

THE DYNAMICS OF JAVANESE CULTURE IN THE *NUSWANTARA* TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

The shifting meaning of Javanese culture is a central theme in Tunggono's Nuswantara trilogy. This topic is important to explore, as the social criticism embedded in these fictional works warrants careful analysis. This descriptive qualitative research aims to explain the role of Javanese locality as a critique of sociocultural dynamics in the trilogy. Swingewood's sociology of literature and van Peursen's theory of cultural dynamics are applied as analytical frameworks. The researcher serves as a human instrument, gathering data through heuristic reading, hermeneutic interpretation, and note-taking. The data are processed using content analysis, which includes condensation, display, conclusion drawing, and verification. The findings indicate that the Javanese cultural dynamics in the trilogy can be categorized into three domains. First, mystical thought encompasses Hindu–Kejawen practices associated with shamans, the controversial jamasan keris ritual, offerings (sajen) and incense (dupa) to summon spirits (dedemit), mystical gamelan, and the perception of spiritual knowledge as identical with supernatural science. Second, ontological thought presents social critiques that challenge mystical traditions, contending that such beliefs do not correspond to the authentic essence of Javanese locality. Third, functional thought highlights critiques that link cultural practices to their societal and practical functions, underscoring the adaptability of Javanese culture within contemporary contexts. Tunggono's cross-cultural engagement contributes to revitalizing discourse on Javanese cultural dynamics in literature, carried out with a strong sense of intellectual responsibility. The research affirms that Javanese culture remains open to interpretation, reflection, and critical inquiry, offering rich possibilities for ongoing scholarly examination of its evolving significance.

Keywords: cultural dynamics, Javanese locality, social reality, sociology of literature

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are deeply connected to the social and cultural environments in which they are produced. As Teeuw (1983) argues, literature does not arise in a social and cultural vacuum. Since the late 19th century, critics have emphasized the importance of examining literature as a reflection of its historical and social context (Damono, 2022). In this regard, 21st century literary works remain tied to the cultural issues of contemporary society, including the erosion of local values under globalization.

Many Indonesians overlook the preservation of local traditions (Aldi & Khairanis, 2025; Polizzi

& Harrison, 2022). Instead, local traditions are often perceived as perceiving them as outdated. Meanwhile, foreign ideologies—such as individualism, secularism, liberalism, and futurism—are viewed as more modern and prestigious. These perspectives, aligned with globalization, contribute to neglect of cultural heritage (Rahaya et al., 2020).

If left unaddressed, these issues risk escalating into broader social disorientation. Indonesian identity, rooted in noble ethics, is threatened by the rapid evolution of modernity (Azizah, 2023). Internalizing ancestral wisdom thus becomes essential to preserve national values. Regional locality represents ethical counsel from past generations and strengthens

community character in line with social norms (Dwiputra & Sundawa, 2023; Imron et al., 2023; Karomah & Masyuri, 2024; Parhan & Dwiputra, 2023). The internalization of local knowledge can be advanced through literary literacy, which positions literature as an educational medium for character development. Literature encourages readers to appreciate cultural values while navigating modern complexity, serving both aesthetic and pedagogical functions.

As a collective cultural heritage, literature embodies wisdom inherited from previous generations. Indonesian literature, deeply rooted in indigenous traditions is inseparable from regional locality (Sayuti, 2011). A notable example is Victoria Tunggono's *Nuswantara* trilogy, which reflects shifting Javanese cultural dynamics and shows how literature preserves and reinterprets ancestral values in the present era.

The trilogy follows a group of young people exploring Java to access a magical portal linking the contemporary world with the Majapahit Kingdom in the late 13th century. Through these adventures, they learn about Hindu Kejawen traditions, including the use of incense (*dupa*) and offerings (*sajen*), spiritual knowledge, the *jamasan keris ritual*, and other culturally significant practices. The narrative illustrates how literature can document and interpret local cultural dynamics.

The reflection of Javanese cultural dynamics in the *Nuswantara* trilogy is analyzed using Swingewood's sociological approach, which includes three models. These models are literature as a reflection of social reality, its relation to historical phenomena, and its link to the author and production (Swingewood, 1972). This research emphasizes the first model, treating literature as a reflection of social reality.

Historically, the sociology of literature emerged as a response to structuralist studies that prioritized internal text structure. Unlike structuralism, sociological approaches highlight literature's role in representing the social world. In this regard, literature is not autonomous but intricately connected to society (Wiyatmi, 2013).

Swingewood (1972) critically challenges Goldmann's view that literary works are merely "passive mirrors." He argues that analyzing social aspects within literary works should not rely exclusively on their formal structure. Goldmann's approach treats the elements of literary works as an integrated whole, which suggests a positivist tendency. According to Swingewood, this perspective risks reducing the role of literature as a social document that actively reflects and engages with social reality rather than standing independently.

To strengthen analysis, Swingewood's ideas are situated within van Peursen's theory, which identifies three stages of cultural development that characterize how local communities navigate sociocultural dynamics. These stages consist of mystical thought, ontological thought, and functional thought, each representing a distinct societal perspective in

understanding truth (van Peursen, 2018). This framework provides a lens for examining Javanese cultural dynamics in the *Nuswantara* trilogy.

