

Talempong as Inheritance Intangible Culture : Identity, Aesthetics and Function Minangkabau Social Society

Rina Armeniza Aziz ^{1*}, John JOI Ihalaaw ², Sugiarto ³

1 Doctoral Study Program in Tourism, Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Ambarrukmo, Indonesia
Email: rinaaziz6@gmail.com

2 Doctoral Study Program in Tourism, Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Ambarrukmo, Indonesia
Email: stipram@gmail.com

3 Doctoral Study Program in Tourism, Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Ambarrukmo, Indonesia
Email: profsugiarto@stipram.ac.id

* Corresponding Author: rinaaziz6@gmail.com

Abstract. Talempong, the Minangkabau bronze gong tradition of West Sumatra, is an important but under-documented intangible cultural heritage. This study examines Talempong's historical evolution, aesthetic value, and role in maintaining Minangkabau identity amidst modernization and the commodification of tourism. Three main focuses are: the development of Talempong from prehistory to the contemporary; the aesthetic principles underlying the performance; and its function as a marker of ethnic and communal identity. Qualitative interpretive methods are employed through a review of ethnomusicology, anthropology, and tourism literature, as well as an analysis of documents on Talempong practice. The findings reveal five historical layers from megalithic idiophones to tourism oriented diatonic ensembles; an aesthetic based on oral tuning systems (limo salabuan, onam salabuan) and colotomic patterns that emphasize communal cooperation; and Talempong's function as a nagari identity, a traditional medium, and a cultural tourism resource. The discussion situates these findings within debates on intangible heritage preservation in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The conclusion confirms that Talempong's sustainability depends on a balance of authenticity and adaptive innovation, with recommendations for community-based documentation, educational transmission, and heritage tourism governance.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Tourism; Cultural Sustainability; Intangible Heritage; Minangkabau Identity; Musical Aesthetics.

1. Introduction

Cultural landscape of Indonesia is not only consists of from material heritage in the form of temples , palaces and houses traditional , but also from braid practice not continuous objects practiced , transmitted , and interpreted repeated by living communities . Among group ethnic groups in the archipelago This time , Minangkabau in West Sumatra maintains one of the the most distinctive combination from organization matrilineal social , Islamic religiosity , and tradition art performances in this country (Agustina et al., 2026; Stark & Yahaya, 2021) . In constellation practice this , Talempong , a set bronze gong bell small protruding , is expression Minangkabau culture is very resilient and rich in semiotics . Musical instruments This played at weddings , deliberations customs , harvest festivals , and, increasingly often , at shows tourism and competitions broadcast on television (Falma et al., 2021; Nursyirwan et al., 2025) .

Problems research discussed in article This consists of from three part . First , although Talempong often mentioned in survey general music traditional Indonesian, track historically from megalithic stone idiophones until ensemble diatonic contemporary seldom reconstructed as a coherent periodization that connects material changes with shift meaning social . Second , logic aesthetics show Talempong , in particular system distinctive non temperamental tuning and texture rhythmic interplay related , has documented in a way ethnomusicology (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) but Not yet in a way systematic associated with

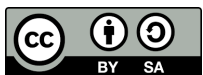
Received: January 17, 2026;

Revised: January 31, 2026;

Accepted: February 26, 2026;

Published: February 28, 2026;

Curr. Ver.: February 28, 2026.



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

theory aesthetics culture and formation meaning collective . Third , while Talempong often claimed as marker Minangkabau identity , the mechanism by which the practice music the do Work identity this , especially below pressure modernization , commodification tourism and migration demographic (region) , requires observation more theoretical and empirical careful (Syafri et al., 2023; Wardhani, 2023) .

Previous studies has approach Talempong from at least three corner viewpoint . Ethnomusicology studies has system - focused tuning and technique show , document coexistence approach pentatonic traditional and modern diatonic towards setup Talempong in various districts in West Sumatra (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) . Studies on education and cultural policy have examined the role of Talempong in non-formal education and cultural transmission (Falma et al., 2021; Widiarsa & Mayasari, 2024) . Studies on tourism and cultural heritage management have analyzed how Minangkabau performing arts, including Talempong, are mobilized in cultural tourism strategies and community-based heritage governance (Setiyono et al., 2024; Syafri et al., 2023) . Each of these works offers valuable but partial insights; relatively less noticed is an integrative approach that treats history, aesthetics, and identity as interrelated dimensions of a single cultural phenomenon, read through a broader theoretical framework of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) preservation (Jian, 2023; Poplawska, 2025) .

The weakness of previous approaches is not a matter of empirical inaccuracy, but rather fragmentation: historical accounts tend to be descriptive and site specific, aesthetic analyses tend to remain internal to music theory, and identity claims are often asserted rather than theorized. This article proposes a literature-based, integrative qualitative synthesis that draws on ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, and heritage tourism studies to examine Talempong as a historically layered, aesthetically coded, and identity-forming institution. Its specific aims are: (1) to reconstruct the historical development of Talempong from its prehistoric origins to its current hybrid form; (2) to analyze the aesthetic values embedded in Talempong tuning, rhythm, and performance practices; and (3) to explain how these historical and aesthetic dimensions combine to maintain Minangkabau cultural identity under conditions of modernization and the commodification of tourism.

