

Research Article

Social Transformation and Challenges of Traditional Music in the Era of Globalization: A Case Study of Talempong in West Sumatra

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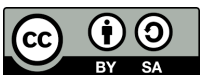
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Abstract: Traditional music plays a crucial role in local cultural identity, yet faces pressures from globalization, modernization, and urbanization. This article examines the social transformation and sustainability challenges of Talempong, a Minangkabau percussion ensemble in West Sumatra, through a qualitative case study based on ethnographic observation, interviews, and document analysis. Results reveal tonal, technical, and functional hybridization; weakening intergenerational transmission due to urbanization and the erosion of nagari structures; and the commodification of Talempong for tourism and popular entertainment, which opens up economic opportunities while diminishing ritual authenticity. The discussion places these findings within the framework of glocalization, cultural hybridity, and sustainability, concluding that Talempong's survival depends on adaptive, community-based revitalization that balances authenticity with digital innovation, the creative economy, and youth education. Such approaches are essential to ensure that Talempong remains a dynamic cultural practice capable of evolving with social change while preserving its historical significance, symbolic meanings, and Minangkabau cultural identity.

Keywords: Popular Culture; Social Transformation; Traditional Music; Urbanization; West Sumatra.

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1. Introduction

Traditional music is a tangible manifestation of collective identity, encoding cosmology, kinship, ritual, and historical memory as a living archive of local wisdom (Hanif & Maruti, 2024). In Indonesia, hundreds of traditional musical forms serve as ethnic markers, communication media, and ceremonial accompaniments (UNESCO, 2021). However, in the past three decades, globalization, digitalization, urbanization, and popular culture have put pressure on the sustainability of these traditions (Rusnalasari, 2025).

The talempong, a set of small gongs typical of the Minangkabau people, reflects both the resilience and vulnerability of traditional music (Falma et al., 2021). Historically, it has played a role in traditional ceremonies, weddings, harvests, and village rituals, with its orally transmitted non-diatonic pentatonic/hexatonic tuning system (Wimbrayardi & Parmadi, 2021; Yusman, 2021). The talempong is not just an instrument, but an icon of Minangkabau identity recognized throughout the Malay archipelago. (Falma et al., 2021).

However, in recent decades, Talempong has been dragged into a complex transformation process. Modern musicians increasingly use Western diatonic scales to adapt Talempong to electronic keyboards, electric bass, and drum kits (Wimbrayardi & Parmadi, 2021). Today, Talempong is undergoing a transformation: the use of Western diatonic scales, integration with modern instruments, the emergence of commercial hybrid genres such as Talempong Goyang, and the weakening of intergenerational transmission due to migration and urbanization (Alfalah, 2013; Miko et al., 2024). Digital media strengthens the dominance of popular music, marginalizing tradition in the daily lives of the younger generation (Rusnalasari, 2025).

These dynamics raise pressing sociological and cultural questions: how do modernization, urbanization, and popular culture interact to reshape the social meaning, transmission, and sustainability of Talempong as a living tradition? While a growing body of research examines the technical and organological dimensions of Talempong (Darlenis, 2022; Wimbrayardi & Parmadi, 2021) and the broader socio-cultural transformations of Minangkabau society (Miko et al., 2024; Pepinsky et al., 2022), few studies integrate these various aspects into a coherent analysis of social transformations affecting one particular traditional music genre within the framework of globalization theory. This article addresses this research gap with three questions: (1) how does modernization change the musical structure and performance context of Talempong; (2) how does urbanization affect intergenerational transmission; and (3) how does global popular culture reshape the social and economic functions of Talempong. The article is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews theory and literature; Section 3 explains the methodology; Section 4 presents findings and discussion; Section 5 concludes with theoretical and practical implications for the sustainability of Talempong and similar traditional music.