Scholars such as Abrams (1971), Eagleton (1996), Horatius in Wellek & Warren (2016), and Teeuw (2017) emphasize how literature portrays humans and culture. This portrayal is inseparable from didactic messages conveyed through aesthetic language. Literature thus functions as creative expression and as a medium for readers to internalize moral and cultural values.

Relevant prior research further supports this research. Adji & Intan (2020) examined the cultural dynamics of Toraja society in the novel *Puya ke Puya*, which depicts the Rambu Solok ceremony as it encounters conflicts with new ideas. Their findings demonstrate that *Puya ke Puya* accurately reflects the social dynamics surrounding the Rambu Solok ceremony, rooted in the ancestral beliefs of Aluk Todolo, which convey lessons about aspects of collective consciousness within the community. Although this research focuses on a different aspect of local wisdom, it shares a comparable analytical approach and closely relates to the themes of this research, particularly regarding literary works as reflections of cultural dynamics in local communities.

In his research, Ramadhan (2020) examines how the Banjar community resists the challenges of modernity, as depicted in the novel *Jendela Seribu Sungai*. Using a sociological approach to literature, he demonstrates that the story reflects the settlement patterns of the Banjar people along the Martapura River. This geographical condition plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of the Banjar locality. The community's ancestors instill values of preserving the river ecosystem, which they regard as essential for life, transportation, and trade. Ramadhan's thesis enriches this research by offering insights into the representation of regional locality and its social dynamics in literary works.

In a related research, Fajriani and Widiastuti (2024) also employ a sociological approach to literature to explore social changes in Javanese society, focusing on issues of community structure, economic policy, political policy, and social policy during the New Order era, as illustrated in the drama *Gapit*. Their research highlights that the author, Widoyo, uses his literary works as a platform to voice critical perspectives on how ordinary people (*wong cilik*) often suffer as a result of inhumane modernization. They identify government ideology as a primary factor contributing to these hardships. This condition leads civil society to advocate for justice and demand that the government fulfill its responsibility in improving the welfare of the people. Their findings therefore expand the discourse of this research, particularly in relation to social change in Javanese community life.

Drawing from several relevant studies, a research gap becomes evident: the fictional works analyzed so far are not informed by cross-cultural perspectives introduced by their respective authors.

The novel *Puya ke Puya*, written by Oddang, a writer from South Sulawesi, addresses the cultural dynamics of Toraja society. In contrast, *Jendela Seribu Sungai*, authored by South Kalimantan writers Seftiana and Soebli, portrays the cultural dynamics of the Banjar community within the context of modernity. Additionally, the drama *Gapit*, created by Widoyo, a Javanese writer from Surakarta, illustrates the structural challenges facing Javanese society during the New Order era. These literary works highlight significant issues but also reveal the research gap that this research intends to address through a novel analytical approach.

The Nuswantara trilogy is particularly noteworthy because Tunggono, from Ende, East Nusa Tenggara, is not entirely “pure Javanese” yet demonstrates a strong foundation in Javanese cultural knowledge. Her seven-year ethnographic research (2015–2021) across Java, participation in rituals, research of lontar manuscripts, and collaboration with cultural informants provide empirical grounding for her literary work. This foundation allows her to document and reinterpret Javanese culture in a cross-cultural literary context. As a result, the *Nuswantara* trilogy may be classified as a cross-cultural literary work (Ashcroft et al., 2025).

Given this context, the research is significant for exploring Javanese cultural dynamics from the perspective of a non-Javanese author. This unique viewpoint warrants evaluation through a sociological lens, aiming to clarify how the *Nuswantara* trilogy represents Javanese locality as a critique of sociocultural dynamics. The research thus bridges literature, culture, and social reflection.

METHODS

This research design is a descriptive qualitative research grounded in the post-positivist paradigm. It analyzes naturalistic phenomena in the *Nuswantara* trilogy, which consists of *Gerbang Nuswantara* (Book One), *Candi Nuswantara* (Book Two), and *Jagat Nuswantara* (Book Three). The research examines these texts to uncover representations of sociocultural dynamics in the context of Javanese locality.

The research employs a holistic scientific method that analyzes language units, including words, phrases, sentences, and discourses within the research subjects. These units illustrate the role of Javanese locality as a critique of sociocultural dynamics in the *Nuswantara* trilogy. As such, the research does not rely on statistical data processing (Moleong, 2022; Sugiyono, 2022).

The *Nuswantara* trilogy, as a cross-cultural product, reflects significant issues in Javanese cultural dynamics, including Hindu Kejawen, *jamasan keris*, *sajen*, and *dupa*, mystical *gamelan*, spiritual science, and supernatural science. These elements are deeply rooted in Javanese society, which Tunggono documents and critiques in her works. Previous

empirical sociocultural research further supports this perspective.

The researcher plays a central role as the human instrument in conceptualizing and carrying out the research. Data collection uses three techniques: heuristic reading to formulate the meaning and synopsis of the trilogy, hermeneutic reading to explore deeper meanings of Javanese sociocultural dynamics, and note-taking to record quotations classified by research focus (Riffaterre, 1978).

