

## Ngajeng Wong Kalang yard, in harmony with nature: Ethnographic approach in Kalang Village, Lumansari Village, Gemuh District, Kendal Regency - Central Java

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received April 14, 2023 Received in revised form Dec. 01, 2023 Accepted January 08, 2024 Available online April 01, 2024</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Kalang tradition Obong tradition Omah tradition</p> <p>*Corresponding author: Stefanus Prabani Setio Architecture Study Program, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Katolik Darma Cendika, Indonesia Email: <a href="mailto:stefanprabani@ukdc.ac.id">stefanprabani@ukdc.ac.id</a> ORCID: <a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1893-2696">https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1893-2696</a></p>	<p><i>Pekarangan ngajeng (Ngajeng yard) is an open area at the front of the residence. Ngajeng yards are formed based on the division of residential land. The formation of the Ngajeng yard is based on tradition. The Ngajeng yard's use is determined by social, religious, traditional, and agricultural factors. The ngajeng yard is still preserved by the Kalang village's Javanese sub-ethnic group, the Kalang. The advantage of the ngajeng yard space as a path for the sun's movement is provided by the Limasap house, where the Kalang people reside, being oriented towards the North and South. Specifically, the objective of the ngajeng yard following the direction of the sun's movement will be covered in this research. The methods used are 1) ethnography, describing traditions related to the Ngajeng yard as well as religious aspects and beliefs of the Kalang people; 2) Analysis of the sun's movement in the East to West trajectory. The orientation of the traditional Limasap omah (house) building influences the existence of the ngajeng yard; 3) The next stage is looking for a belief system through ontology, explanation, prediction, axiology, practice, and epistemology approaches. At this stage, a belief system about the Ngajeng yard is obtained. Thus, it can be concluded that the Ngajeng yard is an open space that has various functions for the Kalang people. These functions are 1) Social function, as a communication, mitigation, and security space; 2) The function of tradition, as a space for the obong tradition to lead ancestors to nirvana; 3) Agricultural function, related to tandur (planting) traditions and harvest traditions. The belief system that is formed is a legacy of tradition related to the implementation of the wong (people) Kalang tradition.</i></p>

### Introduction

Conventional settlement patterns typically exhibit a particular attitude toward the natural world (Lake 2022). Generation after generation inherits this orientation. Traditional notions of nature serve as the foundation for settlement orientation (Tarigan 2023). The ancestors examined the universe and its gifts to determine whether they were appropriate for human use (Widodo 2019). These pursuits develop into customary knowledge

that permeates everyday life (Rahmawati, Arifin, and Dwisusanto 2023). As a result, it becomes conventional historical knowledge (Hermawan 2023). The traditional Kalang people of the Indonesian island of Java, primarily in Kendal Regency, Central Java, have incorporated this traditional knowledge into their settlement pattern. The village is referred to as Kalang village. The people are known as *wong* (people) Kalang. This community group has a custom of carrying on the traditions of their Kalang



forefathers. A sub-ethnic group of Javanese people identified as Wong Kalang maintains customs based on their ancestry. The customs upheld are those of the Kalang people, and their ancestors are Kalang ancestors. The Kalang tradition involves a lot of activities. The Kalang tradition covers many aspects of life carried out in the *ngajeng* yard, *omah* Limasap and *wingking* yard. Apart from inheriting traditions, ancestors also inherited village spatial patterns, village facilities and house orientation in Kalang village.

The life of the Kalang people, known to have existed since the 8th century, is written in the Harinjing inscription (804 AD) (Lelono 1989). History records the existence of the Kalang people in the administrations of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom (17 AD), the Majapahit Kingdom (1292 AD), and the Hindu Mataram Kingdom (732 AD). The Kalang people were conveyed to the peri-peri regions of the Islamic Mataram kingdom under King Sultan Agung to build food barns.

The distribution of the Javanese-Kalang sub-ethnicity was detected in several areas, including Tegal Gendu (KotaGede) Yogyakarta, Petanahan, and Ambal in Kebumen, Pekalongan, Semarang, Walikukun, Madiun, Tulungagung, Surabaya, and in the Banyuwangi area (Warto 2001).

The life of the Kalang people in several areas still exists, such as in the Bojonegoro Regency, East Java, and Kendal Regency, Central Java, which still has the Kalang community (Muslichin 2011).