2. Literature Review

Globalization, Glocalization, and Cultural Hybridity

Globalization theory offers a fundamental lens for understanding the transformation of local cultural expressions. Rather than producing simple cultural homogenization, globalization is more appropriately understood through the lens of glocalization, where global cultural flows are continually reinterpreted, absorbed, and reshaped by local actors to produce new hybrid forms (Robertson, 1992). This process of cultural hybridization is neither purely destructive nor purely additive; it produces a third space where local and global elements are recombined into new, culturally meaningful, albeit transformed, expressions (Robertson, 1992). Applied to music, this framework helps explain why Talempong has not simply disappeared under the pressure of globalization but has instead branched into traditional and hybrid-popular genres that coexist, compete, and sometimes reinforce each other.

Modernization, Urbanization, and Cultural Transmission

Modernization theory suggests that as societies industrialize and urbanize, traditional institutions of cultural transmission extensive kinship networks, communal rituals, and oral learning are gradually replaced by formal, market-oriented, and individualized modes of cultural learning (Miko et al., 2024). In the Minangkabau context, this process is reinforced by the centuries-old institution of merantau (migration), whereby young Minangkabau people,

traditionally men and increasingly women, leave their hometowns (nagari) to pursue education and livelihoods elsewhere in Indonesia and abroad (Azura et al., 2024; Miko et al., 2024) . Comparable evidence from Indonesian sociolinguistics suggests that urbanization interacting with ethnic diversity accelerates the shift from local languages and, indirectly, locally embedded cultural practices toward more standardized and nationally dominant forms (Pepinsky et al., 2022) . Because Talempong performance practices, repertoire, and tuning knowledge have historically been transmitted through community-based learning embodied in physical form within the nagari, the erosion of these structures directly threatens the sustainability of the tradition.

Popular Culture, Commodification, and Cultural Tourism

The commodification of traditional culture for tourism and commercial entertainment is a second major transformative force. Cultural commodification theory frames this process as the conversion of rituals, performances, and symbolic practices into marketable goods oriented to the expectations of tourists and consumers, often at the expense of their original ritual meaning (Shepherd, 2002) . Comparative case studies from Indonesian tourism studies, including the commodification of ceremonies in Bali and Karo cultural performances in North Sumatra, demonstrate a consistent pattern in which commodification generates economic opportunities for local performers while simultaneously risking the erosion of the depth and authenticity of rituals (Indrianto, 2005) . In West Sumatra, in particular, performing arts studios in tourist hubs such as Bukittinggi have institutionalized Talempong performances as paid tourist attractions, and the broader provincial creative economy has explicitly incorporated performing arts, including music, as a commercial subsector (Irwan et al., 2023; Zusmelia et al., 2022) .

Previous Studies on Talempong and Similar Traditional Music

Several recent studies provide an empirical basis for this research. (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) documented the diversity of Talempong tuning systems across Minangkabau regencies and observed the increasing adoption of Western diatonic tuning by modern artists alongside the persistence of traditional non-diatonic techniques among cultural custodians. (Darlenis, 2022) examined how digital media and internet-era technologies are reshaping the protection and transmission of Talempong pacik, concluding that digital documentation can function simultaneously as a preservation tool and a vector of stylistic change. (Falma et al., 2021; Yusman, 2021) affirmed the continued symbolic centrality of Talempong and related instruments in non-formal education and Minangkabau cultural identity, even as formal transmission channels weakened. Outside of West Sumatra, similar processes have been documented for traditional Dong music in China, where tourism development reshaped performance content and communities' relationships with music (Song & Yuang, 2020) . For example, for Isan folk music in Thailand, where digital sound technology has been mobilized for preservation (Seekhunlio et al., 2023) ; and for keroncong music in Indonesia, where musicians rely on artistic creativity and cultural adaptation to maintain the genre's relevance (Suryati et al., 2025) . Collectively, this literature suggests that the observed trajectories of simultaneous hybridization, transmission erosion, and commodification of Talempong are not isolated phenomena but part of a broader global pattern affecting traditional music in societies undergoing rapid modernization and urbanization (Rusnalasari, 2025; Song & Yuang, 2020) .