Once collected, the data undergo analysis through content analysis. According to Sumarno (2020), this technique sharpens the examination of social documents, such as literature, containing linguistic symbols and meanings. It is applied alongside qualitative procedures outlined by Miles et al. (2018) which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing verified conclusions.

The conclusion applies logical induction to derive findings from specific observations and formulate broader insights. Data verification employs two approaches: expert judgment validity through consultation with Prof. Dr. Anwar Efendi, M.Si., a literature expert who reviews the findings, and semantic validity achieved by contextual interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section examines how Tunggono presents critical ideas on Javanese cultural dynamics in the *Nuswantara* trilogy. The discussion highlights the three stages of Javanese cultural development: mystical, ontological, and functional thoughts. These stages are analyzed through the sociological perspective of literature, which interprets literary works as reflections of social reality (Swingewood, 1972; van Peursen, 2018).

First, the findings are categorized under mystical thoughts when a character perceives the presence of supernatural forces whose origins are unclear. This perception indicates the need for further investigation into ontological thoughts. Second, ontological thoughts harmonize human existence with the universe, allowing individuals to transcend the boundaries of mystical thought. Third, functional thoughts dismantle the separation between humans and the universe by emphasizing their functional relationship. This perspective aligns with the sociological approach to literature, which underscores the interconnectedness of human life and reality.

Beliau menganut agama Kejawen yang percaya pada jin dan perdukunan. “Sepertinya, Pakde Nur itu juga seorang dukun,” kata ayahnya, membuat Rani kecil semakin merasa asing dengan figur yang samar diingatnya dari foto. (Gerbang Nuswantara, 2015, p. 77)

(He adhered to the Kejawen faith, which involves belief in jinn and shamanism. “Apparently,

Uncle Nur was also a shaman,” her father said, making young Rani feel even more estranged from the figure she vaguely remembered from a photograph.)
(translation mine)

The first finding examines the evolving meaning of Kejawen beliefs, often associated with shamans and jinns. In the background story, Rani as a child is influenced by mystical ideas presented by Mr. Zaki. Rani’s father uses this approach to sever ties with the Dijoyo family line. Likewise, his wife, Mrs. Zaki (Ratih), distances herself from Javanese traditions.

This issue of mystical thinking also results in defamation. Mr. Zaki makes baseless accusations, claiming Uncle Nur is a shaman who colludes with jinn. In reality, Uncle Nur adheres to Hindu Kejawen, a syncretic tradition. As noted by Astawa et al. (2025) and Widana & Wirata (2023), followers of Hindu Kejawen worship Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa through prayer practices embedded in Javanese traditions, consistent with Uncle Nur’s beliefs.

These findings demonstrate that the Nuswantara trilogy reflects the social and cultural dynamics of Javanese society, which continues to maintain a strong connection to mystical thought. However, the concept of Hindu Kejawen is often misunderstood, with many perceiving it as part of supernatural powers (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18).

“Ini bukan cerita belaka, Rani. Ini adalah sejarah dan silsilah keluargamu yang perlu kamu ketahui,” kali ini suara pakdenya terdengar keras dan tegas.

“Tapi, Pakde, zaman sekarang kan hal itu sudah nggak zaman. Nggak ada gunanya. Sekarang, semua orang sederajat mau dia kaya atau miskin,” Rani balas berkeras.

“Itulah yang salah dari pemikiran orang zaman sekarang. Mereka melupakan sejarah, mengecilkan leluhur. Yang dilihat dan dipedulikan adalah sejarah dan budaya luar, sementara budaya negeri sendiri tidak dilestarikan. Yang dicari adalah pemahaman luar, bukan filsafat dan kearifan negeri sendiri.” (Gerbang Nuswantara, 2015, pp. 88-89)

(“This is no mere story, Rani. This is the history and genealogy of your family that you must know,” her uncle’s voice now sounded firm and commanding.

“But, Uncle, that’s outdated. It’s useless. Nowadays, everyone is equal whether rich or poor,” Rani insisted.

“That is precisely the flaw in modern thinking. People forget history and belittle their ancestors. What they see and value is foreign history and culture, while their own heritage is neglected. They pursue foreign knowledge, not the philosophy and wisdom of their own land.”)
(translation mine)

Uncle Nur serves as a fictional character representing Tunggono’s ontological thought, which critiques the influence of foreign ideologies that threaten local wisdom (Aldi & Khairanis, 2025; Polizzi & Harrison, 2022; Rahaya et al., 2020). The argument between Rani and Uncle Nur illustrates this conflict. Rani believes that continuing family traditions, particularly the preservation of Hindu Kejawen cultural values, is outdated and unimportant. This perspective stems from her childhood exposure to foreign ideologies introduced by her parents.

