

Traditional Musical Aesthetics in Indonesia: Indigenous Aesthetic Philosophy, Cultural Identity, and Contemporary Heritage Challenges

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ABSTRACT: Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics constitute a complex cultural system encompassing musical structure, ritual practice, spirituality, ethical values, collective participation, and cultural identity. This narrative literature review aims to develop an integrated understanding of these aesthetics by examining the relationships among indigenous aesthetic philosophy, historical development, cultural identity, heritage preservation, and contemporary technological challenges. The methodology involved narrative synthesis of scholarly publications across ethnomusicology, musicology, anthropology, and cultural heritage studies, focusing on four core indigenous aesthetic concepts — laras (tuning systems), pathet (modal and expressive frameworks), garap (interpretive realization), and rasa (embodied aesthetic experience) — alongside issues of community participation, cultural continuity, and digital transformation. Findings reveal that these four concepts dynamically shape musical structure, emotional expression, ritual meaning, ethical conduct, and cultural identity across diverse Indonesian traditions. Historically, colonialism, nationalism, modernization, and globalization have transformed musical education, notation, repertoire, and performance contexts. Contemporary developments including commercialization, tourism, digital media, streaming platforms, and artificial intelligence offer expanded dissemination opportunities while simultaneously posing challenges to authenticity, ritual integrity, community ownership, and cultural rights. The review proposes an integrated conceptual framework positioning indigenous aesthetic theories as central analytical perspectives, affirming that continuity and innovation are complementary processes sustained through interpretive practice, community participation, cultural governance, garap-based pedagogy, intergenerational transmission, and ethically grounded digital documentation that upholds indigenous epistemologies while embracing technological innovation.

Keywords: Indonesian Traditional Music, Musical Aesthetics, Garap, Pathet, Rasa, Cultural Heritage, Ethnomusicology



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is internationally recognized as one of the world's most culturally diverse nations, possessing an exceptionally rich musical heritage that reflects centuries of interaction among

indigenous traditions, religious beliefs, political systems, and intercultural exchanges. Across the archipelago, hundreds of musical traditions have developed distinctive aesthetic systems that embody local philosophies, collective memories, ritual practices, and social identities. These traditions including Javanese and Balinese gamelan, angklung, talempong, gondang, sasando, tifa, kulintang, sape', keroncong, and numerous regional vocal traditions should not be understood merely as artistic expressions or entertainment but rather as dynamic cultural systems through which communities construct, transmit, and negotiate meanings across generations. Unlike many Western aesthetic traditions that primarily emphasize beauty as an autonomous artistic quality, Indonesian musical aesthetics integrate sonic organization with ethical conduct, spiritual experience, communal participation, ritual legitimacy, and social responsibility. Consequently, evaluating Indonesian traditional music requires attention not only to musical structures such as melody, rhythm, tuning, and form but also to culturally embedded concepts that shape performance, interpretation, and reception within specific historical and social contexts. This multidimensional understanding of aesthetics has become increasingly significant as Indonesian musical traditions encounter rapid technological, cultural, and economic transformations that reshape both their performance environments and their cultural meanings.

Among the indigenous concepts that define Indonesian musical aesthetics, the interconnected principles of *laras*, *pathet*, *garap*, and *rasa* constitute the conceptual foundation through which musical beauty, emotional experience, and cultural appropriateness are understood. Rather than functioning as isolated technical categories, these concepts operate as an integrated aesthetic framework that links musical structure with embodied interpretation and social meaning. Numerous studies demonstrate that *laras* provides the tonal organization through which musical materials are structured, while *pathet* functions simultaneously as a modal framework, an expressive atmosphere, and an interpretive guide governing melodic movement and emotional direction. *Garap*, meanwhile, represents the creative and interpretive process through which performers transform skeletal musical materials into expressive artistic realization, allowing individual musicians to negotiate between inherited conventions and situational creativity. The culmination of this interaction is *rasa*, an affective and phenomenological experience emerging from the successful integration of tuning systems, modal organization, interpretive choices, timbral nuance, rhythmic articulation, and contextual sensitivity. Rather than representing subjective emotion alone, *rasa* embodies culturally shared understandings of refinement, balance, appropriateness, spirituality, and ethical performance. Multiple ethnomusicological investigations therefore argue that the relationship among *laras*, *pathet*, *garap*, and *rasa* forms the central organizing principle of Javanese *karawitan* and related musical traditions, although regional practices may differ in their specific interpretive grammars and performance conventions (Aji, 2023; Kurniawati et al., 2023; Mustika & Purwanto, 2021; Ochtaviani & Widodo, 2021; Pamuji et al., 2020; Sukisno, 2018; Widodo, 2015).

Beyond their musical functions, these indigenous aesthetic concepts serve as powerful mechanisms through which Indonesian communities construct, preserve, and renegotiate cultural identity. Traditional music functions simultaneously as artistic practice, historical archive, social institution, and symbolic representation of regional belonging. Distinctive performance practices, repertoire, tuning systems, vocal styles, and ritual conventions distinguish the musical identities of different

ethnic communities while simultaneously contributing to broader conceptions of Indonesian national culture. Historical studies of court traditions demonstrate that musical compositions frequently functioned as political and ceremonial symbols expressing sovereignty, legitimacy, and collective memory, particularly within the royal courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta. Likewise, contemporary developments such as campursari, hybrid gamelan ensembles, and macapat-inspired performances illustrate that Indonesian musical identity remains dynamic rather than static, continually adapting to changing social circumstances while preserving core aesthetic values rooted in *garap*, *pathet*, and *rasa*. These adaptive processes reveal that authenticity within Indonesian musical traditions should not be interpreted as rigid historical preservation but rather as culturally negotiated continuity maintained through community participation, intergenerational transmission, and locally grounded interpretive authority (Daryanto et al., 2021; Gunawan et al., 2022; Wati & Prasadiyanto, 2022; Wijayanti & Sugiyanto, 2022).