The contribution of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it connects the ethnomusicological description of Talempong to broader frameworks of music and identity theory (Sauve & Phillips, 2023; Wood, 2022) and to UNESCO - influenced debate on protection inheritance culture intangible (Jian, 2023; Poplawska, 2025) . In general practical , study This offer synthesis that can give information for policy protection based community , planning tourist culture and curriculum education art in West Sumatra and comparable areas . The next section from article This arranged as following : Part 2 reviews literature about history , aesthetics Talempong , and frame theoretical music , identity , and heritage intangible ; Part 3 explains method qualitative based documents used ; Section 4 presents results synthesis ; Section 5 discusses results This in relation with study previously ; and Section 6 concludes with implications and limitations .

2. Literature Review

Origins and Historical Development of Talempong

The earliest layer of evidence associated with the Talempong is not metallurgical, but rather lithic. In the highland village of Talang Anau, Lima Puluh Kota Regency, a set of megalithic stones known as talempong batu has been documented as a form of stone idiophone, struck to produce tones resembling the tone material of the talempong pacik ensemble. Local oral tradition attributes the discovery and ritual arrangement of these stones to legendary religious figures, placing the instrument in a cosmology that predates written historical records. Although its exact age cannot be confidently established archaeologically, its continued ritual use, particularly in nazar (vow fulfillment) ceremonies, suggests a durable, albeit reconfigured, continuity between prehistoric material culture and present-day Minangkabau religious and musical practices.

The next, better documented layer relates to the bronze *talempong*, whose distribution in nearly every *nagari* (adat village federation) in the highland regencies of Tanah Datar, Agam, Lima Puluh Kota, Sijunjung, and Solok has been described as a recognized marker of regional identity across the Malay world since ancient times (Nursyirwan et al., 2025). Within this bronze tradition, ethnomusicological research identifies the *talempong pacik*, a configuration of five or six hand-held gongs consisting of male (low-pitched) and female (high-pitched) roles along with a *peningkah* (time-keeping) section, as the paradigmatic performance format for processions, weddings, and welcoming ceremonies (Falma et al., 2021; Nursyirwan et al., 2025). A parallel format, the *talempong duduak* or *talempong unggan*, in which musicians play a set of gongs mounted on a rack while seated, is more closely associated with formal customary deliberations.

The mid-20th century marked a period of highly dense community ownership: oral history and ethnomusicological accounts agree that, by the 1960s and 1970s, complete *Talempong* ensembles were maintained by nearly every *pesukuan* (clan subdivision) within a *nagari* (Nursyirwan et al., 2025). This density of ownership began to erode in the 1980s, coinciding with a period of academic institutionalization in which scholars and students associated with the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Padang Panjang (formerly ASKI, now ISI Padang Panjang) began systematically documenting *Talempong* repertoire, including the reuse of *talempong* stone megaliths for structured performances (Nursyirwan et al., 2025). This institutional shift simultaneously preserved an endangered repertoire and shifted some custodianship from purely communal to academic and institutional actors, a pattern also observed in broader Indonesian cultural heritage governance (Saputra, 2025).

Since the 1990s and increasingly in the 21st century, *Talempong* has undergone further transformations related to globalization, tourism, and digital media. Contemporary ensembles have increasingly adopted Western diatonic tuning, allowing for collaboration with keyboards, electric basses, and drum kits, and *Talempong* performances are now regularly staged for tourist audiences, television broadcasts, and competitive festivals (Emawati & Munaf, 2024; Nursyirwan et al., 2025). This periodization from megalithic idiophones, to communal bronze ensembles, to academically documented repertoires, to hybridized tourism-oriented performances provides a historical foundation upon which to understand the tradition's aesthetic function and identity.

Aesthetic Values in *Talempong* Performances

The aesthetic uniqueness of *Talempong* lies largely in its tuning philosophy. Traditional Minangkabau tuning groups do not calibrate pitch against a fixed, externally standardized scale; instead, tuning is done through embodied sensory assessment, which practitioners describe as tuning based on feeling, mood, and hearing, resulting in two primary scale systems known as *limo salabuan* (five tone variant) and *onam salabuan* (six tone variant) (Nursyirwan et al., 2025). This non-temperamented, orally transmitted approach to pitch organization exemplifies what ethnomusicologists have long identified as a central feature of Southeast Asian gong bell aesthetics: tuning is not simply an acoustic calibration but an act of cultural inscribing, in which a community's collective sensibility is literally built into the instrument (Wood, 2022).