Uncle Nur recognizes the potential social disorientation that may result if his niece continues down this path (Azizah, 2023). He firmly argues that the Dijoyo family lineage is significant. This lineage is rooted in Prince Adiwijoyo, the son of Majapahit and the founder of the Pajang dynasty. Each descendant is therefore tasked with upholding and preserving the wise traditions of their ancestors while honoring God (Krissandi et al., 2023; Wasisto, 2021). A prime example of this responsibility is engaging in religious activities, such as praying to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa through Javanese traditions and rituals. This practice reflects a syncretism between Hinduism and Kejawen, encompassing all aspects related to God and the guidance of Javanese ancestors (Astawa et al., 2025; Widana & Wirata, 2023). This discussion aligns with Swingewood’s (1972, p. 13) sociological approach to literature, as framed by van Peursen’s (2018, p. 18) theory, emphasizing literature as a reflection of social reality.

“Sebetulnya, tidak apa-apa membaaur dengan budaya lain. Tapi, ketika budaya itu malah menggantikan budaya sendiri, kalian jadi kehilangan jati diri,” kata Raden Abhiyasa yang seakan menampar Rani.

Seketika Rani merasa malu pada dirinya sendiri, pada bangsanya, pada generasinya. Betapa mudahnya memercayai budaya asing dan menganggapnya sebagai budaya sendiri ketika tidak ada pengetahuan apa pun tentang budaya leluhurnya. Rupanya mengikuti tradisi nenek moyang tidak berarti dia menjadi orang yang membosankan atau kuno. Ini artinya melestarikan budaya dan membuatnya tetap hidup dalam kehidupan modern.

(Jagat Nuswantara, 2021, p. 205)

“Actually, there is nothing wrong with mingling with other cultures. But when that culture replaces your own, you lose your identity,” said Raden Abhiyasa, his words striking Rani like a slap.

Instantly, Rani felt ashamed of herself, her nation, and her generation. How easily they trusted foreign cultures and mistook them for their own when they lacked any knowledge of their ancestral heritage. She realized that following the traditions of her forebears did not mean being old-fashioned or dull; rather, it

meant preserving culture and keeping it alive in modern life.)
(translation mine)

A common issue faced by local communities is the direct impact of globalization, which continuously alters sociocultural aspects over time. Many individuals are tempted to adopt Western cultural practices without careful consideration. As a result, the values and traditions inherited from their ancestors are often neglected (Aldi & Khairanis, 2025; Polizzi & Harrison, 2022; Rahaya et al., 2020). This problem is illustrated in the excerpt above which presents a debate between Rani and Raden Abhiyasa.

The tension in their discussion eases when Raden Abhiyasa makes a sarcastic remark toward Rani, suggesting that she is losing her identity as part of the Javanese ethnicity. His words carry a mocking tone, functioning as a symbolic slap in the face for Rani. Ultimately, she feels ashamed, as she has always regarded herself as an outsider—embracing foreign culture as her own while perceiving her native culture as *alie*.

This moment sparks reflection in Rani's mind. She begins to engage in introspection and recognizes the importance of incorporating her ancestors' traditions into her daily life. As emphasized by Dwiputra & Sundawa (2023), Imron et al. (2023), Karomah & Masyuri (2024), and Parhan & Dwiputra (2023), learning from ancestral wisdom does not render an individual outdated. Instead, the ethical and spiritual values embedded in Javanese traditions protect society from the negative consequences of globalization.

Rani's realization of the significance of her cultural roots exemplifies functional thought. This concept highlights the mutual relationship between human thought and the universe (van Peursen, 2018, p. 18). The author presents this situation in her fictional work as a reflection of social reality, offering a critique of modernity that undermines local wisdom (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13).

Terkejutlah Rani. Tak pernah terbayang sebelumnya ada anggota keluarganya yang 'berurusan' dengan keris. Setahu Rani, keris adalah benda mistis yang harus dijauhi. Selain merupakan senjata kuno, keris itu ada 'isinya'. Dan 'isinya' itu adalah sesuatu yang gaib. Ada sihirnya. Aliran sesat.
(Gerbang Nuswantara, 2015, p. 46)

(Rani was shocked. She had never imagined that any member of her family had dealings with a keris. To her knowledge, the keris was a mystical object to be avoided. Beyond being an ancient weapon, the keris had an "essence." And that essence was something supernatural—sorcery, heresy.)
(translation mine)

This section explores Rani's belief that the *keris*, a traditional Javanese stabbing weapon, is associated with a heretical cult. When Rani first encounters Bima's *keris*, she is unaware that a member of her family is connected to an ancient weapon imbued with supernatural power. This portrayal of sociocultural dynamics reflects the character's emotions and thoughts, which appear to be enveloped by a mystical energy of unknown origin.

The shifting significance of the *keris* arises because some individuals fail to recognize the true essence of Javanese culture. This issue may also be interpreted as a "side effect" of foreign ideologies that undermine local traditions (Aldi & Khairanis, 2025; Asih et al., 2023; Azizah, 2023; Polizzi & Harrison, 2022; Rahaya et al., 2020). Consequently, the local community must cultivate a critical attitude and mindset to ensure that Javanese local wisdom is preserved for future generations (Dwiputra & Sundawa, 2023; Imron et al., 2023; Karomah & Masyuri, 2024; Parhan & Dwiputra, 2023). One way to address this challenge is through a deeper research of the essence and function of the *keris*, which will be further examined in the following section on ontological and functional thought.