Heirs to the Kalang tradition as true Kalang descendants (the term for Kalang people who still carry out their ancestral traditions), preserving Kalang traditions. Traditions are carried out individually, in families, and groups. This tradition can only be carried out in Kalang village. Routine traditions follow the Javanese *petunias dino* (counting days based on the Javanese calendar) and incidentals based on the *dino geblak* or *dino sedo* (day of death) of family members. Kenduri tradition, thanksgiving, and prayers for the safety for family members. The traditions that are carried out regularly are the Ewuh tradition, and the Sadran tradition. Meanwhile, the incidental tradition is the Obong tradition (Pemerintah desa Lumansari 2016).

The Kalang forefathers established Kalang Village. In the village, the Kalang tradition has been passed down from generation to generation. Specifically, the historical and architectural artifacts in Kalang village are arranged in

accordance with the direction that the buildings face, both north and south. A residential pattern and settlement from the Islamic Mataram era, the Hindu Mataram kingdom, and the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace (Junianto 2012).

Kalang Village is a place where people live and practice their customs. Only Kalang village can perform any Kalang tradition. The Kalang people become exclusive as a result of their customs. This implies that the Kalang people are limited to performing their customs within their group and their village. All things considered, the yard or village serves as a location for the performance of customs. The village line thus becomes the line defining customary activities.

The movement of light and dark in the sun is connected to the way customs are performed in Kalang village. This has been associated with the farming practices of the Kalang people. The cardinal direction is the orientation of this conventional relationship with the sun. Our ancestors studied the universe's relationship between space and time in traditional orders that were frequently connected to social rituals (Masruri 2013). Space as a place of activity and time is related to the activities of the Kalang people. Belief in the universe by these ancestors is related to the activities of wong kalang as subjects and implementing traditions related to belief, order of life, and agricultural activities, will have a big influence on the way of life of traditional communities.

#### Appreciating nature's gifts

Traditional society in everyday life is always oriented towards the universe (Rahmawati, Arifin, and Dwisusanto 2023; Pradono 2019). Knowledge about the universe is learned through experience, natural phenomena, and studying natural cycles, this knowledge is also studied by scientists (Suprpto 1996).

Wolff divides it into two parts, encompassing general metaphysics (ontology) and special metaphysics. In special metaphysics, there are three types, namely: Cosmological (Universe), Anthropological (Psychology), and Theological (Philosophy) (Maiwan 2012; Zulhelmi 2019; Vidal 2014). The conventional order of life is influenced by the order of the universe as it is understood in science. The spatial planning pattern of the Kalang village, which is oriented towards the North and South in the *omah* Limasap (traditional Kalang people's house), is implemented in the agrarian way of life of the

Kalang people. This orientation is comparable to the North-South orientation of the Yogyakarta Palace, which represents the Javanese tradition. In actuality, though, Kalang village has a different orientation. Concerning this orientation, they have customs. Living in harmony with nature is the result of being close to it. Living in balance with the natural world is a matter of local knowledge that contributes to its preservation (Poespowardojo 1986; Suhartini 2009). With tradition, the Kalang people shape their self-awareness into something unique, determining new guidelines for how knowledge and truth can be achieved. Awareness of traditional knowledge as a means and religiosity are self-limitations for behavior (Zulhelmi 2019; Hasbunallah 2018).

Harmony with nature is knowledge of how humans behave towards the universe and respond to phenomena that will occur. Excessive management results in imbalance. Meanwhile, wise management will provide benefits. The ancestral goal is in harmony with nature to achieve balance. Balance is the hope between utilization, management, and conservation (Maridi 2015).

Humans are faced with a cosmological perspective in time and this will systematically influence their lives (Adom 2018; Bakker 1995).

Research conducted on Kalang people in Kalang village shows that life cannot be separated from tradition. Life in the *Andangan* room of *omah* Limasap shows the tradition of forming the *Kiwo* room and the *Tengen* room meaning *kiwo* (weak) and *tengen* (strong). Likewise, the *Lengkong* Room has become a tradition as a mitigation space. Space in the Kalang tradition is formed based on ancestral traditions which are believed to be about respecting and living in harmony with nature.

The *ngajeng* yard is an important space related to the agricultural life of the Kalang people. The existence of a *ngajeng* yard is very important for the agricultural cycle that is carried out, namely: *Mbibit* (seedlings) – *Tandur* (planting) – *Panen* (agricultural products). The cycle carried out in the *Ngajeng* yard is *Mbibit* sows' seeds in the initial planting medium and harvests by drying the agricultural products.