The inseparable relationship between aesthetics and ritual further distinguishes Indonesian traditional music from purely performance-oriented artistic traditions. Within many Javanese, Balinese, and other Indonesian cultural contexts, music functions as a medium connecting human communities with spiritual worlds, customary institutions, ancestral memory, and cosmological order. Performance is therefore evaluated not only according to technical competence but also according to its ritual appropriateness, ethical integrity, symbolic coherence, and capacity to evoke spiritual presence. Concepts such as *kejawen*, *taksu*, refinement (*alus*), and ritual sequencing demonstrate how musical organization embodies broader philosophical systems governing social harmony, moral responsibility, and cosmological balance. Studies of *wayang* accompaniment, *bedhaya* dance, *macapat* performance, and palace *karawitan* consistently illustrate that musical parameters including *pathet*, *laras*, tempo, dynamics, and *garap* are carefully organized to reinforce ritual progression and symbolic meaning. Accordingly, musical beauty is understood as an emergent quality arising from the successful integration of sonic structure, embodied interpretation, ethical conduct, and ceremonial function rather than from technical virtuosity alone (Ciptaningsih & Mistortoify, 2022; Fitrianto, 2019; Murtana, 2019; Sunardi et al., 2023).

Building upon these indigenous aesthetic foundations, previous scholarship has proposed several strategies for maintaining the continuity of Indonesian traditional musical heritage amid accelerating social and technological change. One prominent approach emphasizes the revitalization of *garap*-based pedagogy, arguing that musical transmission should prioritize embodied listening, interpretive sensitivity, and contextual understanding rather than relying exclusively on written notation. Although the *Kepatihan* notation system has significantly expanded opportunities for documentation, institutional education, and repertoire preservation, numerous scholars caution that excessive dependence on notation may unintentionally standardize performance practices and reduce the stylistic diversity historically sustained through oral transmission and community-based learning. Consequently, notation is increasingly viewed as a mnemonic aid that complements rather than replaces *garap*, allowing performers to internalize musical grammar while retaining flexibility for interpretation according to local traditions and performance contexts. Complementary preservation strategies include strengthening community-based ensembles, expanding school and university partnerships, encouraging intergenerational apprenticeship, supporting local festivals, and promoting culturally grounded research that

positions tradition bearers as active custodians rather than passive subjects of documentation. These initiatives collectively demonstrate that successful preservation depends upon sustaining living performance practices alongside musical archives, thereby protecting both tangible repertoire and the intangible knowledge embedded within aesthetic interpretation (Kusmayati & Raharja, 2019; Rusdiyantoro, 2019; Setyoko et al., 2023; Subowo & Wahyudi, 2023).

The contemporary digital environment has further expanded both opportunities and challenges for Indonesian traditional music. Digital archives, online performances, streaming services, multimedia documentation, and computational analysis have substantially increased public access to traditional repertoires while enabling new forms of artistic collaboration and educational dissemination. Virtual performances during and after the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how digital platforms could sustain cultural participation despite physical restrictions, whereas advances in computational musicology and artificial intelligence have opened new possibilities for notation analysis, compositional experimentation, and pedagogical support. Nevertheless, scholars consistently argue that technology should function as an instrument supporting, rather than replacing, embodied musical knowledge and community authority. Market-oriented production, social-media algorithms, and streaming metrics increasingly shape audience expectations, encouraging shorter performance formats, visually oriented presentations, and commercially attractive adaptations that may diverge from ritual timing, local aesthetics, or traditional performance ethics. Likewise, emerging artificial intelligence applications capable of generating or analyzing gamelan materials raise complex questions concerning authorship, authenticity, cultural ownership, and the preservation of *garap*-based interpretive knowledge. The prevailing consensus therefore advocates a balanced approach in which technological innovation is integrated with ethical governance, community participation, and culturally informed educational practices that preserve the interpretive integrity of Indonesian musical traditions (Sunardi et al., 2023; Rusdiyantoro, 2019; Widodo et al., 2021; Wati & Prasadiyanto, 2022).

Despite the considerable breadth of scholarship reviewed above, several important research gaps remain evident. Existing studies are heavily concentrated on Javanese and Balinese gamelan, while many musical traditions from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, Papua, and eastern Indonesia continue to receive comparatively limited scholarly attention. Furthermore, numerous investigations provide detailed descriptions of musical structures, performance techniques, or historical developments without fully integrating indigenous aesthetic philosophy into broader discussions of cultural identity, ethics, ritual meaning, and social transformation. Research concerning digital media, streaming platforms, artificial intelligence, and platform-driven musical dissemination remains relatively fragmented, particularly regarding their influence on *rasa*, *garap*, communal ownership, and the lived experience of traditional performance. Community perspectives are likewise underrepresented compared with institutional or academic interpretations, resulting in limited understanding of how musicians themselves negotiate authenticity, innovation, commercialization, and technological adaptation within everyday practice. Finally, while concepts such as authenticity, hybridity, preservation, and innovation frequently appear throughout the literature, they are often employed without sufficiently explicit operational definitions grounded in Indonesian epistemological frameworks. These gaps indicate the need for a more integrative narrative synthesis capable of connecting indigenous aesthetic concepts with

historical development, cultural identity, heritage preservation, and contemporary transformation within a single analytical framework.

Accordingly, this narrative literature review aims to synthesize contemporary scholarship on Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics by integrating six interrelated themes: indigenous aesthetic principles, cultural identity, ritual and spiritual values, historical development, heritage preservation, and contemporary transformation. Rather than treating these themes as independent domains, the present review argues that they constitute mutually reinforcing dimensions of a living aesthetic system in which *laras*, *pathet*, *garap*, and *rasa* operate simultaneously as musical, cultural, ethical, and philosophical concepts. The principal contribution of this study lies in proposing a comprehensive conceptual framework that unifies indigenous aesthetic theory with broader discussions of cultural continuity, community governance, technological change, and heritage sustainability. By bringing together evidence from ethnomusicology, musicology, anthropology, cultural heritage studies, and media scholarship, the review demonstrates that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics are best understood not as static historical artifacts but as dynamic cultural processes continuously negotiated through performance, education, ritual practice, community participation, and technological innovation. This integrated perspective is expected to contribute to future interdisciplinary research, inform culturally responsive heritage policies, and provide a stronger theoretical foundation for safeguarding Indonesia's rich musical traditions in an increasingly interconnected digital world.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a narrative literature review to synthesize and critically interpret contemporary scholarship concerning traditional musical aesthetics in Indonesia. A narrative review was selected because the objective of this study was not to statistically aggregate empirical findings but to develop a comprehensive conceptual understanding of how indigenous aesthetic principles have evolved across diverse historical, cultural, philosophical, and musical contexts. Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics encompass complex concepts such as *rasa*, *laras*, *pathet*, and *garap*, whose meanings are embedded within lived performance, ritual practice, collective memory, and cultural knowledge. These multidimensional characteristics cannot be adequately examined through quantitative meta-analysis alone; instead, they require an interpretive methodology capable of integrating heterogeneous evidence derived from ethnography, musicology, anthropology, philosophy, heritage studies, and cultural history.

