various performances. This is said to be a shift from identity performance to cultural performance (Carlson, 2013). Change occurs when *Ondel-ondel* becomes an identity and is then packaged as a cultural performance.

Impact of Identity and Rights of The Betawi Community

Urbanization ultimately compels *Ondel-ondel* followers to reproduce Betawi culture by adapting to prevailing social conditions to maintain their ethnic identity within a different socio-cultural environment. Indirectly, this activity contributes to the reproduction of Betawi culture in the urban social environment. Betawi ethnic arts have emerged to the surface, becoming traditional performances that

dominate the city streets. This is also the message we want to convey: that the Betawi ethnic group remains the “owner” even though many ethnic groups from outside the region live in Jakarta and have other cultures. Traditions contribute to a sense of meaningfulness that emerges from social relationships, both within the wider community and within organizations (Nugent & Flynn, 2020).

In 1966, when Soeharto served as President of the Republic of Indonesia (New Order), the government began to intensively pursue development across various sectors, including tourism. The development of this sector aims to increase investor attractiveness, which will ultimately improve the economy. As a result, after various tourism programs were carried out by the government in the 1980s, data emerged showing that the country's foreign exchange earnings increased from the tourism sector, especially through the three main tourism gateways, namely Bali, Medan, and Jakarta. The cultural and power relations that characterize modern society are properly understood from the perspective in which cultural areas are now increasingly organized and constructed by means of governance (Bennett, 2020).

In an effort to attract tourists, Indonesia has also launched various programs to develop traditional Indonesian arts. In fact, this has been done since the Old Order, but the changes were more visible and felt during the New Order. During cultural change, the New Order exerted a significant influence. Cultural life during the New Order era was forced into a culture of diversity (Shahab, 2014). During the New Order government, which began in 1965, only the state had the right to determine the direction of artistic performances and other cultural production (Harley et al., 2014). Therefore, at that time, the government viewed culture as something that needed improvement, especially in the realm of cultural products. Currently, *Ondel-ondel* has become a form of entertainment for the community and a source of income for the performers. *Ondel-ondel* is

done by going around every street while asking for donations from everyone they meet. A performance must be interpreted as a form of gradual transition without sudden changes by human action (Schechner, 2013).

At the 2017 Jakarta International Java Jazz Festival, a pair of *Ondel-ondel* heads became the event logo, representing the Betawi ethnic group and the theme of Indonesian ethnic elements, which changes every year. Similar to Java Jazz, on the city's birthday, the *Ondel-ondel* figure is also displayed across various tourism office advertising media, which is normal because almost all tourism programs incorporate Betawi cultural concepts. *Ondel-ondel*-themed crafts are becoming popular among tourists in Jakarta, generating income for sellers and spurring other creative work by artisans. For example, batik makers producing Betawi-themed batik, such as Terogong Batik, Palbatu Batik, and Denta Betawi Batik, stated that the *Ondel-ondel* motif is more sought after by buyers than other motifs. This shows that *Ondel-ondel* has represented identity and had an economic impact, even though there needs to be a form of negotiation and transformation of tradition. Traditional forms of negotiation are used to form identities that influence the economy and the media (Jensen et al., 2011). The impact of identity occurs for two reasons, namely that it is used by economists, and prime identity has important behavioral consequences in the real world (Benjamin et al., 2010). A well-managed identity will achieve prosperity through the economy (Byrne, 2010). Although using culture as a tourist attraction provides economic benefits, the main aim is to positively impact cultural sustainability (Djukardi et al., 2020).

Through various forms of change, currently *Ondel-ondel* is known as a culture belonging to the Betawi people in general, and is starting to fade the perception of the Betawi ethnic grouping. This affects social identity relationships that unite people within the same ethnic group. Social identity refers to a person's sense of self that

is derived from perceived membership in a social group (Charness & Chen, 2020). Even though the Jakarta government plays a role in preserving traditions and managing identity, the Betawi people have the right to use their cultural identity because they are the owners of that identity. In a universal context, culture is the substance and symbol of society (Cleveland, 1995). The changes that occur in *Ondel-ondel* constitute a form of cultural adaptation managed by the community. The purpose of change is not to deny identity, but rather to provide an alternative position for the identity being represented (Carlson, 2013). Changes are also needed in identity to make people more active identity owners than non-owners (Bhabha, 2012).