The second aesthetic principle concerns its interconnected and colotomic organization. As in other Southeast Asian gong-bell ensembles, Talempong performances distribute melodic responsibilities among several performers, each playing one or two gongs whose parts interrelate to produce a composite melodic rhythmic texture. This distributed structure is not simply a technical convenience; it embodies, in sonic form, the values of cooperation and consensus cherished in Minangkabau customary discourse, where no single voice dominates and coordinated contributions are valued above virtuosic individual performances. Therefore, the aesthetic experience of Talempong cannot be separated from its social choreography: the visual arrangement of the performers, the call-and-response between male and female gongs, and the audience's gestural engagement during the procession all contribute to a multisensory aesthetic that transcends narrow acoustic description.

The third dimension of Talempong aesthetics relates to its material qualities and timbre. The bronze alloy, casting technique, and profile of the center and edges of each gong create a resonant and sustained timbre, whose rich harmonic quality is valued precisely for its ability to be clearly heard amidst the ambient noise of open-air processions and crowded ceremonial halls. When modern diatonic Talempong ensembles adopted Western equal temperament tuning to enable interoperability with electronic instruments and orchestras, practitioners and audiences often described a perceived aesthetic loss a reduction in the instrument's distinctive resonance even as they recognized the communicative and economic advantages of the hybrid format (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) . This tension between fidelity to traditional timbre aesthetics and the practical demands of contemporary performance contexts recurs in many Southeast Asian gong traditions experiencing similar pressures of modernization.

Music, Identity, and Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Theoretical Framework

The relationship between music and collective identity has long been a central concern of ethnomusicology, although scholars caution against treating identity as a static trait reflected only in music; rather, identity is continually constructed, negotiated, and performed through musical practices (Sauve & Phillips, 2023; Wood, 2022) . Applied to the Minangkabau case, this processual view of identity helps explain why Talempong functions not simply as a symbol of an already established ethnic identity but as an active mechanism through which nagari, clan, and ethnic membership are continually reshaped, particularly for the many Minangkabau who live in rantau (voluntary migration abroad) and for whom Talempong performances at diasporic gatherings serve to reconnect dispersed kin with a shared cultural home (Wardhani, 2023) .

A second theoretical aspect relevant to this research is the international framework of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), formalized by the 2003 UNESCO Convention concerning the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which defines ICH as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage and that are continually reinvented in response to their environment (Poplawska, 2025) . This framework has been influential in shaping national and provincial cultural policies in Indonesia, including efforts to inventory, document, and legally protect traditional cultural expressions (Setiyono et al., 2024; Widiarsa & Mayasari, 2024) . At the same time, critical heritage studies warn that the ICH framework can inadvertently encourage static, museum-oriented conceptions of tradition, or can create friction when communities'

economic engagement with their own heritage (e.g., through commercial tourism activities) does not align with government actors' expectations of authenticity (Poplawska, 2025) .

A third relevant theory concerns cultural heritage tourism as a preservation mechanism, which has two facets. On the one hand, tourism development can foster the revival of previously declining performance traditions, generating new economic value for custodian communities, and strengthening a sense of community and collective memory (Syafri et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023) . On the other hand, critical tourism studies warn that transforming cultural practices into marketable spectacles risks commodifying and eroding the authenticity of the traditions they claim to preserve, turning communities into objects of display rather than active guardians of their own heritage (Syafri et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2026) . Digitization is a fourth force that is increasingly prominent: digital archiving, virtual reality reconstruction, and dissemination via social media are widely promoted as strategies for preserving endangered performing arts traditions, but this raises parallel questions about who controls the resulting digital assets and whether mediated representation can replace embodied, community-based transmission (Ernawati & Munaf, 2024; Innocente et al. , 2023; Widodo et al. , 2024; Zhao & Kim, 2024) .

Together, these three theoretical strands processual musical identity theory, the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) safeguarding framework, and the ambivalent role of tourism and digitalization provide the interpretive lens through which this study analyzes Talempong. Rather than treating history, aesthetics, and identity as separate objects of inquiry, the framework developed here treats them as mutually constitutive: historical layering produces the material and institutional conditions for aesthetic practice; aesthetic practice encodes and transmits social values; and these meaningful performances are available for use by the custodian community itself, by cultural policy actors, and by the tourism market as resources for identity work.

3. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design based on a systematic literature review and document analysis, an approach well suited to synthesizing diverse ethnomusicological, anthropological, and heritage tourism studies into a unified account of a single cultural phenomenon. Primary materials consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and institutional heritage documentation published between 2021 and 2026, supplemented by previous foundational ethnographic and ethnomusicological sources on Minangkabau culture where relevant for historical contextualization.

Literature was identified through a structured search of academic databases and journal repositories (including SPAFA Journal, *Harmonia: Journal of Music and Arts*, *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, ScienceDirect, and other relevant media) using search terms incorporating “Talempong, Minangkabau, intangible cultural heritage, gong bells, cultural identity, and heritage tourism.” Sources were screened for relevance to at least one of the study’s three analytical foci of historical development, aesthetic values, or identity/heritage functions and were retained if they offered empirical descriptions, theoretical arguments, or comparative material related to Talempong or closely related Southeast Asian performing arts traditions.