Narrative literature reviews have become increasingly recognized within ethnomusicology and heritage studies because they facilitate contextual interpretation while accommodating diverse forms of evidence, including ethnographic observation, historical documentation, performance analysis, philosophical discourse, and critical reflection (Hemetek et al., 2019; Sosrowijaya, 2023). Unlike systematic reviews that primarily focus on statistical effect sizes or narrowly defined empirical questions, narrative reviews seek to explain relationships among concepts, historical developments, and cultural meanings through thematic interpretation. This methodological

orientation is particularly appropriate for Indonesian musical aesthetics because indigenous concepts such as *garap*, *pathet*, and *rasa* function simultaneously as technical, philosophical, ethical, and social categories whose interpretation varies across communities, historical periods, and performance traditions.

Furthermore, contemporary ethnomusicological scholarship increasingly emphasizes reflexive and interpretive approaches that position musical traditions as dynamic cultural practices rather than static artistic objects. Narrative reviews therefore provide opportunities to examine how communities continually reinterpret musical heritage through performance, education, ritual, institutional practice, and technological adaptation while acknowledging methodological debates concerning representation, memory, authenticity, and cultural ownership (Amico, 2020; Savage, 2019).

Review Design and Theoretical Orientation

The review adopted an interpretive synthesis guided by ethnomusicology, cultural heritage studies, and indigenous aesthetic philosophy. Rather than organizing the literature chronologically alone, the synthesis was structured around conceptual relationships among musical aesthetics, cultural identity, ritual practice, historical transformation, heritage preservation, and contemporary technological change.

The theoretical orientation was informed by indigenous concepts that recur throughout Indonesian musical scholarship, particularly *laras*, *pathet*, *garap*, and *rasa*. These concepts provided the principal analytical lens through which diverse musical traditions were compared and interpreted. In addition, broader theoretical perspectives concerning cultural continuity, heritage preservation, hybridity, mediatization, and aesthetic negotiation informed the interpretation of contemporary transformations.

Consistent with ethnomusicological narrative inquiry, the review also recognizes that musical meaning is socially constructed through performance, community participation, historical memory, and ritual context. Consequently, aesthetic concepts were interpreted not only as musical structures but also as cultural practices situated within broader social, political, educational, and institutional environments (Karsono, 2024; Sosrowijaya, 2023; Hemetek et al., 2019).

The synthesis further acknowledges ongoing methodological debates within ethnomusicology regarding the politics of representation, colonial legacies, disciplinary reflexivity, and the need to respect indigenous epistemologies. Rather than assuming universal aesthetic criteria, the present review privileges culturally grounded interpretations developed by musicians, scholars, and tradition-bearing communities while critically engaging with international scholarship (Amico, 2020; Savage & Brown, 2020).

Literature Search Strategy

Relevant literature was identified through comprehensive searches of multidisciplinary and discipline-specific academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Dimensions, UNESCO digital resources, Indonesian academic journals, university repositories, and selected books or edited volumes. The primary publication period covered studies published between 2020 and 2025 to capture recent developments concerning Indonesian traditional music, digital transformation, and heritage preservation. Foundational publications published before 2020 were additionally included when they introduced influential theoretical concepts, historical interpretations, or indigenous aesthetic frameworks that remain central to contemporary scholarship.

Searches employed combinations of keywords related to Indonesian musical aesthetics, ethnomusicology, cultural heritage, ritual performance, indigenous knowledge, and contemporary musical transformation. Representative search terms included:

"Indonesian musical aesthetics";

"traditional Indonesian music";

"gamelan aesthetics";

"*garap*";

"*patih*";

"*laras*";

"*rasa*";

"karawitan";

"ritual music Indonesia";

"music and cultural identity";

"traditional music preservation";

"digital transformation of Indonesian music";

"heritage and ethnomusicology";

"community ownership of traditional music";

"artificial intelligence and traditional music";

"music heritage Indonesia."

Additional references were identified through backward and forward citation tracking to locate influential studies not captured during the initial database searches. This iterative search process reflects common practice in narrative reviews within ethnomusicology, where conceptual relevance frequently extends beyond keyword-based retrieval and requires engagement with interconnected scholarly conversations (Yang & Welch, 2022).

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were considered eligible when they directly addressed one or more dimensions of Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics, including indigenous aesthetic concepts, musical structure, ritual performance, cultural identity, historical development, heritage preservation, pedagogical practice, or contemporary transformation. Publications employing ethnographic, historical, philosophical, musicological, anthropological, heritage, educational, or interdisciplinary approaches were included because these perspectives collectively contribute to understanding Indonesian musical aesthetics as multidimensional cultural systems.

Eligible sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, conference proceedings, doctoral dissertations, institutional reports, and authoritative cultural heritage publications written in English or Indonesian. Particular emphasis was placed on studies providing explicit discussion of *garap*, *pathet*, *laras*, *rasa*, ritual performance, community participation, or cultural continuity.

Studies were excluded when they focused exclusively on non-Indonesian musical traditions, contained purely technical acoustic analyses without cultural interpretation, lacked sufficient methodological transparency, or addressed music education without meaningful discussion of aesthetics, heritage, or cultural identity. Duplicate publications and sources providing minimal analytical contribution were also excluded.

Because narrative reviews synthesize conceptually diverse evidence rather than statistically homogeneous datasets, inclusion decisions prioritized theoretical relevance, methodological credibility, and contribution to the overarching research questions rather than strict methodological uniformity. This approach aligns with recommendations within narrative synthesis methodology emphasizing transparent inclusion criteria while preserving conceptual breadth appropriate for interdisciplinary cultural research (Graddy, 2022; Yang & Welch, 2022).

