

KECAK DANCE AS A MEDIUM OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY BETWEEN INDONESIA AND JAPAN 2024

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Article History

Received: 17 December 2025

Accepted: 14 January 2026

Published: 4 February 2026

Abstract

This study examines the role of the kecak dance as a tool of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in bilateral relations with Japan in 2024. The focus is on the kecak dance performance at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum as a means of introducing Indonesian culture. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study found that the kecak dance functions as a cultural communication tool that builds a positive image of Indonesia in Japan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo played an important role in supporting this initiative. Despite challenges such as limited budgets and differences in cultural perceptions, the opportunities that arise are considerable. In conclusion, the kecak dance has great potential in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy strategy in the future.

Keywords: Kecak Dance, Cultural Diplomacy, Indonesia, Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as an archipelagic nation with extraordinary biological and cultural richness, one of which is reflected in Bali's performing arts heritage, namely the kecak dance. As a cultural icon that combines elements of ritual, the Ramayana epic narrative, and performance art, the kecak dance serves not only as a tourist attraction but also possesses profound spiritual and communicative values (Sumantri, 2024). In the context of international relations, this performing art has developed into a strategic instrument of "soft power" cultural diplomacy to strengthen bilateral relations, particularly between Indonesia and Japan. The cultural ties between the two countries have a long history, dating back to the pre-World War II era and continue to flourish through various festivals and arts performances (Kencana, 2023). However, these diplomatic efforts face challenges of modernization, including the need for artistic adaptation to remain relevant to global audiences without sacrificing its traditional essence (Ruastiti, 2021).

Despite the immense potential of the kecak dance in cultural diplomacy, there is a significant gap in the intensity of cultural promotion between the two countries, with Japan tending to be more active and consistent than Indonesia. Other challenges include issues of artistic representation in the technological age, bureaucratic obstacles, and limited participation of the younger generation in preserving traditional arts. Based on this context, this study specifically proposes the following research questions: (1) How will the kecak dance serve as a medium for cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and Japan in 2024? and (2) What are the challenges and opportunities faced in the strategy for promoting the kecak dance in Japan?

This study aims to analyze the role of the kecak dance in diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2024 and identify obstacles and potential development opportunities. The <http://jurnaldialektika.com/>

primary focus is on analyzing the performance form, the involvement of cultural actors, and its impact on Indonesia's image in the eyes of the Japanese public. Practically, this study is expected to provide strategic recommendations for the government and stakeholders in designing more effective and sustainable cultural diplomacy.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in its efforts to deepen the study of cultural diplomacy through specific performing arts instruments. This study fills a research gap regarding the effectiveness of the *kecak* dance as a medium for contemporary post-pandemic diplomacy, particularly in the context of a performance at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in 2024. Thus, this research is not only relevant for academics in the fields of international relations and cultural anthropology, but also crucial for efforts to preserve Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage on the global stage (Meidariani, 2022).

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of global interactions is no longer limited to the political aspects of power alone, but has expanded to encompass complex interactions between non-state actors in various dimensions of life. Perwita & Yani assert that contemporary international relations can be seen in "the diminishing role of states as actors in world politics and the increasing role of non-state actors," where geographical boundaries are increasingly blurred due to global interdependence.¹ This shift marks a transition from the traditional focus on high politics (military and security) to low politics issues such as economics, the environment, and socio-cultural issues, which demand more inclusive interaction mechanisms beyond mere intergovernmental relations.

In response to the increasingly open dynamics of global interactions, the concept of public diplomacy has emerged as a strategic framework. Jan Melissen defines new public diplomacy as "a process of direct interaction between individuals within a state aimed at advancing the interests and values by representing that state."² In contrast to traditional, closed diplomacy, this approach emphasizes the importance of engaging with foreign and domestic publics, where both state and non-state actors can play an active role in shaping international perceptions through propaganda, image management (nation branding), and cultural relations.

Specifically, efforts to influence foreign public perception through cultural assets are explained through the concept of cultural diplomacy. Milton C. Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture between one country and another, with the aim of fostering mutual understanding."³ This practice can be carried out through various methods such as exhibitions, competitions, negotiations, and expert exchanges, aimed at advancing national interests in a subtle yet effective manner (soft power) in building a foundation of long-term trust between nations.