Data analysis followed a thematic synthesis procedure. Relevant passages were extracted and coded into three main categories appropriate to the research objectives (historical periodization, aesthetic principles, and identity/heritage functions), with secondary codes covering cross-disciplinary themes such as tourism commodification, digitalization, and institutional governance. Codes were repeatedly compared across sources to identify points of convergence, divergence, and gaps, following the interpretive logic of constant comparison common in qualitative document analysis. Triangulation across disciplinary perspectives from ethnomusicology, the anthropology of the Minangkabau matrilineal system, and heritage tourism studies was used to strengthen the credibility of the resulting synthesis, in lieu of statistical validity criteria appropriate for quantitative designs.

Two limitations of this method are worth noting. First, as a literature based synthesis, this study does not present new primary field data collected by the authors, and its findings are therefore limited by the scope and quality of published records. Second, because most of the available ethnomusicological documentation is concentrated in specific districts (primarily Tanah Datar, Agam, and Lima Puluh Kota), the resulting synthesis may underrepresent Talempong variants specific to other parts of the Minangkabau cultural region, including diasporic communities in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

4. Results and Discussion

The Historical Trajectory of Talempong as a Living Heritage

The synthesized literature supports a five-period historical trajectory for Talempong, summarized in Table 1. The earliest identifiable layer is the megalithic Talempong stone tradition, whose stone idiophones remain preserved as sacred communal possessions in Nagari Talang Anau and are activated primarily during votive rituals. The second period, spanning the pre colonial era to the early 20th century, is marked by the consolidation of bronze Talempong pacik ensembles in nearly every tribal community across the Minangkabau highlands, tuned through embodied, non standardized methods and serving as icons of nagari identity. The third, densely documented period, occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, when community ownership of complete Talempong ensembles reached its recorded peak. The fourth period, the 1980s and 1990s, was marked by academic institutionalization, with arts scholars documenting, recording, and in some cases reconstructing Talempong repertoires despite the decline in the number of village based, fully staffed ensembles. The fifth and current period, from the 2000s onwards, is characterized by diatonic adaptations, tourism oriented performances, mentoring programs aimed at youth recruitment, and dissemination through broadcasts and social media.

Table 1. Comparative periods in the historical development of Talempong.

Period	Estimated Era	Main Characteristics	Sociocultural Significance
Prehistoric / megalithic	Ancient times without dates	Stone idiophone talempong stone; discovery of oral legends (e.g. Syamsuddin's narrative)	Establishing deep time continuities between sound, land, and ancestors.
Pre-colonial to early 20th century	Pagaruyung Kingdom in its time and beyond	Bronze talempong pacik is consolidated in each pesukuan (clan); non-diatonic tuning by ear.	Becoming an icon of village identity and traditional ceremonies.

1960s 1970s	to	Post-independence consolidation	The Talempong group is growing rapidly in almost every tribe and village.	Peak transmission and community-based ownership
1980s 1990s	to	Institutionalization	Academic documentation by ASKI/ISI Padang Panjang; the decline in the number of complete village ensembles.	The shift from purely communal ownership to academic and institutional management.
2000s present	to	Globalization and digitalization	Diatonic adaptation, tourism performances, dissemination through social media, mentoring programs.	Negotiating the continuity between authenticity, commodification, and revitalization

Throughout this journey, the literature agrees on the finding that Talempong's historical continuity is not simply static preservation, but rather a continuous adaptation mediated by the community: from stone to bronze, from fully communal to partially institutionalized management, and from an untempered tuning system to an increasingly hybridized one. Each transition was driven by a combination of endogenous cultural dynamics (such as the indigenous people's own capacity for reinterpretation) and exogenous pressures (colonial and post-colonial state formation, academic institutionalization, globalization, and the tourism market).

Aesthetic Dimensions of Talempong Performances

From this synthesis emerged four aesthetically and functionally distinct categories of Talempong ensembles, summarized in Table 2: talempong pacik (hand-held, processional), talempong duduak/unggan (rack-mounted, deliberative), talempong batu (megalithic, ritual), and talempong kreasi (diatonic, tourism-oriented). Each format encodes a distinct aesthetic logic related to its performance context: the mobile, embodied virtuosity of pacik processional playing; the formal, duduk-like restraint of duduak accompaniment for customary deliberation; the minimally processed sacred sounds of batu idiophones; and the harmonically orchestrated and enriched textures of the creation ensemble designed for stage presentation.

Table 2. Types and social functions of Talempong ensembles in Minangkabau society.