"Kalau begitu, keris itu memang mistis ya, Mbah?" tanya Rani berhati-hati menyimpulkan. Namun, eyangnya malah tertawa.

"Yang mistis itu pikiran manusianya saja yang belum nyampé," jawab si Kakek di ujung tawanya. "Mistis itu kan artinya sesuatu yang ndak dimengerti, yang misterius. Lalu, dikait-kaitkan dengan makhluk haluslah, jinlah, dukun segala. Lha kalau pemikiran manusia itu yang salah, mbok ya jangan dianggap barang-barang pusaka itu salah juga. Piyé tho? Manusia modern itu rumit sekali, semua yang benar dibilang salah, yang salah dibilang benar."

(Gerbang Nuswantara, 2015, p. 252)

("So then, the *keris* really is mystical, isn't it, Grandfather?" Rani cautiously concluded. But her grandfather only laughed.

"What's mystical is merely human thought that has not yet reached understanding," he replied between chuckles. "Mystical simply means something not understood, something mysterious. Then people connect it with spirits, jin, shamans, and the like. If human thought is at fault, the heirlooms should not be blamed as well, should they? Modern people are so complicated—what is true they call false, and what is false they call true.")

(translation mine)

This section presents Tunggono's ideas that critique the perception of the *keris* as a mysterious object, embodied through the character of Mbah Tunggul. He argues that the problem arises when

people's thoughts fail to reach a critical level. Those influenced by mystical thinking often associate the *keris* with harmful practices, such as shamanism and jinn rituals.

Mbah Tunggul emphatically criticizes individuals who tarnish the image of the *keris*. He contends that if erroneous interpretations exist among the people, the blame should not be directed at relics symbolizing Javanese cultural heritage. Although UNESCO recognized the *keris* as world cultural heritage in 2005, some individuals still regard it as a mystical object conveying power, authority, protection against poison, supernatural energy, and luck. Such views are inconsistent with the function of the *keris* as a traditional weapon.

This interpretation underscores the dual dynamics within the Javanese cultural mentality regarding the *keris*. One group perceives it as imbued with mystical powers, while the other consists of intellectuals striving to restore its philosophical essence. The *keris* stands as a cultural artifact that possesses both aesthetic value and practical utility as a weapon. Thus, it is essential to preserve it by maintaining its condition through regular cleaning to prevent rust and ensuring it is not misused (Setiawan, 2021; Zulfikar et al., 2023).

This analysis aligns with Swingewood's (1972, p. 13) and van Peursen's (2018, p. 18) view that fictional prose reflects the sociocultural dynamics of human life. The Nuswantara trilogy functions as a social document that mirrors the realities of its time while engaging with ontological thought. Through this narrative, the author defends the essence of Javanese culture, which remains deeply interconnected with sociocultural realities.

“Yang kamu lakukan selama ini adalah ritual dasar untuk memandikan kerismu. Ritual yang kami lakukan itu lebih kompleks, untuk diberi tahu tugas dan hal-hal lainnya. Instruksi dari beliau tidak datang sekaligus, tapi secara bertahap, jadi ritual tetap yang harus diadakan setiap tanggalan kliwon,” kata Eyang Tirto. (Candi Nuswantara, 2018, p. 12)

*“What you have been doing so far is only the basic ritual of bathing your *keris*. The ritual we perform is more complex, meant to receive instructions and other matters. His directions do not come all at once but gradually; therefore, the fixed ritual must be held every *kliwon* day on the Javanese calendar,” said Eyang Tirto. (translation mine)*

Based on the narrative context, Eyang Tirto (Mbah Tunggul's son), a fictional character, presents an idea about the ritual of washing the *keris*, known as *jamasan keris*. This aligns with the research findings of Kartika & Wicaksono (2024) and Wardhani et al. (2021), who describe the required equipment and procedures for the ritual. The ritual begins with washing the *keris* in flower-infused water. Next, the

blade is soaked in lime juice with sediment removed (*warangan*), which enhances the appearance of its the *keris* motif (*pamor*). After this, a mixture of lime peel, ash, and coconut water is applied to polish the *keris*, remove rust, and prevent corrosion. The *keris* is then rinsed with alkaline soapy water to neutralize any acidity from the *warangan* solution. Finally, the blade is dried with a cloth, oiled, and exposed to sunlight. Throughout the ritual, prayers are offered for the heir, accompanied by *sajen* presented during the handover of the *keris*.

Eyang Tirto explains that the *jamasan keris* takes place *kliwon* date, with some individuals also observing it during the *suro* month of the Javanese calendar. This tradition carries deep significance, as it embodies cultural appreciation that emphasizes the responsibility of caring for and respecting ancestral weapons (Muthoharoh, 2022). The inheritance of this relic is passed down from generation to generation. The goal is to maintain the metal's cleanliness and prevent rusting on all its parts, including the blade's shape (*dhapur*), the *pamor*, the sharp tip (*pucukan*), the hilt—which consists of the pommel (*deder*), upper grip (*mendak*), and guard (*ganja*)—and the sheath (*warangka*) (Saputri & Yuwono, 2022; Wibawa et al., 2024).