Problems and Reconstruction of *Ondel-ondel*

Traditions that were initially ritualistic and later packaged as performances sometimes appear difficult for urban communities to understand in modern contexts, as they are often considered a static, past phenomenon (Adam, 2020). The high attractiveness of Jakarta as a city has resulted in increased population density and congestion. This density not only reduces the space for living people to move, but also narrows the space for *Ondel-ondel* adherents to move. This traditional Betawi art has long been a fixture of the streets of Jakarta. Decorate the city's corners with performances in the form of parades.

The increasingly popular tourism industry requires visual imagery for regional promotion across various media. Promotion is carried out to strengthen and manage cultural identity (Sharaningtyas & Sumiarni, 2023). The *Ondel-ondel* figure is increasingly appearing across various advertising media to attract tourists. The media chose several other icons of Jakarta's identity, such as the National Monument, a traditional Betawi dancer, Abang Nene from the city of Jakarta, and several tourist attractions. Unfortunately, the visual appearance of *Ondel-ondel* increasingly distances the figure of *Ondel-ondel* from art

itself. In visual depictions, *Ondel-ondel* is now better known as a Betawi cultural identity and an icon of the city of Jakarta, rather than as a performing art. Because a performance is an act that is presented or held in a representative manner (Mori, 2015). The condition of the city of Jakarta, which is increasingly congested with traffic jams, makes it increasingly difficult for a pair of dolls to walk around the capital. Even in 2014, when Ahok became the Governor of Jakarta, the government issued a strict ban on these performances. Ahok, with a realistic leadership style, believes that performing *Ondel-ondel* for money is the same as begging, and that *Ondel-ondel* art is not worthy of being used as a medium for begging.

If we call *Ondel-ondel* an icon of the city of Jakarta, then in this case the government has forgotten about branding, which is an important element because an icon is essentially part of a brand. Branding efforts should include linear behavior, attitudes, and policies so that the icon's message is well recorded and understood by the public. Because culture functions as a cultural technology that organizes and shapes social and human behavior (Bennet, 1998). However, this is not the case with the tourism program launched by the Jakarta City Government. Even though Gray (2010) said that effective cultural policies are, of course, emphasized by the government, the management of *Ondel-ondel* as an identity is actually worrying. The various forms taken to improve *Ondel-ondel's* image are not driven by similar branding efforts. Modern Betawi society currently recognizes *Ondel-ondel* as a craft object rather than as a performance (Wahidiyat & Carrollina, 2023).

Ondel-ondel followers spontaneously try to fulfill their modality by displaying this art along the streets of Jakarta. This activity, more often equated with 'busking', is a departure from the traditional Betawi art format. The transformation from rituals to performers in the Soeharto era to their current status as buskers is inseparable from government policy and economic

conditions. Some people criticized this and thought this was a degradation of Betawi culture. Unlike now, which is so random, without any concept in the traditional *Ondel-ondel* art performance. So it is not strange that beggars are considered to be no different from beggars and street singers.



Figure 2. *Ondel-ondel* used for busking in Jakarta (source: personal document, 2024)

The government's policy of prohibiting traveling *Ondel-ondel* performances tends to drown out this local culture, with the prohibition of street *Ondel-ondel* performances and a lack of significant conservation efforts. Even though the figure of *Ondel-ondel* can be found easily in every corner of the city of Jakarta, in the form of cartoons or photos displayed in Jakarta tourism advertisements, nowadays this performance is quite difficult to find. Policy points need to emphasize that this is a conservation effort to preserve and utilize cultural wealth, so that people's culture can be developed and contribute to the evolution of world culture (Alaszewska, 2015). This kind of attitude is actually expected by the Betawi people in Jakarta. Traditional ideas and values inherent in the core of culture give rise to the term "ideology, such as the idea that cultural systems are conditioned and actions are always rationalized (Griffin, 2006).