Style	/	Instrumentation	Typical Social Context	Main Social Functions
Choir				
Talempong Pacik	5-6	hand-held bronze kettle gongs (male talempong, female talempong, peningkah)	Wedding procession (procession), welcoming guests, harvest celebrations.	Marking transitions and honoring guests; strengthening kinship and customary obligations.
Talempong Duduak / Unggan	A set of gongs arranged on a shelf, played while seated by several musicians.	bronze gongs arranged on a shelf, played while seated by several musicians.	Nagari ceremony meeting, customary deliberation (customary deliberation)	Accompanying formal customary discourse; signifying communal consensus.

Talempong Stone	Megalithic stone slabs, struck as idiophone musical instruments, are preserved as village sacred objects.	Nazar Ritual (fulfillment of oath), village commemoration in Lima Puluh Kota	Connecting communities with ancestral and cosmological narratives.
Creative / Modern Talempong	The diatonically tuned talempong is combined with keyboard, bass guitar, and drum kit.	Concert stage, television broadcast, tourism show, competition	Popularizing the tradition to a younger audience and not from the Minangkabau tribe.

At the level of pitch organization, the results of the study confirm the existence of the two traditional scale systems mentioned, limo salabuan (five notes) and onam salabuan (six notes), both tuned through sensory judgment rather than standard measurements, along with the evolving practice of diatonic major adopted for compatibility with modern instrumentation (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) . At the level of rhythmic melodic organization, the results of the study confirm an interrelated colotomic structure in which the low and high gong sections, coordinated by the peningkah timekeeper section, together produce a composite texture that cannot be produced by a single player an aesthetic principle that materially embodies cooperative social values.

At the social aesthetic level, the synthesis finds that Talempong's meaning cannot be separated from its performative context: the same acoustic material is aesthetically and socially encoded differently depending on whether it accompanies a wedding procession, a customary council, a votive ritual, or a touring stage performance. Both audiences and practitioners report a perceived aesthetic trade-off in the shift towards diatonic tuning: while the modern format expands the instrument's musical interoperability and audience reach, some sources note that it is accompanied by a perceived reduction of the instrument's distinctive resonant and modal character (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) .

Social Function and Identity of Talempong

Three interrelated identity functions of Talempong have been identified. First, the nagari and clan-level function: Talempong ensembles have historically been associated with specific tribes and nagari, such that ownership, repertoire, and performance style serve as markers of local communal belonging distinct even from neighboring villages (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) . Second, the ethnic and diasporic function: on a broader scale, Talempong performances are widely recognized as icons of Minangkabau ethnic identity known throughout the Malay world, and play a documented role in reconnecting migrants with their homelands during cultural festivals and visits to their homeland (Agustina et al., 2026; Wardhani, 2023) .

Third, the communicative function of custom: because Minangkabau customary governance operates through modes of indirect discourse and consensus building that parallel the transfer-based logic observed in related performance traditions such as silek (Minangkabau martial arts) (Poplawska, 2025) . Talempong's interconnected and non-hierarchical musical

texture operates as a sonic homology for preferred modes of customary social coordination, reinforcing rather than simply accompanying customary practices.

Finally, research documents a fourth, more recent and more contested function: Talempong as a resource for cultural tourism and the creative economy. Qualitative accounts of village tourism development in West Sumatra indicate that the incorporation of Talempong and related performing arts into community-based tourism initiatives has, in documented cases, been associated with strengthening, rather than weakening, cultural identity and collective memory, along with new economic opportunities for custodian communities (Syafri et al., 2023) . At the same time, comparative cases from other traditional village tourism contexts caution that such positive outcomes are not automatic, and that the risk of erosion of authenticity driven by commodification depends heavily on the governance model under which tourism is organized (Tang et al., 2026; Xu et al., 2023) .

Discussion

Talempong as a Marker and Mechanism of Minangkabau Identity

The results reported above indicate that Talempong functions simultaneously as an identity marker (a recognizable symbol of Minangkabau identity) and as an identity mechanism (an active practice through which that identity is continually reshaped). This dual character aligns well with processual theories of music and collective identity, which argue that musical practices do not passively reflect pre-existing identities, but actively construct and negotiate them through repeated performances (Sauve & Phillips, 2023; Wood, 2022) . The specific nagari and clan ownership patterns documented in the results (Section 4.3) support this processual reading: since historically each tribal group maintained its own ensemble and, to some extent, its own stylistic inflections, the act of playing Talempong itself indicates specific, localized belonging, rather than a generic ethnic label.

These findings confirm and extend previous research on Minangkabau matrilineal identity, which emphasizes custom and kinship structures rather than expressive culture itself as the primary vehicle for maintaining Minangkabau identity, particularly among migrants in the outlying region (Stark & Yahaya, 2021; Syahrizal & Meiyenti, 2022) . This synthesis suggests that Talempong operates as a complementary vocal vehicle for the same identity work accomplished structurally by matrilineal kinship and customary law: where custom regulates identity through descent and customary obligations, Talempong articulates it through an embodied collective voice. This complementarity helps explain why diasporic communities continue to invest in Talempong performances at cultural festivals even when the practical economic functions once associated with village-based ensembles (agrarian ceremonial cycles, for example) are no longer directly relevant to the lives of urban migrants (Agustina et al., 2026; Wardhani, 2023) .