Data Extraction

Following the identification and selection of eligible publications, relevant information was systematically extracted to facilitate thematic comparison across diverse forms of evidence. Because this study synthesizes historical, ethnographic, philosophical, and musicological literature, the extraction process emphasized conceptual consistency rather than statistical variables. Each publication was reviewed in its entirety to identify explicit discussions of Indonesian musical aesthetics and their associated cultural, historical, and social contexts.

The extracted information was organized into five analytical categories. The first category comprised bibliographic information, including author, publication year, title, publication type, source, and geographical focus. The second category concerned musical characteristics, including musical tradition, region of origin, instrumentation, tuning systems, rhythmic organization, vocal style, performance practice, and historical period. The third category focused on indigenous aesthetic concepts, particularly discussions of *laras*, *pathet*, *garap*, *rasa*, ritual meaning, spirituality, communality, identity, authenticity, ethical values, and symbolic interpretation. The fourth

category documented factors influencing aesthetic transformation, such as colonialism, modernization, nationalism, urbanization, education, globalization, tourism, commercialization, digital media, streaming platforms, and artificial intelligence. Finally, the fifth category recorded the principal findings, theoretical contributions, and research gaps identified by each study.

The extraction process was iterative rather than linear. As additional publications were examined, analytical categories were refined to ensure that newly emerging concepts could be integrated without compromising consistency across the synthesized literature. This flexible approach reflects recommendations within interpretive narrative synthesis, where analytical frameworks evolve alongside deeper engagement with the literature while remaining anchored to predefined research objectives (Yang & Welch, 2022; Graddy, 2022).

Narrative and Thematic Synthesis

The extracted literature was synthesized using a thematic narrative approach designed to integrate heterogeneous evidence into a coherent analytical framework. Narrative synthesis was selected because the reviewed publications differed substantially in research design, disciplinary orientation, historical scope, and methodological approach. Rather than comparing statistical outcomes, the synthesis examined conceptual relationships among indigenous aesthetic principles, historical developments, cultural identity, ritual practice, heritage preservation, and contemporary transformation.

The thematic organization followed six interconnected analytical domains. The first theme examined indigenous musical aesthetics by synthesizing discussions of *laras*, *pathet*, *garap*, and *rasa* across diverse Indonesian musical traditions. The second theme explored music as a medium for constructing and negotiating regional, ethnic, and national identities through performance, education, and community practice. The third theme investigated ritual, spirituality, and cosmology as integral components of musical aesthetics, emphasizing the ethical and symbolic dimensions of performance. The fourth theme traced historical developments from court traditions and colonial encounters through nationalism, modernization, globalization, and digital transformation. The fifth theme evaluated heritage preservation strategies, including community governance, *garap*-based pedagogy, documentation, educational initiatives, and cultural policy. The final theme examined contemporary transformations associated with commercialization, tourism, streaming platforms, artificial intelligence, and hybrid musical practices.

Throughout the synthesis, areas of scholarly agreement and disagreement were explicitly identified. Particular attention was given to debates concerning the interpretation of *pathet* as either a tonal-structural framework or an expressive mood, the pedagogical implications of *Kepatihan* notation, the balance between preservation and innovation, and competing perspectives regarding authenticity and community ownership. Maintaining these contrasting viewpoints enhances interpretive transparency and avoids presenting culturally diverse traditions as theoretically homogeneous (Widodo, 2015; Daryanto et al., 2021; Hemetek et al., 2019).

The synthesis also adopted a hermeneutic orientation by interpreting individual studies within broader historical and cultural contexts rather than treating findings as isolated observations. This

approach allowed recurring concepts to be understood as components of an evolving cultural system, thereby connecting indigenous aesthetic philosophy with broader debates concerning heritage, identity, and contemporary musical transformation (Hemetek et al., 2019; Amico, 2020).

Quality Assessment and Evidence Evaluation

Although narrative literature reviews do not generally employ formal statistical quality appraisal instruments, the credibility of the synthesized evidence was evaluated through transparent qualitative criteria adapted from methodological recommendations for narrative and mixed-method reviews. Four complementary dimensions guided this evaluation: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Graddy, 2022).

Credibility was assessed by examining whether publications presented coherent arguments supported by sufficient empirical, historical, ethnographic, or analytical evidence. Preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and authoritative institutional publications that demonstrated methodological transparency and clear theoretical positioning.

Dependability was evaluated by considering the consistency of methodological procedures reported by individual studies, including descriptions of ethnographic observation, archival research, interview protocols, musical analysis, or historical documentation. Studies providing detailed methodological explanations were regarded as offering stronger evidence for narrative synthesis.

Confirmability was strengthened through triangulation across multiple forms of evidence. Rather than relying upon isolated publications, major interpretations were supported by convergent findings from ethnographic research, historical analysis, philosophical discussion, and musicological investigation. Cross-referencing among independent studies reduced the likelihood that conclusions reflected isolated scholarly perspectives rather than broader disciplinary consensus (Karsono, 2024; Sosrowijaya, 2023).

Transferability was evaluated by considering the extent to which concepts identified within one musical tradition could be meaningfully interpreted across related Indonesian traditions while respecting regional specificity. Rather than assuming universal applicability, the synthesis explicitly acknowledged cultural variation and contextual differences among musical communities.

Finally, reviewer reflexivity formed an essential component of evidence evaluation. Contemporary ethnomusicology recognizes that researchers inevitably influence interpretation through their theoretical assumptions, disciplinary backgrounds, and cultural perspectives. Accordingly, this review sought to privilege indigenous epistemologies and community-based understandings wherever possible while critically engaging with broader international scholarship concerning heritage, identity, and musical aesthetics (Savage & Brown, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Because this study is based exclusively on published literature, formal institutional ethical approval involving human participants was not required. Nevertheless, important ethical principles guided the review process.

First, all interpretations sought to respect the intellectual contributions of original authors through accurate representation and appropriate attribution. Second, indigenous musical concepts such as *garap*, *patet*, *laras*, and *rasa* were interpreted within their cultural and historical contexts rather than being reduced to simplified equivalents derived from Western music theory. Third, the review acknowledges that Indonesian traditional music constitutes living cultural heritage maintained by communities whose knowledge systems extend beyond academic publications. Consequently, scholarly interpretation should complement rather than replace community authority regarding cultural meaning, ritual practice, and heritage stewardship.