3. Research Methods

This research employed a qualitative case study design, which is appropriate for capturing contextual, meaningful, and historically embedded processes of cultural transformation (Song & Yuang, 2020). The research was conducted in several Talempong producing centers in West Sumatra, including Tanah Datar Regency, Agam Regency, and Bukittinggi City, chosen for their historical significance as centers of Talempong practice and their contemporary exposure to tourism-driven commodification (Irwan et al., 2023; Nursyirwan et al., 2025).

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, in depth semi structured interviews were conducted with 18 informants, consisting of traditional Talempong musicians and tuners (*tukang talempong*), guardians of customary and nagari culture, contemporary and hybrid genre musicians, tourism and creative economy actors, and younger community members representing the next generation. Second, non-participant observation was conducted at both traditional ceremonies and commercial or tourism-oriented performances to compare performance contexts, audience composition, and musical adaptations across environments. Third, document analysis was conducted on regional cultural policy documents, previous ethnomusicological research, and secondary media content (including social media performance recordings) to triangulate the interview and observation data.

Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis procedure following Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Irwan et al., 2023). Three main thematic categories were derived deductively from the research questions of modernization of musical structures, urbanization and transmission, and commodification of popular culture, and then refined through iterative coding of interview transcripts and field notes. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, member checking with key informants, and peer discussions within the research team.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, organized around the three thematic dimensions of social transformation identified in the research questions. Interpretation of these findings in relation to previous studies will be discussed in the Discussion section that follows.

Modernization of Musical Structure and Instrumentation

Fieldwork confirms that Talempong currently exists in two parallel, though interacting, forms. The first is the traditional form, tuned through sensory-based, non-diatonic techniques locally called *limo salabuan* and *onam salabuan*, and played in customary contexts such as *baralek* (weddings) and *penangguan tamu* (guest welcoming ceremonies). Traditional tuners report that this tuning process cannot be standardized or notated; it relies entirely on the tuner's internal sense of Minangkabau tonal aesthetics, developed over years of apprenticeship. The second is a modern hybrid form in which Talempong is retuned to the Western diatonic scale and combined with an electric keyboard, bass guitar, and drum kit to create a genre widely

known as Talempong Goyang or Talempong pop, which is primarily played at weddings, festivals, and tourist attractions.

Informants consistently described this bifurcation as a response to market and audience demands, rather than a rejection of tradition itself. Younger, commercially oriented musicians reported that diatonic tuning allowed Talempong to integrate more easily with dangdut, Minang pop, and other popular genres that dominate the contemporary wedding entertainment market, thus preserving the instrument's economic viability even as its tonal identity shifted. Conversely, guardians of tradition expressed concern that diatonic adaptation risked eroding the distinctive tonal aesthetic that has historically distinguished Talempong Minangkabau from other Indonesian gong-bell ensembles.

Urbanization, Migration, and Transmission Erosion

The second major finding relates to the impact of urbanization and migration on the intergenerational transmission of Talempong knowledge. Informants at all research sites reported a significant decline in the number of young people willing to undertake the lengthy informal apprenticeships required to master traditional tuning and performance techniques. This decline is attributed to two interacting processes. First, migration draws young Minangkabau people, including those from families historically associated with Talempong craftsmanship, to urban centers in Java and beyond to pursue formal education and paid employment, physically separating them from the nagari-based social structures where Talempong knowledge is embedded. Second, the gradual weakening of matrilineal communal institutions, including the diminishing central role of the rumah gadang (traditional communal house) as a site for everyday cultural transmission, has reduced the number of informal opportunities through which children and adolescents are naturally exposed to Talempong performances and practices.

Several informants noted that formal educational institutions, including local arts high schools and university-affiliated conservatories, have begun to partially replace the increasingly eroded informal transmission system, offering structured Talempong instruction as part of extracurricular or degree programs. However, this institutionalized transmission is widely described as having a narrower scope than traditional apprenticeship, tending to standardize repertoire and techniques for pedagogical purposes rather than preserving the full diversity of regional tuning variants documented in Tanah Datar, Agam, Lima Puluh Kota, Sijunjung, and Solok.