A further point of convergence with previous research concerns the gender dimension of Talempong's identity function. Because Minangkabau society is matrilineal, with women holding central structural authority over lineage and property (Stark & Yahaya, 2021; Vicente Cateia, 2024) , it is noteworthy that Talempong performance itself is not entirely gender-segregated, and the male/female terminology for paired gongs metaphorically encodes a pervasive complementary gender logic in Minangkabau cosmology rather than a literal division of performers by sex. These findings add a musical dimension to existing anthropological

accounts of gender complementarity in Minangkabau society (Fatmariza et al., 2024) , suggesting that the instrument's organological naming system serves as a small-scale embodiment of broader gender ideologies within the culture.

The Creation of Aesthetic Meaning and the Question of Cultural Continuity

The aesthetic findings reported in Section 4.2, namely the thermally untuned and sensorially tuned scale systems, and the interlocking colotomic organization, align well with broader ethnomusicological theories of Southeast Asian gong bell aesthetics, where interlocking tuning and performance are understood not simply as technical parameters but as culturally rich practices that encode values of cooperation, hierarchy, and communal coordination. The findings of this study extend these general theoretical claims to the specific case of Talempung by showing how its two traditional tuning systems (limo salabuan and onam salabuan) function as culturally specific manifestations of broader regional patterns of embodied, non-standardized pitch organization (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) .

At the same time, the documented shift towards diatonic tuning in contemporary creative ensembles presents a real tension that previous single-disciplinary studies have tended to treat separately, either as a musical theoretical curiosity (in ethnomusicological accounts) or as an economic adaptation (in tourism and creative economy accounts) (Ernawati & Munaf, 2024) . When read through the framework of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) safeguards (Poplawska, 2025) , this tension is better understood as a recurring structural dilemma of living heritage: because the UNESCO Convention explicitly defines ICH as something that is continually reinvented rather than fixed, Talempung's diatonic adaptation cannot be directly classified as either authentic continuity or inauthentic loss. Rather, it exemplifies what heritage scholars describe as the productive discomfort that results when a tradition's economic and creative agency intersects with external expectations for the preservation of authenticity (Jian, 2023; Poplawska, 2025) .

The findings of this study also align with comparative research on traditional music revitalization elsewhere in Indonesia, where digital learning media and hybrid settings have been documented as double-edged interventions: capable of expanding the tradition's audience and engaging young people, yet carrying the risk of decontextualizing the repertoire from the social and ritual settings that historically gave it meaning (Ernawati & Munaf, 2024; Rusnalasari, 2025; Sosrowijaya, 2023) . Parallel findings from Sundanese music education research, which documents both the pedagogical benefits and representational trade-offs of adapting traditional notation and repertoire for contemporary instruction, further reinforce the patterns identified here for Talempung (Saiful et al., 2025; Saiful & Sukmayadi, 2024) .

Threats, Adaptation, and Sustainable Governance

The study documents a historically measurable decline in the density of complete community-owned Talempung ensembles since the 1980s (Section 4.1), a pattern consistent with broader explanations of the breakdown in intergenerational transmission affecting traditional music across urbanizing Indonesia (Rusnalasari, 2025) . This finding is significant because it suggests that threats to Talempung's sustainability are much older than the recently discussed pressures of digital media competition and global pop culture consumption; institutional and demographic changes (regency reorganization, rural-to-urban migration, and the gradual dissolution of traditional nagari governance units under national administrative

law) appear to be drivers of decline that are earlier and perhaps more structurally impactful than digital disruption itself.

Nonetheless, research also documents active and partially successful adaptation strategies. Community-based tourism initiatives incorporating Talempong performances, when structured around genuine local ownership and the Minangkabau Time Corridor model of reviving ancestral practices within contemporary tourism infrastructure, have been associated with strengthening cultural identity and collective memory, rather than decline (Syafri et al., 2023) . This finding contrasts instructively with more cautious research on tourism commodification in other traditional village contexts, where tourism development has been associated with erosion of authenticity and objectification of host communities (Tang et al., 2026; Xu et al., 2023) . This comparison suggests that outcomes depend less on whether tourism engagement occurs at all than on specific governance arrangements, specifically the degree of genuine community control over programming, pricing, and representation through which such engagement is organized (Setiyono et al., 2024; Widiarsa & Mayasari, 2024) .

Digitization emerged from the discussion as an ambivalent and governance-dependent force. Comparative cases of digital intangible heritage preservation and virtual reality elsewhere—Chinese paper-cutting art, Indonesia's Watu Gong heritage site, and immersive augmented reality applications in the cultural heritage domain generally demonstrate clear benefits for documentation, dissemination, and audience reach, but also underscore that digital substitutes cannot replace embodied, community-based transmission, and that questions of data ownership and control of representation remain largely unresolved (Innocente et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2024; Zhao & Kim, 2024) . Applied to Talempong, this suggests that digital archiving and social media dissemination initiatives currently underway in West Sumatra should be treated as complements, not substitutes, for direct mentorship-based transmission within tribal and nagari communities.