The closeness of Kalang people to Javanese ethnicity

Kalang is a Javanese sub-ethnicity (Kholiq 2017), this shows that Kalang is not Javanese but is within the scope of Javanese ethnicity. The

existence of Kalang is different because of the traditions that follow the traditions inherited from their ancestors. The existence of *wong* Kalang was detected living in the forests of Java and frequently appears in crowded places such as markets and other colossal events (Pontjosoetirto 1971). Becoming a marginalized group that lives in groups in the central areas of the kingdom/government. Their whereabouts have been recorded by the Dutch government (Warto 2001). The people of Kalang are close to the Javanese ethnic group, absorbing a lot of Javanese culture as a form of adjustment.

Only the implementation of traditions will show the identity of the Kalang people. Likewise, the Kalang village area has become a limited traditional area (Hastorahmanto, Soetomo, and Sardjono 2020). The group leader is administratively invisible, but the traditional leader will appear as the inheritor of the tradition that was revealed by the ancestors (Muslichin 2009).

## Methods

Ethnography is employed as a research approach because it has research stages that make it possible to follow ethnic activities (Groat and Wang 2013; Ratnasari and Sudradjat 2023). These are cultural or traditional activities that are practiced by various ethnic groups (Ratnasari and Sudradjat 2023). The Kalang ethnic group's explanation of the domain will serve as the foundation for an ethnographic analysis of its meaning (Suprapti et al. 2010). Through an ethnographic approach following the *wong* Kalang tradition in the *Ngajeng* yard, performed in several stages. Stages of the research: 1) Conducting a mini tour within the scope of Kalang village. Aims to find problems that occur concerning nature; 2) Finding the problem. The gap between expectations and reality in the settlement structure is of concern to researchers. The *ngajeng* yard in some houses has changed its function. However, the tradition of *tandur* and *panen* is still generated in the *Ngajeng* yard; 3) Examining the problem, problems arise when land is limited so they have to move to another place. The tradition also moved out of the *ngajeng* yard; 4) Determining the informant. Questions arise and who should I ask? 5) Following the activities of *Wong* Kalang. Asking questions is

part of research, but an ethnographic approach provides an opportunity to be active in local traditions and culture; 6) Finding domains. Domains emerge that are only specific to the *wong* Kalang tradition, so specific understanding and definitions are needed; 7) Analyzing semantic domain relationships. The domains found are related to activities or traditions so semantic relationship analysis is needed; 8) Creating structural questions; 9) Arranging a taxonomic analysis; 10) Asking contrasting questions. Domains sometimes need to be differentiated from different activities to better understand their definition and meaning; 11) Discovering cultural themes. All the activities participated in by the Kalang ethnic group reveal cultural meanings and themes (Naidoo 2012).

At these stages, questions were asked about the activities performed by the Kalang people related to the Ngajeng yard. There are so many activities carried out in the Ngajeng yard, but the activity patterns will be mapped into several activity groups so that the activity patterns become clear. After grouping, it was found that activities were sporadic, structured and traditions could be explained as follows: 1) Sporadic activities were seen as activities that had no pattern that tended to be carried out anywhere and spread; 2) Structured activities have a neatly arranged pattern; 3) Traditional activities are activities that are repeated over a certain period and have been conducted from generation to generation.

Of the three groups of *wong* Kalang activities, structured activities and traditions have a relationship. This relationship becomes an activity that can explain the orientation of the building and grounds of Ngajeng. These two groups of activities are the subject of discussion that will answer the function of the ngajeng yard where the Kalang people live.

The activities performed by the Kalang people in the Ngajeng yard show a tradition. This tradition is an ancestral heritage that continues to be preserved today. It is visible that there are similarities in the activities carried out in the Ngajeng yard. These similarities can be categorized into: 1) Time; 2) Type of activity; 3) Subject; and 4) Object. meanwhile, the traditional activities carried out can be divided into 1) Spiritual tradition activities; 2) Social tradition activities; and 3) Agricultural tradition activities. These three activities are seen in a series of dark and light conditions marked by the solar cycle.

## Results and discussion

For the people of Kalang, the ngajeng yard is not a yard as a condition of residence. Ngajeng yard occurs through a tradition and is used for traditions, encompassing:

### 1. Spritual traditional activities

In the Kalang people's life, the essence is that humans can control nature. Mastery means a wise attitude. Being wise and looking after is a noble attitude. A noble attitude is a gift for human life (Sukman 2014). This is based on the spirit, mind, and heart which are at the highest level of the spiritual structure.