To understand how cultural identities such as the *Kecak* dance can influence relations between countries, this study uses a Constructivist perspective. This approach emphasizes that the structure of international relations is shaped not only by material power but also by social interactions, identities, and shared norms.⁴ In this context, artistic performances serve not only as entertainment but also as communicative instruments that construct Indonesian national identity in the eyes of the Japanese public, which in turn can strengthen bilateral relations through deeper cross-cultural understanding.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of cultural diplomacy. This approach was chosen because the researcher aimed to understand the meaning behind cultural performances in the context of international relations without statistical measurement, but rather through naturalistic interpretation of data. The primary object of this research was a kecak dance performance held during a festival at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in Hachioji, Tokyo, in 2024.

The subjects or informants in this study were determined using a purposive sampling technique, in which the researcher selected informants deemed to have the most understanding of the topic. Key informants included representatives from the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, the Bali Provincial Tourism Office, members of the Indonesian Student Association (PPI) in Japan, and the kecak dance community. The data collection process was conducted through direct observation of the research subjects, in-depth interviews, both in person and online (via Google Meet, email, and Instagram direct messages), as well as archival documentation and visual materials related to the cultural diplomacy activities. Data analysis was conducted using a data reduction model, where information collected from interviews and online searches was sorted to remove irrelevant data and focus on significant patterns. The reduced data was then presented descriptively to illustrate the roles of state and non-state actors in cultural promotion. The final stage of analysis was drawing conclusions based on data interpretation validated through source triangulation techniques, to answer how the kecak dance functions effectively as an instrument of diplomacy between Indonesia and Japan.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings of the research on the role of kecak dance as a medium for cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and Japan in 2024, and analyzes the accompanying challenges and opportunities. Data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation are interpreted to develop an argument about the significance and contribution of kecak dance in strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. This discussion not only highlights successful implementation but also explores the meaning behind each finding within the theoretical framework of cultural diplomacy and international relations.

The Role of Kecak Dance as a Medium for Cultural Diplomacy

Kecak dance proved effective as a tool for Indonesian cultural diplomacy in Japan in 2024, as witnessed through a series of performances at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum (TFAM). This event, held in collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Tokyo, attracted more than 200 Japanese residents, many of whom actively participated in the kecak dance workshop. This high level of enthusiasm, reinforced by the presence of representatives of the Japanese royal family and the appreciation of TFAM Director Yoshiro Shimizu, indicates the positive acceptance of Indonesian culture by the Japanese public. These findings confirm the kecak dance's capacity as a powerful soft power medium, capable of promoting cultural richness and building bridges of understanding between countries. Perwira and Yani (2005) emphasize that international relations is no longer solely about state actors; here, kecak dance has become an effective non-state actor in influencing perceptions.

Through interviews with Mr. Erfan, an informant from the Indonesian Student Association (PPI) in Japan, it was revealed that kecak dance has become an integral part of Indonesia's official cultural diplomacy strategy in Japan since 2018. This is supported by diplomatic facilities, funding allocations through the Indonesian Partnership Fund (IKI) program, and integrated coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kemenlu), the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo, and the arts community. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs even

noted positive internal evaluation results, indicating an increase in Japanese public understanding and interest in Indonesian culture thanks to kecak dance diplomacy. This underscores that this strategy has moved beyond mere incidental performances to a structured and sustained effort, in line with Melissen's (2005) definition of public diplomacy, which emphasizes direct interaction and perception-building. The academic contribution lies in the empirical validation that traditional art can be leveraged as a strategic foreign policy instrument, not merely entertainment.

Challenges in Promoting the Kecak Dance in Japan

Despite its success, the promotion of the Kecak Dance in Japan faces multidimensional challenges. First, there are language barriers and differences in cultural context. The epic narrative of the Ramayana, on which the Kecak Dance is based, is unfamiliar to most Japanese, necessitating explanatory narratives, visualizations, and educational workshops to ensure its spiritual and philosophical meanings are not lost in cultural translation. Mr. Erfan from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs identified budget limitations, logistical complexities, and the need for content adaptation as key obstacles. Differences in aesthetic tastes, where Japan tends to value wabi-sabi and simplicity, can potentially make the Kecak Dance seem exotic without a deep understanding. This challenge demonstrates that achieving the "mutual understanding" envisioned by Cummings (2003) in cultural diplomacy requires more than just physical presentation, but also the hard work of bridging meanings.

Second challenges are logistical and technical aspects. Traditional Kecak Dance performances require many dancers, circular formations, and a dominant sound element. Moving this production to Japan's typically smaller, more individual-oriented arts spaces required adaptations to the choreography and number of dancers. Furthermore, the fire element in certain scenes, such as Hanoman burning Alengka, clashed with Japan's strict security regulations, requiring the production team to find artistic alternatives that remained symbolic. These challenges highlight that implementing cultural diplomacy requires creative and adaptive solutions to maintain the essence of the art amidst technical limitations and host regulations.