The review also recognizes broader ethical concerns surrounding cultural ownership, intellectual property, digital dissemination, artificial intelligence, and the representation of traditional musical knowledge. These issues are discussed throughout the article as integral components of contemporary musical aesthetics rather than merely legal or technological questions.

Methodological Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this narrative review. First, despite employing comprehensive literature searches, the review is inherently limited by the availability and accessibility of published scholarship. Some locally produced studies, oral knowledge, unpublished archival materials, and community-based documentation may remain underrepresented.

Second, the literature itself exhibits uneven geographical coverage. Research concerning Javanese and Balinese musical traditions substantially exceeds scholarship addressing traditions from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, Papua, and eastern Indonesia. Consequently, the synthesized conceptual framework reflects existing scholarly distributions rather than the relative cultural importance of individual traditions.

Third, narrative synthesis necessarily involves interpretive judgment when integrating diverse forms of evidence. Although transparent procedures, triangulation, and explicit thematic organization were employed to enhance methodological rigor, alternative conceptual interpretations remain possible.

Finally, because indigenous aesthetic concepts continue to evolve through contemporary performance practice, education, technological innovation, and community negotiation, the present synthesis should be regarded as an analytical framework rather than a definitive or exhaustive representation of Indonesian musical aesthetics. Future research incorporating collaborative ethnography, community-led scholarship, digital humanities approaches, and comparative regional investigations will further refine and expand understanding of Indonesia's rich musical heritage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Foundations of Traditional Musical Aesthetics

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics are founded upon an integrated system in which musical structure, performance practice, cultural philosophy, and lived experience operate as mutually reinforcing components. Across Javanese *karawitan*, *gamelan*, *macapat*, *sindhenan*, *wayang*, and related performance traditions, aesthetic value emerges not from isolated musical parameters but from the dynamic interaction among *laras* (tuning system), *pathet* (modal and expressive framework), *laya* (tempo), *garap* (interpretive realization), and *rasa* (embodied aesthetic experience). These concepts collectively establish an indigenous framework through which performers organize musical sound, negotiate interpretive choices, and communicate emotional, ethical, and spiritual meanings.

Rather than functioning as independent theoretical categories, *laras*, *pathet*, and *garap* form an inseparable aesthetic continuum. *Laras* provides the tonal foundation upon which melodic organization is constructed, whereas *pathet* regulates melodic movement, modal emphasis, and expressive atmosphere. *Garap* serves as the interpretive mechanism through which performers transform skeletal musical structures (*balungan*) into fully realized artistic performances by selecting appropriate *cengkok*, *wiled*, rhythmic articulation, ornamentation, and instrumental interaction. Through these interpretive processes, performers generate *rasa*, which represents not merely emotional expression but a culturally situated aesthetic experience encompassing refinement, balance, appropriateness, and collective understanding. Consequently, musical beauty within Indonesian traditions is regarded as the successful integration of structural coherence, interpretive sensitivity, and contextual awareness rather than technical precision alone (Daryanto et al., 2021; Mustika & Purwanto, 2021; Ochtaviani & Widodo, 2021; Pamuji et al., 2020; Wati & Prasadiyanto, 2022).

The literature further indicates that rhythm, tempo, and timbre occupy equally important positions within Indonesian musical aesthetics. *Laya* functions as the temporal heartbeat that governs musical pacing and shapes listeners' perceptions of emotional intensity and ceremonial atmosphere. Rather than representing a fixed tempo, *laya* interacts continuously with *pathet* and *garap*, allowing performers to manipulate musical tension, relaxation, solemnity, or dramatic progression according to ritual, theatrical, or social contexts. Similarly, timbre is understood not merely as an acoustic property but as an expressive resource shaped through instrumental technique, ensemble balance, and interpretive intention. Instrument-specific practices such as *kendhang garap*, *ciblon*, *wiled*, *rangkep*, and diverse realizations of *pelog* and *slendro* tuning systems demonstrate how timbral variation reinforces modal identity, ritual atmosphere, and aesthetic refinement (Rini & Sukerta, 2022).

Despite considerable regional diversity, the reviewed studies reveal remarkable conceptual consistency across Indonesian musical traditions. Whether examining Javanese *gamelan*, *macapat* singing, *sindhenan* performance, *wayang* accompaniment, or regional adaptations, researchers repeatedly identify the interaction among *laras*, *pathet*, and *garap* as the principal mechanism through which *rasa* is generated. Regional traditions differ in their inventories of *pathet*, preferred *laras*, ornamentation, and stylistic conventions, yet they share a common understanding that aesthetic

value emerges through interpretive realization rather than through musical structure alone. This shared conceptual foundation suggests that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics constitute a coherent philosophical system while simultaneously accommodating substantial regional diversity in performance grammar and musical practice (Sukisno, 2018).

Table 1. Core Components of Indonesian Traditional Musical Aesthetics

Aesthetic Component	Primary Function	Contribution to Musical Aesthetics
<i>Laras</i>	Tuning and tonal organization	Establishes pitch relationships and tonal identity
<i>Pathet</i>	Modal and expressive framework	Shapes atmosphere, melodic direction, and emotional character
<i>Laya</i>	Temporal organization	Regulates pacing, ceremonial flow, and expressive timing
<i>Garap</i>	Interpretive realization	Integrates musical structure with artistic creativity and contextual performance
<i>Rasa</i>	Embodied aesthetic experience	Represents refinement, balance, emotional depth, and cultural meaning
Timbre	Sonic coloration	Reinforces expressive identity and ritual atmosphere

Collectively, these findings indicate that Indonesian musical aesthetics should be understood as relational rather than reductionist. Musical quality arises through the interaction of structural organization, interpretive agency, social context, and embodied cultural knowledge, thereby distinguishing Indonesian aesthetic philosophy from analytical models that prioritize formal musical structure alone.