In the maintenance and preservation of arts and culture in Indonesia, it is still too early to establish an established system. A government that tends to be afraid of change and treats traditional art as 'antiques in

a museum', of course, will not align with the nature of culture, which is dynamic and ever-changing. Even if conservation is successful, the policy may not account for cultural actors already involved in the field, such as volunteers. Culture requires dynamic freedom to keep pace with the times. Barker (2003) argues that freedom and solidarity are understood as forms of sincere, non-forced sharing and cooperation, meaning they are more meaningful as support for freedom and togetherness than as a means of control. Maintaining culture must also encompass the capacity to face problems, tolerate ambiguity, overcome crises, handle stress, and recover (Hasem, 2011). However, the government is more comfortable using these icons on its own, without providing support to artists and the *Ondel-ondel* arts group in Jakarta.

Trying to be more realistic in modern times, like today, with economic conditions increasingly pressing on the lives of various sectors, in fact, traditional art and culture can no longer be an important aspect, especially in urban spaces. Moreover, preserving an art form without the motivation to gain material benefits is almost impossible, as any activity requires capital. As stated by Kay (2000), the special function of traditional art is carried out not only to improve the image of a region and control cultural identity, but also to improve the quality of life of the community through individual and collective creativity. Therefore, if the aim is the preservation of traditional arts, it is appropriate for the perpetrators to receive proper appreciation so that they pay more attention to both material and non-material aspects. Understanding traditions will be better achieved by seeing them as positively and creatively related rather than by aligning them (Adam, 2020).

Ondel-ondel is played by walking around while playing music and featuring a pair of giant doll figures. Given the need for performances as the streets of Jakarta become increasingly congested, it is clear that these artists now feel their freedom is being taken away by the times. Especially

during working hours, congestion is very high across most of Jakarta. Meanwhile, it is generally a good opportunity for performers to present *Ondel-ondel* performances. The busier road users are, the more likely they are to benefit. This thought arises because they are indeed making an offer for the economy. However, this small profit affects traffic jams and driver comfort.

Ondel-ondel players, who are considered the same as beggars, are strictly prohibited by the government from performing on the streets. In response to the prohibition, the *ider* performers did not abandon the activities that provided them with income. Instead, they sought alternative performance spaces, including Kota Tua, the National Monument, and weekly events such as Car Free Day. On the other hand, this has a positive impact because the area reflects Jakarta's history and identity, especially when there are *Ondel-ondel* present. However, this makes the traditional art paradigm look even more ancient and not dynamic enough to keep up with the times, so that it is commensurate with museums and historical places. In fact, cultural orientation provides a paradigm for organizing the world of life in the present (Rüsen, 2012). Culture that has been preserved to the present provides deep insight into the relationship between humans and their environment, the way humans express their identity, and how they adapt to change (Wahidiyat & Carrollina, 2023)

In the current trajectory of *Ondel-ondel* art, the original Betawi street-singer form must compete with prominent icons in various tourism programs in Jakarta. For them, Betawi ethnic culture practitioners, traditional art cannot only be known or remembered through pictures, but must also be known in its entirety. As long as its followers are still scattered on the streets of Jakarta, at that time, the art of *Ondel-ondel* can still be enjoyed. Despite various prohibitions and restrictions on pedestrian presence because they are considered to disrupt traffic, they still try to adapt to the space and time that exist in the lives of the people of the city of Jakarta. *Ondel-ondel*

players in several areas are still free to go around on foot, selling performances from one place to another. However, there are also some who live in one place but use other means of transportation, such as trucks or carts. This diversity of methods arises when *Ondel-ondel* players try to be more flexible in occupying the space and time they encounter, even though they are in a less capable form. Maybe various factors make this art less popular with the public. But once again, it is important to remember that *Ondel-ondel*, which falls under the category of folk art, is constrained by both material and non-material limitations.