Third, administrative and coordination aspects add to the complexity. Differences in time zones, work systems, and professional expectations between Indonesia and Japan can hinder the smooth processing of visas, work permits, and inter-institutional coordination. Mr. Erfan emphasized the importance of efficient cross-sector coordination between the government, the arts community, and local partners in Japan to overcome these logistical complexities. Finally, maintaining long-term Japanese public interest is a significant challenge. The positive initial response needs to be followed up with a sustainable program so that the Kecak Dance is not merely a fleeting spectacle but builds a deep emotional connection. These challenges emphasize that cultural diplomacy is a non-linear process, requiring institutional synergy and ongoing strategic adaptation to achieve optimal impact.

Strategic Opportunities for Sustainable Cultural Diplomacy

Amidst these challenges, this research also identified several strategic opportunities. First, the high level of Japanese public interest in Balinese culture and concrete institutional support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo provide a strong foundation. The Kecak Dance has been recognized as part of the official diplomatic strategy since 2018, demonstrating a long-term commitment. This support ensures the program's sustainability and makes it more than just a local community initiative. It validates the constructivist approach, where institutional recognition and support foster strong norms and collective identity.

Second, there is great potential for cross-cultural collaboration. The idea of combining elements of the Kecak Dance with traditional Japanese arts such as Noh or Taiko, without

sacrificing the essence of each, offers the opportunity to create innovative hybrid performance forms. Such collaborations not only enrich the artistic experience but also strengthen cultural ties through "co-creation," proving that cultural diplomacy can foster creative synergy rather than simply one-way presentations.

Third, digital technology offers broad and efficient reach. Recording and broadcasting Kecak Dance performances through platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and the use of Virtual Reality (VR) technology allows access to thousands, even millions, of Japanese audiences without the constraints of time and space, while also saving costs. This approach is relevant for engaging a younger generation in Japan, who are adaptable to visual media. Furthermore, the involvement of young Indonesians in Japan as volunteers or cultural ambassadors is also vital to ensuring a dynamic and sustainable program across generations, in line with the principles of public diplomacy involving various actors.

Fourth, synergy between the promotion of the Kecak Dance and the tourism and creative economy sectors. Each Kecak performance can serve as a promotional platform for cultural tourism to Bali, encouraging Japanese audiences to experience the authentic version of the dance. Marketing creative economy products such as souvenirs, books, and visual art related to the Kecak Dance can also expand the economic impact of cultural diplomacy. Finally, collaboration with Japanese academic institutions for seminars, workshops, and research on the Kecak Dance expands the scope of cultural diplomacy into the scientific and educational realms. The existence of a roadmap for Indonesia-Japan cultural diplomacy, including the Sahabat Budaya Program that makes the Kecak Dance an annual event, demonstrates a systematic and structured effort to make art an instrument of high-impact and sustainable foreign relations.

E. CONCLUSION

This study found that the Kecak Dance played a significant role as a medium for cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and Japan in 2024. Through a strategic performance at the Fuji Art Museum in Tokyo, the Kecak Dance successfully not only introduced the richness of Balinese culture but also facilitated in-depth cross-cultural understanding and strengthened bilateral relations, supported by the high enthusiasm of the Japanese people and institutions. This success confirmed that traditional performing arts can function effectively as an instrument of soft power and people-to-people diplomacy, validating the theoretical frameworks of public diplomacy and constructivism that emphasize the formation of shared identities and norms in international relations. The integrated support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo demonstrates strategic implementation that goes beyond mere performances.

However, this study also identified multidimensional challenges in promoting the Kecak Dance, including language barriers, aesthetic differences, logistical complexities, and the need for sustainable programming. However, despite these challenges, significant opportunities were also identified through artistic collaboration, the use of digital technology for broader reach, and synergy with tourism promotion and youth engagement. The practical implication of this study is the need for a more structured, collaborative, and adaptive cultural diplomacy strategy so that the promotion of traditional arts is not merely incidental but becomes an integral part of long-term foreign policy. The limitation of this study lies in its focus on one year of implementation; therefore, further research directions are suggested to explore the long-term impact of Kecak Dance diplomacy, its effectiveness in different cultural contexts, or compare similar strategies from other countries to enrich the cultural diplomacy model.

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