Popular Culture, Digital Media, and Commodification

The third finding relates to the influence of popular culture and digital media on the social function and economic position of Talempong. Young informants largely reported that their daily music consumption was dominated by national and global popular genres accessed through YouTube, TikTok, and streaming platforms, with traditional Talempong music primarily encountered in the context of ceremonial obligations rather than voluntary listening. This pattern reflects broader findings about Indonesian youth engagement with traditional music, where global popular genres are highly favored in daily consumption while traditional songs are perceived as ceremonial or outdated (Rusnalasari, 2025).

At the same time, this research documents an active process of commercial adaptation in which Talempong has been integrated into West Sumatra's creative economy as a tourist attraction. Performing arts studios in Bukittinggi and other tourist destinations offer scheduled Talempong performances to domestic and international visitors, generating additional income for the musicians and contributing to the broader performing arts subsector of the regional creative economy (Irwan et al., 2023; Zusmelia et al., 2022). Tourism-oriented performances were observed to be shorter, more visually choreographed, and more reliant on hybrid diatonic arrangements than ceremonial performances, reflecting a deliberate adaptation to tourist expectations for accessible and entertaining spectacles rather than ritual depth.

Finally, several younger informants expressed a willingness to reengage with Talempong if presented through modern digital formats, such as short video content, remix recordings, or game-based educational apps a finding consistent with broader research on digital revitalization strategies for traditional Indonesian music (Darlenis, 2022; Ernawati & Munaf, 2024).

Discussion

The findings presented above can be productively interpreted through the theoretical lenses of glocalization, cultural hybridity, modernization, and cultural commodification introduced in section 2, and are strongly supported by previous empirical research on comparable traditional music traditions.

Hybridization as Glocalization, Not Just Loss

The separation of Talempong into traditional and hybrid diatonic styles is best understood not as a unilateral cultural loss, but as an example of glocalization, whereby global musical idioms are reinterpreted locally to produce new, economically viable hybrid forms (Robertson, 1995). This interpretation is consistent with documentation (Nursyirwan et al., 2025) of the coexistence of traditional non-diatonic tunings and modern diatonic adaptations in contemporary Minangkabau musical practice, and with broader ethnomusicological evidence that traditional instruments elsewhere in Indonesia, for example, gamelan ensembles reinvented in the membranophone tradition of East Java (Hidayatullah et al., 2024), undergo similar tonal and structural hybridization when integrated into popular markets and tourism. This study extends the existing literature by demonstrating that hybridization in the case of Talempong is driven more by the practical economic logic of the wedding entertainment market than by aesthetic experimentation, where musicians must remain compatible with the dominant popular genre to maintain their livelihoods.

Urbanization and Structural Erosion in Transmission Systems

The observed decline in informal apprenticeship confirms and extends previous sociological research on Minangkabau social transformation. A study (Miko et al., 2024) on eldercare in Minangkabau society documented a parallel process in which migration and modernization progressively weakened matrilineal communal institutions, a structural shift with direct implications for all cultural practices, including Talempong, which relies on the rumah gadang (house) and nagari (village) as sites of transmission. Similarly, (Azura et al., 2024) found that increasing education and mobility among Minangkabau in the rantau (diaspora) was associated with a gradual loosening of adherence to customary structures. On a broader national scale, (Pepinsky et al., 2022) showed that urbanization interacting with ethnic diversity

systematically accelerated language shift in Indonesia, a process structurally analogous to the erosion of musical transmission documented here: both traditional languages and music rely on dense, geographically concentrated social networks that tend to be diluted by migration and urban diversification. Taken together, this corroborating evidence suggests that the challenges faced in transmitting Talempong culture are not unique, but rather reflect a broader pattern of institutional erosion that is simultaneously affecting multiple dimensions of Minangkabau intangible cultural heritage.