Folk art performers are basically volunteers who preserve a culture without being commercially oriented, so in practice they don't really think about attractive packaging, the quality of the performance, or market conditions or consumer tastes. So, it is natural that these volunteers attract more protests than they entertain the people in the areas they pass through. In fact, many Betawi people do not agree with the existence of traveling *Ondel-ondel* performances that busk on the streets because they disturb the environment. Community protests against the presence of pedestrians indicate that the environment has changed and that more and more people do not feel part of the culture. The reason many people support government policies regarding *Ondel-ondel* is that it is related to culture and personal interests (Sihombing, 2023). They think that *Ondel-ondel* is Betawi culture, which is sacred, and that having buskers use *Ondel-ondel* will eliminate its sacred form.

Currently, the Jakarta government is still focusing on branding and using *Ondel-ondel* as the main icon because it represents the identity of the Betawi people. Several forms of *Ondel-ondel* cultural reconstruction have been undertaken to restore *Ondel-ondel* performances in public spaces. For example, in 2022, to coincide with Jakarta's 495th birthday, the Jakarta Government will collaborate with 35 Betawi Culture studios to stage *Ondel-ondel* performances in several public spaces, including Kota

Tua, Taman Ismail Marzuki, Setu Bakakan Betawi Cultural Village, and shopping centers. Then the show continues at every birthday celebration in Jakarta and on Eid Betawi until now. Current government efforts have provided opportunities for *Ondel-ondel* performance artists to perform comfortably in public spaces, even though begging street *Ondel-ondel* performances still occur. This is in line with the opinion of Benjamin et al (2010) that emphasizing ethnic identity can cause risk and time preferences to conform to general stereotypes. Thus, policies for managing identity require collaboration between the Betawi people, as the owners of cultural identity, and the government, which has the power to control it. Effective cultural policy is emphasized by the ideology of the cultural owner group, with the government's ideas on the other side (Gray, 2010). Regional governments need to provide cultural utilization facilities that can be utilized by everyone (Djukardi et al., 2020).

The transformation of *Ondel-ondel* from ritual tradition to cultural industry can be understood through the identity management framework proposed by Shin & Jackson (2003), which examines four interconnected dimensions of identity sites. First, the way identity is formed reveals how *Ondel-ondel* emerged from the specific cultural practices of peripheral Betawi communities and gradually came to be recognized as a collective symbol through government intervention and artistic representation. Second, the impact of identity demonstrates how *Ondel-ondel's* recognition generated both social cohesion among Betawi people and economic opportunities through tourism and creative industries. Third, identity as a marker of power and privilege manifests in the government's authority to determine which cultural forms receive official recognition and support, while the Betawi community maintains its right, as cultural owners, to adapt and reproduce its heritage. Finally, the problem of identity and its reconstruction becomes evident in the ongoing tensions between preservation and modernization,

in which *Ondel-ondel* faces challenges of commodification, spatial constraints, and shifting public perceptions, necessitating continuous negotiation between tradition and contemporary urban life. Negotiation within cultural traditions safeguards their core elements (Budiman, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

The development and management of cultural identity in the *Ondel-ondel* case has quite a long history of problems. The government's efforts to revive *Ondel-ondel* increasingly shape identity amid urbanization, even at the expense of its sacred elements. This was done to represent all Betawi people with different beliefs about the *Ondel-ondel* ritual. The formation of the *Ondel-ondel* cultural identity gave rise to various Betawi artists, and their management introduced new forms within the creative industry that represented *Ondel-ondel*, such as songs, performances, crafts, and other visual works. Identity then began to affect the economic and tourism sectors managed by the community and the Government.

Over time, problems with the identity of *Ondel-ondel* arose as public spaces for *Ondel-ondel* performances disappeared due to urban development. As a result, *Ondel-ondel* buskers appeared, wandering the streets of Jakarta. This depicts the journey of traditional art against the flow of modernity. The paradigm of the importance of preserving culture becomes unrealistic when it encounters the conditions of a society already material-oriented. The government's ban and protests from road users regarding the presence of street performers are certainly increasingly drowning out the existence of *Ondel-ondel art*. On the other hand, it is still needed to become an icon of the city of Jakarta. However, the government has begun to reopen public spaces and to present *Ondel-ondel* performances at events such as Jakarta's birthday and Eid Betawi. This research has limitations in its scope, focusing on the development and management of the in-

dustry, so it is hoped that future research can examine the industry's impact and role in society in greater depth.

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