By keeping the *keris* clean, it can be preserved as both a cultural artifact and an effective weapon. However, the *keris* should not be used carelessly. Its function is intended for emergencies, such as warfare or threats from enemies (Setiawan, 2021; Zulfikar et al., 2023).

Selain itu, bau kemenyan ini adalah wewangian yang disukai oleh para leluhurnya, walau banyak orang yang bilang bau ini mengundang dedemit dan jin.

(Gerbang Nuswantara, 2015, pp. 207-208)

(Moreover, the scent of kemenyan incense was a fragrance favored by her ancestors, although many people claimed that this aroma attracted dedemit (spirits) and jin.) (translation mine)

The excerpt above discusses the fragrance of *dupa*, which many people, including their ancestors, appreciate. However, some individuals who are unfamiliar with the purpose of *dupa*, particularly *Styrax benzoin*, mistakenly assume that it is used to summon jinn and demons. This misconception emerges from mystical beliefs, as portrayed in the Nuswantara trilogy, which references the use of *dupa* as an accompaniment to Hindu worship.

The literary works do not endorse the use of *dupa* to summon jinn and *dedemit*. Instead, the author critiques the shifting interpretations of the function of *dupa*. This critique is embodied in the fictional character Uncle Bayu, who challenges mystical assumptions that distort the significance of Javanese heritage, as elaborated in the following discussion on ontological thought.

"Kita luruskan dulu ya masalah ini. Ritual dan *sajén* itu apa, sih, sebenarnya? Ritual itu kan serangkaian tindakan yang dilakukan secara tradisi. Hal ini dilakukan di banyak institusi seperti agama, sekolah, bahkan dalam hal-hal sederhana sehari-hari pun. Contohnya, berdoa sebelum makan. Itu, kan, ritual juga."

"Maksudku, yang pakai bakar *menyan* itu loh, Om," tukas Indra.

"Ya, itu sama aja, kan?" Om Bayu balik bertanya. "Kalian kalau berdoa di gereja pasang lilin, di kelenteng atau wihara bakar *dupa*, bawa persembahan kembang dan buah-buahan, di masjid pakai wudu dulu, terus gerakan salat juga kan ada aturannya, itu sama saja dengan ritual.... Sama aja konsepnya, cuma beda bentuk."

Keempat anak muda di hadapan Om Bayu mengangguk-angguk. "Menyan jangan dianggap sesuatu yang mistis cuma karena dipakai oleh dukun-dukun. Sama aja kayak bawang putih bisa dibuat makan, tapi juga bisa buat ngusir vampir," Om Bayu berhenti sebentar karena tamu-tamunya tertawa. "Jangan dianggap benda itu sesuatu yang keramat, tapi kamu masih menyangkal animisme-dinamisme."

Kini keempat tamunya terdiam oleh teguran keras Om Bayu.

(Jagat Nuswantara, 2021, pp. 26–27)

("Let us straighten this out. What are rituals and *sajen*, really? A ritual is a set of traditional actions. It exists in many settings—religion, schools, even daily life. For example, praying before meals is also a ritual.")

"I mean the one with burning *menyan*, Uncle," Indra said.

"Well, isn't that the same?" Uncle Bayu replied. "In church you light candles, in temples or monasteries you burn incense and bring offerings, in mosques you perform *wudu* first, and *salat* has its own rules. The concept is the same; only the forms differ."

The four young people nodded. "Don't see *menyan* as mystical just because *dukun* use it. Garlic is used for cooking but also, in stories, to repel vampires," Uncle Bayu paused as they laughed. "Don't treat objects as sacred while denying animism and dynamism."

At this, the four guests fell silent at his stern words.

(translation mine)

When Indra and his friends visit Uncle Bayu's house, Indra seeks to discuss the essence of *sajen* and *dupa*. From Indra's perspective, the tradition of *sajen*, accompanied by burning *dupa* that spreads a fragrant aroma, is merely a mystical object. He believes it is misused in heretical rituals by shamans.

Uncle Bayu recognizes a flaw in Indra's

understanding of sacred *sajen* and *dupa*. He cautions Indra not to fall into a state of ambivalence. Indra's mystical thoughts lead him to contradictory conclusions, as he simultaneously sanctifies *sajen* and *dupa* while denying the existence of animism and dynamism. Upon hearing this stern reprimand, all of Uncle Bayu's guests remain silent.

Uncle Bayu also offers a simple analogy to clarify his point. He compares the use of garlic in cooking to its use as a supposed remedy to ward off vampires. The latter reflects unscientific mystical thought, as it does not correspond to garlic's true essence as a bulbous plant commonly used in various dishes.

From an ontological perspective, *sajen* and *dupa* can be examined through a sociological lens. First, *sajen* serves as a form of sacrifice to express gratitude and seek blessings from Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. One common type of Hindu *sajen* in the Nusantara region is betel leaves offered to those who are honored (*canang sari*). As the Hindu Kejawan belief evolves, *canang sari* is supplemented with coconut leaves (*janur*), flowers, fruits, and other plant components. However, if a believer wishes to pray without a *sajen*, it is not a problem, because the most crucial aspect of prayer is a pure heart (Nisa et al., 2025; Pasaribu et al., 2025).