Typically, traditional activities are performed either before or after sunrise. The custom, which ends at midnight or before dawn, is surrounded by a gloomy atmosphere. The Ewuh custom is performed in the dark, early hours of the morning. To request protection from their ancestors for every member of the family, mothers prepare offerings. All of the offerings have been placed in different locations and mantras (prayers) are recited before sunrise. After all the offerings are finished, the mothers will come out and greet other mothers as neighbors saying "*wis rampung*" (has done) it is finished. This means that the Ewuh tradition has been implemented. However, this tradition is not yet complete, because there is still a second offering that will be prepared after sunset, until the middle of the grave. After the mantra is recited, it is placed on the *amben* (a wide bed usually placed in the *pawon* (kitchen)). Then they gathered with their families to eat *gemblong* and banana *sepet*.

Meanwhile, the Obong tradition is also performed at night until the morning before the sun rises. The activity carried out is *mendak seunggal* (one year after the death of a sibling (family member)). The tradition begins with the recitation of mantras (prayers) by the Sonteng shaman with offerings and *Mantenan* (wooden dolls made up like humans). In the morning before sunrise, the obong tradition is carried out. The obong tradition is burning *omah-omahan*, *mantenan* and *sandangan*. The orientation of the front of the house is towards the West which means the direction of Nirvana. while the morning before welcomes a bright day so that the journey to nirvana is bright and smooth. This *obong* tradition is applied in the Ngajeng yard.



Figure 1. Omah Limasap wong Kalang

## 2. Social tradition activities

In this social tradition, it involves many people and neighbors. The people who came were *sedulur* (brothers) and neighbors around the house. This tradition includes a larger yard and borrowing a neighbor's yard. Borrowing the yard because it requires a large yard. Borrowing these yards is possible because the *ngajeng* yards of each household do not have boundaries between each other. The *ngajeng* yard is open without any massive eyes. The traditions carried out are usually Mantu traditions. *Duwe gawe* (having a celebration/event) is often mentioned by the Kalang people. *Duwe gawe* is when parents marry their children. The daughters of the Kalang family are married off according to this custom. Since most weddings happen during the day, they are bright. As a result, the families that are being fostered always receive clarity in a variety of challenges and are clear in their problem-solving processes.



Figure 2. Ngajeng yard without guardrail, east and west environmental street.

## 3. Agricultural tradition activities

Farming is the Kalang people's primary occupation. The Kalang people first arrived in Kendal Regency to cultivate land in the Mataram Kingdom's peri-peri area. Those Kalang people from the Mataram kingdom who were skilled

farmers were transferred to the West to work on unspoiled land during Sultan Agung's reign. During that time, Kendal was a swamp that was good for growing rice. Thus, those with the ability to cultivate rice fields were sent. Among the residents who were sent were those who followed the Kalang tradition, which dates back to the Hindu Mataram kingdom. They formed a group and were permitted to labor in the rice fields. Members of the same group adhere to the Kalang tradition, they started to establish a village and continue to carry out the Kalang tradition. This has been passed down from generation to generation until now. Until now, he is still cultivating rice fields/agriculture and continuing to carry out ancestral traditions.

About the Ngajeng yard, the Kalang people's ancestral tradition utilizes it as a customary area for agriculture, specifically: 1) The Tandur tradition, which calls for planting plants in the Ngajeng yard. To encourage the growth of shoots, seeds are sown and spread out in an open area. If the newly formed shoots are exposed to direct sunlight, they will perform well. As the sun moves from east to west, shoot growth will be even. 2) Harvest tradition: this tradition aims to produce agricultural products. Grain farming after harvesting necessitates a sun-dried process. In the *ngajeng* yard, on a floor made of *gedhek* (woven bamboo), the grain is sun-dried. The heat of the sun from morning to evening will heat the grain evenly throughout the day. The tradition of *tandur* and *panen* can be perceived in activities that are continuously formed and performed periodically. This pattern of activities conducted simultaneously (massively) has a structured pattern and has clear benefits. In contextual agricultural theology, it is an agricultural activity that maintains the sustainability of the universe. There needs to be an altruistic attitude, placing the interests of other people, including the universe, as the orientation of action (Panjaitan 2020). Altrius' actions are reflected in activities that listen to and follow the sound of nature and maintain its sustainability.



Figure 3. Agricultural tradition activities

#### Life patterns based on nature

In the Kalang village structure, changes continue to occur in line with the increasing level of community knowledge. It illustrates several changes in the function of the yard which are different from tradition. This change was caused by a shift in work. Kalang Village still shows *uri-uri* (preserving) ancestral heritage. *Uri-uri* in carrying out traditions sometimes hinder and conflict with other activities. The *uri-uri* of ancestral traditions is more about respecting ancestors, but in practice, it is just passing on traditions but not giving meaning to these traditions (VG Sri Rejeki, Nindy Soewarno, Sudaryono 2010).