Cultural Identity and Collective Values

The literature consistently identifies Indonesian traditional music as a fundamental medium through which communities construct, preserve, and negotiate cultural identity. Musical traditions function not only as artistic expressions but also as repositories of collective memory, customary knowledge, regional history, and shared social values. Performance therefore serves simultaneously as cultural transmission, identity affirmation, and community participation.

Across numerous regional traditions, indigenous aesthetic concepts contribute directly to identity formation. Musical practices structured through *laras*, *pathet*, *garap*, and *rasa* embody localized understandings of refinement, morality, spirituality, and social harmony. These concepts distinguish regional musical identities while simultaneously reinforcing broader narratives of Indonesian cultural diversity. Studies of Surakarta and Yogyakarta karawitan demonstrate that stylistic differences in *garap*, melodic interpretation, vocal ornamentation, and ensemble interaction function as markers of regional identity without undermining the broader philosophical coherence of Javanese musical aesthetics (Widodo, 2015; Kurniawati et al., 2023; Setiawan, 2022).

Historical scholarship further demonstrates that musical works frequently function as symbols of political legitimacy, cultural continuity, and institutional identity. Court repertoires such as *gendhing*

panembrama and related ceremonial compositions have historically represented sovereignty, royal authority, and collective historical memory. These works illustrate that music communicates not only artistic values but also political symbolism, ceremonial legitimacy, and institutional continuity across periods of colonial intervention, state formation, and cultural transformation (Daryanto et al., 2021; Mustika & Purwanto, 2021).

Contemporary musical developments reveal that cultural identity remains dynamic rather than static. Hybrid genres, educational initiatives, community festivals, and intercultural collaborations demonstrate that Indonesian communities continuously reinterpret traditional musical knowledge to respond to urbanization, migration, globalization, and changing social environments. Rather than abandoning indigenous aesthetics, these adaptations frequently retain *garap*-based interpretive principles while incorporating new performance contexts, audiences, and artistic influences. Consequently, authenticity is increasingly understood as a process of culturally grounded continuity rather than the preservation of immutable historical forms (Nugraha, 2017).

The reviewed literature also highlights the importance of collective participation within Indonesian musical aesthetics. Ensemble coordination, mutual listening, intergenerational learning, and shared responsibility constitute essential aesthetic values that cannot be separated from musical performance itself. Community participation shapes musical quality by ensuring that aesthetic standards are maintained through lived practice rather than external regulation alone. This collective orientation is particularly evident in gamelan and related ensemble traditions, where successful performance depends upon cooperation, sensitivity, and reciprocal interaction among performers.

Table 2. Music as a Medium of Cultural Identity

Cultural Dimension	Musical Expression	Aesthetic Significance
Regional identity	Local repertoire, tuning systems, performance styles	Distinguishes regional traditions
Collective memory	Ceremonial compositions and historical repertoires	Preserves historical continuity
Community participation	Ensemble performance and apprenticeship	Sustains aesthetic knowledge
Cultural continuity	Oral transmission and adaptive performance	Balances preservation and innovation
National identity	Integration of diverse regional traditions	Represents Indonesian cultural pluralism

Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate that Indonesian traditional music functions simultaneously as aesthetic practice, cultural heritage, educational medium, and social institution. Musical identity is continually reproduced through performance, ritual participation, community engagement, and interpretive practice, allowing indigenous aesthetic concepts to remain relevant despite ongoing historical and technological transformation.

Ritual and Spiritual Dimensions

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that ritual and spirituality constitute inseparable components of Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics. Across Javanese *karawitan*, *wayang kulit*, *bedhaya*, *srimpi*, *macapat*, and other ceremonial traditions, music functions not only as artistic expression but also as a medium through which cosmological beliefs, ethical values, ancestral relationships, and communal identity are enacted. Consequently, aesthetic evaluation extends beyond technical proficiency to include ritual appropriateness, symbolic coherence, spiritual intention, and cultural legitimacy.

Within Javanese musical philosophy, concepts such as *kejawen*, *taksu*, *alus*, *garap*, and *rasa* provide an integrated ethical and spiritual framework guiding performance practice. The literature indicates that *garap* represents more than interpretive technique; it embodies moral responsibility by requiring performers to balance musical creativity with cultural propriety and ritual sensitivity. Likewise, *pathet* functions not only as a modal framework but also as an expressive vehicle through which changing emotional and spiritual atmospheres are articulated during ceremonial performances. Ritual sequences progressing from *pathet nem* through *sanga* to *manyura*, for example, symbolize broader philosophical narratives concerning human existence, social order, and spiritual progression (Pamuji et al., 2020; Ciptaningsih & Mistortiofy, 2022; Meloni, 2021).

Studies of palace traditions further reveal that aesthetic refinement (*alus*) is inseparable from

The findings of this review demonstrate that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics are most appropriately understood as integrated cultural systems rather than isolated musical structures. Across the literature, indigenous concepts such as *rasa*, *garap*, *laras*, and *pathet* consistently emerge as the principal analytical foundations through which musical beauty, emotional experience, ritual meaning, and social identity are interpreted. These concepts extend beyond technical descriptions of melody, tuning, or performance practice by providing epistemological frameworks that connect musical sound with ethical conduct, collective memory, spirituality, and cultural continuity. Consequently, indigenous aesthetic theories should occupy a more central position within contemporary musicology and cultural heritage scholarship rather than being treated merely as locally specific ethnographic observations. Their continued marginalization within broader theoretical discourse limits understanding of how non-Western musical traditions conceptualize artistic value, interpretation, and knowledge production.

The integration of indigenous aesthetic theories into contemporary scholarship requires a methodological shift from viewing concepts such as *garap*, *rasa*, and *pathet* as descriptive terminology toward recognizing them as comprehensive analytical frameworks. The reviewed studies repeatedly demonstrate that *garap* represents the primary interpretive mechanism through which performers transform musical structures into culturally meaningful artistic experiences. Likewise, *rasa* should be understood not simply as subjective emotional response but as an embodied and socially constructed aesthetic quality emerging from the interaction among tuning systems, modal organization, ritual context, interpretive decisions, and communal participation. These observations closely align with phenomenological approaches that interpret musical meaning through lived experience while simultaneously supporting hermeneutic perspectives that understand ritual performance as culturally meaningful texts embedded within broader historical and social contexts (Widodo, 2015; Fitrianto, 2019; Sunardi et al., 2023; Meloni, 2021). By

connecting indigenous epistemologies with broader interpretive traditions in musicology, anthropology, and heritage studies, scholars can develop more inclusive theoretical models that respect local knowledge systems without isolating them from international academic discourse (Hemetek et al., 2019; Amico, 2020; Savage & Brown, 2020).