Commodification: Economic Opportunities and Risks of Authenticity

The dual nature of Talempong tourism commodification, generating revenue while simultaneously risking a loss of authenticity, mirrors findings from research on cultural commodification across Indonesia. A systematic review (Irwan et al., 2023) confirmed that tourism commodification of cultural performances consistently produces the same tension between economic benefits and the loss of authentic ritual meaning, a pattern also documented in Balinese ceremonial tourism and Karo cultural performances in North Sumatra. The current findings suggest that West Sumatra's creative economy framework, which explicitly includes performing arts as a commercial sub-sector alongside craft and culinary industries (Irwan et al., 2023; Zuzmelia et al., 2022), has institutionalized this tension rather than resolved it: tourism oriented Talempong performances have become a stable source of supplementary income for performers precisely because they have been shortened, simplified, and hybridized to suit tourist expectations, at the expense of the ritual complexity found in ceremonial performances.

Digital Media as a Double-Edged Sword

The finding that Minangkabau youth primarily consume global and national popular music, yet remain open to re-engaging with Talempong through digital formats, echoes a study (Rusnalasari, 2025) of urban youth in Makassar, which also found that traditional songs were considered outdated in everyday listening but that youth expressed a willingness to reengage through participatory digital media. This convergence across Indonesia's diverse geographic contexts suggests a generalizable pattern: digital platforms serve simultaneously as a primary vector of popular culture penetration that displaces traditional music from everyday life, and as a potential channel for its strategic revitalization, echoing the conclusion (Darlenis, 2022; Ernawati & Munaf, 2024) that internet-era technologies can serve as tools for stylistic change and cultural preservation depending on how they are used. This suggests that revitalization strategies for Talempong should not view digital media as a threat, but instead should actively utilize short-form videos, game-based learning apps, and streaming platforms as means of intergenerational transmission, following models that have been tested for Gambang Kromong and other traditional Indonesian music forms.

Towards an Adaptive Cultural Sustainability Framework

Synthesizing these findings, this study proposes that Talempong's long-term sustainability depends on an adaptive rather than a purist strategy one that neither rejects hybridization outright nor allows commodification to proceed unchecked, but rather directs both processes toward strengthening core cultural meanings. This aligns with cultural sustainability frameworks that emphasize community governance, the integration of formal informal education, and the development of a responsible creative economy as prerequisites for reconciling economic viability with cultural authenticity (Irwan et al., 2023; Zuzmelia et al.,

2022) . Practically, this implies strengthening nagari-based apprenticeship programs even as formal education absorbs increasing transmission, documenting and protecting the full diversity of regional adaptation variants before they are further homogenized by diatonic standardization, and involving traditional custodians directly in the design of tourism adaptations and digital media so that commercial performance remains anchored in, and not detached from, ceremonial meanings.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the social transformation of Talempong, a traditional Minangkabau musical ensemble, under the combined pressures of modernization, urbanization, and global popular culture. The findings indicate that Talempong has undergone a process of tonal and structural hybridization driven by market demand; that urbanization, migration, and the weakening of nagari-based communal institutions have eroded the informal apprenticeship system that historically underpinned intergenerational transmission; and that the commodification of Talempong for tourism and popular entertainment has generated new economic opportunities while placing pressure on ritual authenticity. These findings, interpreted through the lenses of glocalization, cultural hybridity, and cultural commodification theories, and supported by converging evidence from comparable Indonesian and Asian traditional music traditions, suggest that the fate of Talempong is emblematic of the broader structural challenges facing traditional performing arts in rapidly globalizing societies.

This article concludes that Talempong's sustainability cannot be guaranteed solely through rigid preservation or unbridled commercial adaptation, but requires a deliberate, community-rooted, adaptive revitalization strategy that integrates traditional training, formal education, responsible creative economy development, and the strategic use of digital media. Future research should expand this case study analysis through comparative, multi-site, and longitudinal designs that trace the long-term trajectories of hybridization and transmission across various Minangkabau districts, and should further investigate the effectiveness of specific digital revitalization interventions in reversing the intergenerational alienation documented in this and previous research. Policymakers, cultural guardians, and creative economy actors in West Sumatra should consider these findings as a call to design cultural tourism and education policies that explicitly protect the diversity of traditional tuning systems while enabling Talempong to remain a living, economically sustainable, and intergenerationally relevant tradition.

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