Second, burning incense is an integral part of Hindu Kejawan ritual practices. The rising smoke symbolizes reverence and conveys noble prayers to God. In this way, *sajen* reflects the harmonious relationship between God, humans, and the universe (Bugov, 2024; Retno M & Chandra, 2024). Based on this discussion, the *Nuswantara* trilogy portrays Javanese locality as a critique of sociocultural dynamics (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18). The author constructs a conflict around the shifting meanings of several elements in the Javanese system of living, with particular attention to *dupa* and *sajen*.

Bertentangan dengan pendapat umum tentang kemenyan, Bima yang seumur hidupnya dibesarkan di lingkungan keluarga keturunan raja Mataram, tidak menganggap kemenyan sebagai benda mistis, tetapi sebagai pelengkap doa. Seperti hio yang digunakan orang Buddha atau Kong Hu Cu, atau dupa bagi orang Hindu dan Katolik.

(Gerbang Nuswantara, 2015, p. 207)

Contrary to common belief about kemenyan incense, Bima—raised in a family descended from the Mataram kings—did not see it as mystical, but as a complement to prayer, like *hio* used by Buddhists or Confucians, or incense by Hindus and Catholics.

(translation mine)

The description of *dupa* as one of the elements in the system of living equipment serves as a critique of

the perception held by some individuals who consider it merely mystical. The author refutes this notion of “mystical *dupa/kemenyan*” because it contradicts its true essence and function. Consequently, the author firmly advocates for preserving Javanese cultural assets through her fictional works.

Bima, representing Hindu tradition, embodies the author’s critical perspective that one of the roles of *dupa* is to complement prayer. This ritual worship, connected to the metaphysical realm, reflects respect and symbolizes gratitude for blessings bestowed by Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (Agung et al., 2024; Grønseth, 2021; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2021; Sujarwiyanti et al., 2020). In addition to Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, and Catholics also use *dupa* in their worship.

Moreover, there are intriguing facts about the function of *dupa*. Research conducted by Debnath et al. (2024) and Gond & Bhutada (2020) indicates that incense is derived from the *Styrax benzoin* plant, which produces an aromatic resin. When burned, the smoke from *dupa* reduces bacterial and viral contamination associated with airborne diseases. Worshippers believe the smoke purifies the air around the worship space. Thus, this discussion emphasizes the function of *dupa* as a complement to worship.

In addition to *dupa*, there is *sajen*, which strengthens social bonds among Hindus. *Sajen* is present when all Hindus gather during a ceremony to pray. Typically, *sajen* includes fruits and vegetables symbolizing fertility and prosperity, as well as flowers representing beauty and purity. Additionally, rice and various traditional snacks wrapped in banana leaves symbolize gratitude for God’s blessings (Andila et al., 2022; Lilik et al., 2024). When the community can easily access these components, it indicates a sustainable natural environment.

Based on this discussion, the Nuswantara trilogy outlines stages of cultural development. The representation of functional thought in these prose fictions reflects the author’s critical stance toward the perception of *dupa* and *sajen* as mystical. The author rejects mystical connotations associated with their role as complementary elements for prayer. As a result, the Nuswantara trilogy broadens the public’s perspective on local cultural heritage (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18).

Wangi bunga sedap malam yang merebak dan alunan lembut musik gamelan (yang tampaknya terdengar dari sound speaker tersembunyi) membuat ruangan itu semakin berkesan Jawa, campuran rasa keagungan dan kesan mistis bagi Rani.

(Gerbang Nuswantara, 2015, p. 274)

(The scent of tuberose flowers and the soft sound of *gamelan* music (which seemed to come from hidden speakers) made the room even more Javanese, a mixture of majesty and a mystical impression for Rani.)

(translation mine)

The excerpt above derives from Rani’s thoughts, which appear to be infused with mystical energy. In the story, Rani and Bima successfully access a magical portal to enter the Majapahit civilization. Their goal is to return the necklace that belongs to Raden Abhiyasa’s sister, which has been left behind in modern times. Upon arriving at Raden Abhiyasa’s house, they are greeted by the fragrance of tuberose flowers and the sound of Javanese *gamelan* music. For Bima, who is already familiar with Javanese culture, these elements do not carry mystical qualities. However, for Rani, the scent of tuberose flowers and the melodies of the *gamelan* feel enchanting, as she is far from her own home.

The source of the negative energy that contributes to mystical thoughts remains unclear and requires further investigation. This exploration may involve other findings that reflect the stages of local cultural development as depicted in the *Nuswantara* trilogy (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18). The excerpt below addresses the issue concerning the mystical aspect of *gamelan* music.

Sebuah perangkat gamelan menyambut mereka di hall yang menghubungkan gedung lama dan gedung baru. Sekelompok perempuan usia paruh baya yang tampak sedang latihan duduk di belakang masing-masing instrumen dan bekerja sama menciptakan harmoni musik bernuansa Jawa yang mengalun indah. Lalitha menghampiri mereka yang tengah menikmati irama gamelan yang dimainkan.