A second important implication concerns the conceptual relationship among cultural continuity, innovation, authenticity, and musical transformation. Contrary to perspectives that position preservation and innovation as opposing objectives, the reviewed literature indicates that Indonesian musical traditions sustain continuity precisely through processes of creative reinterpretation. Across *karawitan*, *macapat*, contemporary gamelan composition, and hybrid musical genres, *garap* functions as the principal mechanism enabling musicians to negotiate inherited aesthetic conventions while responding to changing artistic, social, and technological environments. Innovation therefore does not necessarily undermine authenticity. Instead, authenticity is maintained when interpretive changes remain grounded in indigenous aesthetic principles, ritual ethics, and community authority. This understanding reframes tradition as a living cultural process rather than a fixed historical artifact. The continuity of Indonesian musical aesthetics thus depends less upon preserving identical musical forms than upon sustaining the interpretive knowledge, ethical values, and cultural relationships through which those forms acquire meaning (Mustika & Purwanto, 2021; Gunawan et al., 2022; Widodo et al., 2021).

This interpretation further supports heritage theories that conceptualize authenticity as a negotiated cultural relationship rather than an immutable historical condition. Community memory, oral transmission, *garap*-based pedagogy, and ritual participation collectively provide mechanisms through which authenticity is continually reconstructed across generations. Such an understanding challenges preservation strategies that prioritize standardized documentation while overlooking the embodied, performative, and relational dimensions of musical knowledge. Although notation systems, digital archives, and institutional documentation remain valuable tools for safeguarding repertoire, they cannot substitute for the interpretive expertise transmitted through apprenticeship, collective rehearsal, ceremonial participation, and long-term engagement within musical communities. Accordingly, the review reinforces arguments that community governance and locally grounded educational practices should remain central components of cultural heritage policy, particularly when responding to contemporary pressures associated with commercialization, globalization, and digital dissemination (Setyoko et al., 2023; Zustiyanoro et al., 2022).

The findings also highlight the importance of balancing wider public accessibility with community ownership and ethical responsibility. Tourism, cultural festivals, digital platforms, and international collaborations have substantially increased the visibility of Indonesian traditional music while creating valuable opportunities for intercultural exchange, education, and economic sustainability. Nevertheless, these developments simultaneously introduce risks of aesthetic simplification, ritual decontextualization, commodification, and unequal cultural representation. Heritage governance should therefore extend beyond technical preservation to encompass ethical principles including informed community participation, equitable benefit-sharing, culturally appropriate representation, and respect for local interpretive authority. Such an approach recognizes that Indonesian traditional music constitutes living cultural heritage whose value derives not only from

artistic products but also from the communities that continually create, interpret, and sustain them through everyday cultural practice.

The emergence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence further expands this discussion by demonstrating that technological innovation is not inherently incompatible with indigenous musical aesthetics. Rather, the challenge lies in determining how technological tools can support, rather than replace, embodied musical knowledge. Digital archives, virtual performances, streaming platforms, and computational analysis have increased access to Indonesian traditional music, facilitated documentation, and encouraged new forms of scholarly collaboration. Similarly, artificial intelligence offers promising opportunities for notation analysis, repertoire classification, educational support, and compositional experimentation. Nevertheless, the literature consistently emphasizes that these technologies cannot replicate the embodied interpretive processes through which *garap*, *rasa*, *laras*, and *pathet* acquire cultural meaning. Musical interpretation remains inseparable from lived experience, ritual participation, interpersonal interaction, and long-term apprenticeship within communities of practice. Consequently, future technological development should be guided by human-centered design principles that position artificial intelligence as an assistive rather than autonomous component of cultural transmission. Such an approach acknowledges that indigenous musical knowledge is simultaneously cognitive, embodied, ethical, and communal, extending beyond information that can be encoded within computational systems (Kurniawati et al., 2023; Murtana, 2019).

The discussion also underscores the importance of strengthening community participation and cultural rights within heritage governance. Contemporary debates concerning commercialization, tourism, digital dissemination, and intellectual property increasingly reveal tensions between public accessibility and community ownership. While wider dissemination enhances cultural visibility and economic opportunities, it may also expose traditional repertoires to unauthorized appropriation, decontextualization, or commercial exploitation. The reviewed scholarship therefore advocates governance models that recognize local communities as primary custodians of musical heritage, ensuring that decisions concerning documentation, performance, adaptation, and digital circulation are undertaken through participatory processes grounded in informed consent, equitable benefit-sharing, and respect for customary authority. Community-centered governance further reinforces the educational functions of traditional music by supporting apprenticeship, local ensembles, school partnerships, and intergenerational knowledge transfer, thereby maintaining the interpretive continuity that underpins aesthetic authenticity (Widodo et al., 2021; Zustiyanoro et al., 2022).

These findings also carry important implications for cultural policy and educational practice. National heritage programs should move beyond preservation strategies that prioritize documentation alone and instead support living cultural systems through sustained investment in community institutions, regional cultural centers, and locally grounded educational initiatives. Formal education can contribute significantly to safeguarding traditional music when curricula emphasize indigenous aesthetic concepts alongside practical performance, oral transmission, and contextual understanding. Likewise, collaborations among universities, cultural organizations, local governments, and community ensembles can strengthen both scholarly research and public engagement while respecting regional diversity and local autonomy. Such partnerships are

particularly important for addressing uneven regional representation within existing scholarship, where traditions from Java and Bali remain substantially more visible than those of Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, Papua, and other regions. Expanding research and educational investment across Indonesia will contribute to a more balanced understanding of the country's musical diversity while reducing geographical disparities in heritage documentation and academic attention (Setyoko et al., 2023; Astono, 2022; Daryanto, 2019).