Finally, this discussion highlights a policy dimension largely absent from previous single case studies of Talempong: Indonesia's broader legal and governance framework for protecting traditional cultural expressions, including communal intellectual property protection and formal cultural heritage inventories, provides an institutional framework that could be more purposefully extended to Talempong specifically (Saputra, 2024, 2025; Setiyono et al., 2024; Widiarsa & Mayasari, 2024) . Currently, the literature suggests that Talempong protection is largely achieved through bottom up community and academic initiatives rather than through targeted state policies, a gap newly apparent in this study's synthesis of studies that situates Talempong within the broader Indonesian cultural governance literature.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to reconstruct the historical development of Talempong, analyze its aesthetic values, and explain its function in maintaining Minangkabau cultural identity. The synthesis suggests that Talempong has evolved through five overlapping historical periods: megalithic, pre colonial/early modern bronze consolidation, mid 20th century communal peak, late 20th century academic institutionalization, and contemporary hybrid/tourism-oriented adaptation, each reflecting different configurations of communal ownership, aesthetic practices, and external pressures. Aesthetically, Talempong is distinguished by its untempered,

orally transmitted tuning system (limo salabuan and onam salabuan) and interlocking colotomic organization that materially encodes Minangkabau values of cooperation and consensus, even as contemporary diatonic adaptations introduce perceived, though contested, aesthetic exchanges.

In terms of identity, the findings support a processual, rather than static, understanding of the Talempong's cultural role: the instrument serves as a specific marker of nagari and clan, as an ethnic and diasporic symbol, as a sonic homology for customary consensus-based governance styles, and, increasingly, as a resource in the creative economy and cultural tourism sectors. The synthesis of these identity functions with historical and aesthetic findings supports the research's implicit hypothesis that historical layering and aesthetic coding are not incidental backgrounds to Talempong's identity functions, but rather its substance.

The study's primary contribution lies in demonstrating that an integrative reading combining ethnomusicology, anthropology, and heritage tourism perspectives yields insights not available from single-disciplinary lenses applied in isolation, particularly regarding the governance-dependent, rather than intrinsically determined, relationship between modernization pressures (tourism, digitalization, diatonic adaptation) and cultural sustainability. For cultural policy practitioners, the implication is that protection strategies for Talempong should incorporate community-centered documentation and mentoring, education-based transmission that does not entirely replace digital media with embodied learning, and tourism governance models that maintain genuine local control over representation and economic benefits.

This study is limited by its reliance on published literature rather than direct fieldwork, and by the geographic concentration of existing documentation in specific districts in West Sumatra, which may underrepresent variations elsewhere in the Minangkabau cultural region, including diaspora communities. Future research would benefit from primary ethnographic fieldwork in a wider range of nagari (traditional villages), systematic acoustic and organological analyses of tuning variations, and longitudinal studies of how community-based tourism governance models influence the long-term sustainability of Talempong transmission across generations.

Reference

- Agustina, S., Sandora, L., Lubis, Y., Nabila, N., & Hanifa, K. (2026). The Philosophy of the Matrilineal Kinship System as a Minangkabau Cultural Heritage. *Yupa: Journal of Historical Studies* , 10 (1), 29–34. <https://doi.org/10.30872/yupa.v10i1.5022>
- Ernawati, & Munaf, DR (2024). Digitizing Indonesian Traditional Music for the Preservation and Democratization of Knowledge. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Publication* , 7 (1), 248–255. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/382252521>
- Falma, FO, Ambiyar, & Aziz, I. (2021). Traditional Musical Instruments of West Sumatra as Non-Formal Education. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Education* , 1 (3), 82–86. <https://ijhess.com/index.php/ijhess/article/view/52>
- Fatmariza, Febriani, R., & Salleh, S. (2024). Resilience and Matriarchal Values: A Study of Women and Single Mothers in the Minangkabau Community. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Gender, Culture and Society* , 256–264.