Wong Kalang as a Javanese sub-ethnic carries out traditional activities passed down from their ancestors (Muslichin 2011). This heritage is a system of life values that is closely related to nature. Nature in the Kalang people's way of life is closely related to the values that regulate a good life, respecting and being oriented towards nature.

The settlement structure, which encounters the macrocosm, demonstrates a nature orientation. The power of the universe is understood to be the macrocosm. The residential environment of Kalang village is governed by forces that are both a part of natural forces and operate like a microcosm (Setiohastorahmanto, Soetomo, and Sardjono 2018).

The power of the cosmos becomes something that has spiritual power for the Kalang people. Strength is an unavoidable part of life but can be followed as an expression of gratitude for the gifts received (Sukman 2014).

The four primary cardinal directions—East, West, North, and South—are represented in the spatial layout of the Kalang settlement. The Kalang people's agricultural activity patterns are connected to the orientation. The cosmos is the basis for this orientation's firmness rather than the government or center of power. Conventional settlement layouts typically have a building orientation that points toward the government center. The ruler controls the layout of the settlements (Cahyandari 2017). The orientation established by the Kalang ancestors shows the existence of natural forces that guide their activities and natural forces that support the activities of the Kalang people.

The agrarian life of the Kalang ancestors inherited a building orientation that was interpreted as harmony with the macro cosmos. This harmony is carried out as a form of utilizing the cosmos for the survival of life. The phrase Kalang is a tradition (Muslichin 2011) is a manifestation of the life of the Kalang people who live according to tradition.

The settlements' North or South orientation is a pattern that developed as a result of the Kalang people's agricultural way of life. Large-scale residential arrangements form solid space patterns. A pattern of void space will arise from open space. Two *ngajeng* yards that face one another form an open space known as the void space pattern. The newly created *ngajeng* yard was utilized as Kalang village's common area and facility. Residential blocks are connected by roads made of Kalang village infrastructure. In the meantime, using the shared yard serves as a custom. Activities that are customary in the *ngajeng* yard are associated with farming.

The *ngajeng* yard which stretches from East to West provides benefits to the Kalang people. This path is the path of the sun which provides light and heat throughout the day. This is used by the

Kalang people as a form of nature's gift to the agrarian way of life they adhere to. This agrarian way of life shows a religious attitude towards *Pangeran* or Prince (the One Who Regulates Nature).

## Conclusions

As an explanation of harmony with nature in the Kalang settlement, it refers in detail to the belief system approach (Vidal 2008), it can be concluded: (1) Ontologically. The Ngajeng Yard in the Kalang settlement is an ancestral heritage that is still maintained today. Its existence has a connection with nature and traditional activities; (2) Explanation. The existing Ngajeng yard is a legacy of Kalang ancestors who were the founders of Kalang village. The Kalang ancestors, as an agricultural community, planned their settlement as a residence that could be used as a place for farming activities while at home or as an activity for family members who were not in the agricultural fields; (3) Prediction. With agriculture serving as the primary source of income, the natural environment is largely unchanged from that of their ancestors' lives. Although there are more homes and residents overall, some homes have had their functions altered in response to shifting activity levels. Natural sustainability is impacted by the way buildings are oriented concerning their surroundings and activities. a local knowledge that has prioritized the environment as the primary foundation for the development of communities; (4) Axiology. Preserving and upholding the current Kalang village structure requires explaining to future generations—who are susceptible to change—the traditional beliefs surrounding the Kalang settlement structure. The world today often does not comprehend how our predecessors thought. The propensity to modify and adjust to the requirements and pursuits of the moment. focused on technology, abandoning the conventional in the process, using natural resources to preserve life and the environment; (5) Praxeology, Preserving the noble plans of ancestors so that there is harmony with nature. Revitalize the function of the Ngajeng yard according to its intended purpose; (6) Epistemology, Kalang ancestors had noble thoughts regarding the natural gifts given. Harmony with nature is a thought about utilizing

nature, appreciating and preserving it. Nature provides good gifts for human life. The balance between humans and nature will be achieved.

## Suggestions

Traditional lifestyles exhibit harmony with the natural world. The shift from conventional to contemporary patterns also results in a shift in orientation—from one concentrated on nature to one focused on profit.

To go back to customs and traditional ways of thinking that are focused on protecting the environment through communal living patterns, it is necessary to consider the policy of an agrarian lifestyle system.

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**Author(s) contribution**

**Stefanus Prabani Setio** contributed to the research concepts preparation, methodologies, investigations, data analysis, visualization, articles drafting and revisions.

**Heristama Anugerah Putra** contribute to the research concepts preparation and literature reviews, data analysis, of article drafts preparation and validation.