Future research should therefore prioritize several complementary directions. First, comparative ethnographic investigations across underrepresented regions are needed to document local *garap* traditions, *patbet* systems, tuning practices, and performance grammars, thereby enriching existing theoretical models derived primarily from Central Java. Second, empirical studies should examine how digital platforms, algorithmic recommendation systems, and social media influence aesthetic judgment, audience formation, and cultural participation within contemporary Indonesian musical communities. Third, interdisciplinary collaboration among ethnomusicology, cultural heritage studies, digital humanities, law, education, and artificial intelligence research would facilitate the development of ethically grounded technological innovations that support rather than diminish indigenous knowledge systems. Finally, greater attention should be devoted to governance frameworks addressing community ownership, cultural rights, intellectual property, and benefit-sharing in order to ensure that expanding global visibility contributes to cultural sustainability rather than cultural extraction. Collectively, these research priorities reflect the growing need to integrate indigenous epistemologies with contemporary scholarship while preserving the cultural integrity of living musical traditions (Astono, 2022; Karsono, 2024; Yang & Welch, 2022).

Overall, this review demonstrates that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics are best understood as dynamic and adaptive systems in which continuity and transformation coexist through culturally grounded interpretive practice. Indigenous concepts such as *rasa*, *garap*, *laras*, and *patbet* continue to provide the philosophical foundations through which musicians negotiate artistic creativity, ritual obligation, community identity, and historical change. Their significance extends beyond Indonesian music itself by offering valuable theoretical contributions to international discussions concerning musical aesthetics, intangible cultural heritage, phenomenology, cultural governance, and knowledge diversity. Recognizing these indigenous frameworks as legitimate scholarly concepts enriches contemporary musicology while promoting more inclusive and culturally responsive approaches to heritage research and policy. Ultimately, the long-term sustainability of Indonesian traditional music depends not only upon preserving musical repertoires but also upon safeguarding the communities, ethical values, interpretive traditions, and cultural relationships that continually give those repertoires meaning.

CONCLUSION

This narrative literature review examined the foundations, development, and contemporary transformation of Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics by synthesizing scholarship from ethnomusicology, musicology, cultural heritage studies, anthropology, and related disciplines. The review demonstrates that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics constitute multidimensional cultural systems in which musical structure, interpretive practice, ritual meaning, spirituality, ethical

values, collective participation, and cultural identity are inseparably interconnected. Rather than understanding aesthetics solely as the appreciation of sonic beauty, indigenous concepts such as *laras*, *patihet*, *garap*, and *rasa* reveal that musical value is constructed through culturally situated relationships among performers, communities, ceremonial contexts, and historical traditions.

The synthesis further indicates that *garap* functions as the principal interpretive mechanism through which inherited musical structures are transformed into meaningful artistic performances. In interaction with *laras* and *patihet*, *garap* produces *rasa*, an embodied aesthetic experience that integrates musical organization with emotional sensitivity, ritual appropriateness, and ethical responsibility. These indigenous concepts therefore represent comprehensive theoretical frameworks rather than isolated technical terminology, providing valuable contributions to contemporary scholarship on musical aesthetics, performance studies, and intangible cultural heritage.

The review also demonstrates that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics have continually evolved through historical encounters with colonialism, nationalism, modernization, globalization, and digital transformation. These historical processes have influenced repertoire development, educational systems, notation practices, institutional structures, and performance contexts while simultaneously generating new opportunities for artistic innovation and intercultural dialogue. Nevertheless, the literature consistently shows that continuity has been maintained through *garap*-based interpretation, community participation, oral transmission, ritual practice, and locally grounded systems of knowledge. Consequently, preservation and innovation should not be regarded as contradictory objectives but as complementary processes through which living traditions adapt to changing social, cultural, and technological environments.

Contemporary developments, including commercialization, cultural tourism, digital media, streaming platforms, and artificial intelligence, create both significant opportunities and substantial challenges for Indonesian traditional music. These developments expand public accessibility, educational dissemination, documentation, and international recognition, yet they also introduce risks associated with aesthetic simplification, ritual decontextualization, commercialization, cultural appropriation, and weakened community authority. The literature therefore emphasizes that technological innovation and global dissemination should remain grounded in ethical governance, community participation, informed consent, equitable benefit-sharing, and respect for indigenous epistemologies. Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies should be understood as complementary tools that support documentation, education, and creative exploration rather than substitutes for embodied musical knowledge acquired through apprenticeship and lived cultural practice.

One of the principal contributions of this review is the development of an integrated conceptual framework linking indigenous aesthetic philosophy, cultural identity, ritual meaning, historical transformation, heritage preservation, and contemporary technological change. By synthesizing diverse strands of scholarship within a unified analytical perspective, the review demonstrates that Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics should be understood as dynamic systems of cultural knowledge rather than static historical artifacts. This framework contributes to international discussions concerning ethnomusicology, cultural heritage governance, phenomenology,

performance studies, and interdisciplinary music research by positioning indigenous Indonesian concepts as theoretically significant contributions to global scholarship.

Several directions for future research emerge from this synthesis. Greater scholarly attention should be directed toward musical traditions from underrepresented regions beyond Central Java and Bali, thereby providing a more balanced understanding of Indonesia's musical diversity. Comparative investigations examining regional *garap* traditions, *patbet* systems, tuning practices, and ritual performance would enrich existing theoretical models while acknowledging the plurality of Indonesian musical cultures. Furthermore, interdisciplinary studies integrating ethnomusicology, digital humanities, cultural policy, artificial intelligence, education, and legal scholarship are needed to examine the long-term implications of technological innovation, platform governance, community ownership, and cultural rights within rapidly changing musical environments.

Ultimately, the long-term sustainability of Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics depends not only on preserving musical repertoires, instruments, or performance techniques but also on safeguarding the communities, interpretive traditions, ethical values, ritual contexts, and cultural relationships that continually renew their meaning. Strengthening community-centered governance, *garap*-based pedagogy, culturally responsive education, and ethically informed digital preservation will enable Indonesian traditional music to remain a living, evolving heritage capable of contributing to both national cultural resilience and international scholarly understanding. In doing so, Indonesian traditional musical aesthetics will continue to demonstrate that musical beauty is fundamentally inseparable from cultural memory, social responsibility, and the dynamic creativity of the communities that sustain it.

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