<https://knepublishing.com/index.php/KnE-Social/article/view/16715>

- Innocente, C., Ulrich, L., Moos, S., & Vezzetti, E. (2023). A Framework Study on the Use of Immersive XR Technologies in the Cultural Heritage Domain. *Journal of Cultural Heritage* , (62), 268–283. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2023.06.001>
- Jian, P. (2023). Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage: Protecting Our Cultural Identity. *Anthropology* , 11 , 299. <https://doi.org/10.35248/2332-0915.23.11.299>
- Nursyirwan, Enida, D., Alfalah, & Najmi, M. (2025). Talempong Music in West Sumatra: The Application of Tone in Traditional Minangkabau Music Performances. *SPAJA Journal* , (9), 78–92. <https://doi.org/10.26721/spafajournal.i39kf22kki>
- Poplawska, M. (2025). Intangible Heritage Systems: Challenges of Cultural Conservation from a Cross-Cultural Perspective. *Ethnomusicology Forum* , 34 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2025.2484707>
- Rusnalasari, ZD (2025). Cultural Resilience in the Digital Age: A Study of Traditional Music and Urban Youth. *Harmonia: Journal of Music and Arts* , 3 (3), 168–178. <https://doi.org/10.61978/harmonia.v3i3.671>
- Saiful, AA, & Sukmayadi, Y. (2024). Utilization of Music Notation as an Adaptation of Sundanese Music Learning Technology. *Korean Music Education Society* , 53 (3), 93–114. <https://doi.org/10.30775/KMES.53.3.93>
- Saiful, AA, Sukmayadi, Y., & Masunah, J. (2025). Bincarung: Kawih Children's Composition Based on Sundanese Local Wisdom. *Malaysian Music Journal* , 14 (1), 82–97. <https://doi.org/10.37134/mjm.vol14.1.5.2025>
- Saputra, R. (2024). Cultural Governance and Preservation Framework in Indonesia: Balancing Policy and Heritage. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* , 11 (3), 25–50. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/2145>
- Saputra, R. (2025). STEM-Based Governance for Cultural Heritage: Integrating Digital Innovation and Policy in Indonesia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* , 12 (5), 325–344. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/2586>
- Sauve, S.A., & Phillips, E. (2023). Anti-Colonial Strategies in Cross-Cultural Music Studies. *Music Perception* , 40 (4), 277–292. <https://doi.org/10.1525/MP.2023.40.4.277>
- Setiyono, S., Keumala, D., Sabirin, A., & Nursantih, N. (2024). Has Indonesia Preserved Traditional Cultural Expressions? *Jambura Legal Review* , 6 (2), 206–239. <https://doi.org/10.33756/jlr.v6i2.24106>
- Sosrowijaya, KM (2023). Transmission of Local and Traditional Music in Indonesian Popular Music (A Case Study of Indonesian Music Groups). *Harmonia: Journal of Music and Arts* , 1 (1), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.61978/harmonia.v1i1.165>
- Stark, A., & Yahaya, F.H. (2021). The Paternal Side of the Family in a Matrilineal Society: The Example of the Minangkabau Tribe in Indonesia. *IIUM Journal of Human Sciences* , 3 (2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijohs.v3i2.208>
- Syafrini, D., Mardhiah, D., Dinda, B., & Fadilla. (2023). Development of Social Capital and Cultural Heritage Tourism in a Former Mining Town, West Sumatra, Indonesia. *Environment, Development and Sustainability* . <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-023-04184-y>
- Syahrizal, S., & Meiyenti, S. (2022). Kinship System of Matrilineal Minangkabau Fishing Communities in Padang City. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Social Sciences (EAI)* . <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.30-8-2021.2316305>
- Tang, X., Li, S., & You, T. (2026). *Folding and Unfolding: A Topological Framework for Understanding Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism in Urban Villages: A Case Study of Chebei Dragon Boat Scene, Guangzhou, China* . USA: Public Library of Science. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0339564>
- Vicente Cateia, J. (2024). The Impact of Culture on Aid Allocation and Gender Gap Investment in Education: Evidence

- from Matrilineal and Patrilineal Societies. *Applied Economics Letters* , 31 (2), 97–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2022.2128166>
- Wardhani, B. (2023). From Jakarta to Oceania: Indonesia's Cultural Diplomacy with the South Pacific. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* , 10 (1), 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970231152011>
- Widiarsa, AP, & Mayasari, H. (2024). Improving the Community Economy Through a Model of Legal Protection for Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions: A Study of the Communal Intellectual Property Framework in Indonesia. *Gelar: Jurnal Seni Budaya* , 22 (2), 239–257. <https://doi.org/10.33153/glr.v22i2.6256>
- Widodo, F.A., Aditya, A., & Kurniawan, R. (2024). Enhancing the Preservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage Through Virtual Reality: A Case Study of the Watu Gong Site in Indonesia. In *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Electrical Engineering, Computer Science and Informatics (EECSI) 2024* , 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1109/EECSI63442.2024.10776179>
- Wood, AL (2022). Global Jukebox: A Public Database of Performing Arts and Culture. *Plos One* , 17 (11). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0275469>
- Xu, L., Shi, L., Wang, X., Wan, Y., & Fan, Z. (2023). Can Tourists Become Students? The Formation and Mechanism of Place Conversion in a Traditional Chinese Village. *Frontiers in Psychology* , 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1301127>
- Zhao, L., & Kim, J. (2024). The Impact of Traditional Chinese Paper-Cutting Art on the Digital Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage Under Virtual Reality Technology. *Heliyon* , 10 (18). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e38073>