(Candi Nuswantara, 2018, p. 152)

(A *gamelan* set greets them in the hall connecting the old and new buildings. A group of middle-aged women, who appeared to be practicing, sat behind each instrument, working together to create a beautiful harmony of Javanese music. Lalitha approached them as they enjoyed the rhythm of the *gamelan*.)

(translation mine)

This excerpt features an image of a *gamelan*, a traditional Javanese art form. While visiting the National Museum, Lalitha, Bima, Iwan, and Dixie are captivated by the beauty of Javanese music performed by a group of middle-aged women. Excited by the experience, Lalitha immediately approaches the artists to enjoy the *gamelan* music up close.

Gamelan is a traditional art form that involves a set of percussion instruments played by a group of musicians in cooperative harmony. Each artist in a *gamelan* ensemble enhances their knowledge and musical skills without the desire to outshine their fellow musicians. In this context, every artist is equal, as the ensemble prioritizes integrity among its members. This moral value aligns with the concept of togetherness of life (*urip bebrayan*). Consequently,

gamelan is highly respected within the Javanese community (Spiller & Clendinning, 2022; Sulistiyani & Sunarmi, 2023).

Javanese *gamelan* is unique in its musical harmony, with each tone featuring several variations based on the song's structure, rhythm, and dynamics. Additionally, each instrument possesses a distinct tone. For example, the bonang instrument group comprises *bonang barung* and *bonang penerus*. The *balungan* group includes *saron*, *peking*, *selentem*, and *demung* instruments. Another group, consisting of the *gong* and *kendang*, serves to establish the rhythm pattern (Kurniawati et al., 2023). Based on this discussion, the *Nuswantara* trilogy serves as a social document that reflects on the ontological significance of *gamelan* art as a cultural product of Javanese society. This artwork is intricately connected to its social aspects and meanings (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18).

"Sekali-kali harus ikut nonton wayangnya, Mbak. Seru deh, lengkap pakai gamelan dan acaranya semalaman. Kalau di Jawa ada banyak!" Bima mulai berpromosi.
(*Gerbang Nuswantara*, 2015, p. 123)

(“You should watch the puppet show (*wayang*) once in a while, Sis. It's so fun, co puppet show mplete with *gamelan* and an all-night show. There are many of them in Java!” Bima began to promote.)
(*translation mine*)

This section explains one of the functions of *gamelan*, which is to accompany *wayang* performances. This is exemplified by Bima, who promotes Javanese culture to his cousin, Rani. Therefore, *gamelan* ensembles are not viewed as supernatural music intended to frighten someone.

In addition to *gamelan*, the text describes *wayang* as a Javanese local tradition that prioritizes its usefulness to the community. *Wayang* is a performing art that entertains, educates, and develops critical thinking skills among the public. Audiences enjoy stories filled with moral advice, performed by the puppeteer (*dalang*) and their colleagues (Krissandi et al., 2023; Nugraheni et al., 2022).

The art of *wayang* is known to the public since the widespread adoption of Hinduism across the island of Java. One piece of evidence for this is the incorporation of the *Mahabharata* story into Javanese puppet shows, which convey values such as *dharma*, *artha*, *moksha*, and *tri hita karana*, as taught by Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (Astawa et al., 2025; Sholehah et al., 2024). Consequently, the sacred messages in Javanese puppet shows serve as a safeguard against the negative impacts of globalization, which can lead to moral degradation (Junaidi et al., 2024).

From this discussion, it can be inferred that Rani, with Bima's assistance, reaches the stage of functional thought. She is liberated from the confines

of mystical thinking that regards *gamelan* as mystical music. This indicates that the *Nuswantara* trilogy reflects the stages of cultural development regarding people's perceptions of *gamelan* art (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18).

"Memang kebatinan itu apa?" tantang Pakde Har. Lalitha cukup kaget dengan pertanyaan ini, tak menyangka sang tuan rumah sebegitu langsungnya bertanya dalam beberapa menit pertama perkenalan mereka.

"Belajar ilmu-ilmu gitu.... Kayak gaib-gaib gitu," jawab Lalitha.

Pakde Har tertawa lepas. Wahyu tersenyum sungkan, berusaha menjaga perasaan Lalitha. Iwan dan Dixie, yang merasa punya jawaban mirip dengan Lalitha, diam saja.

(*Jagat Nuswantara*, 2021, p. 229)

(“What exactly is spirituality?” Uncle Har challenged. Lalitha was startled by the question, not expecting the host to be so direct within minutes of their first meeting.

“Studying mystical knowledge... the supernatural,” Lalitha replied.

Uncle Har laughed aloud. Wahyu smiled awkwardly, trying to spare her feelings. Iwan and Dixie, who shared Lalitha's view, remained silent.)

(*translation mine*)

This section discusses the mystical thought surrounding Javanese spiritual science, represented by Lalitha. To gain insight from various Javanese spiritual experts, Wahyu advises Lalitha to visit Uncle Har at his residence. The goal is to deepen Lalitha's understanding of the essence of meditation, which is not confined to a single idea.

Accompanied by Wahyu, Iwan, and Dixie, Lalitha goes to Uncle Har's house. After they become acquainted, Uncle Har initiates the discussion by asking his guests about the spiritual science that serves as the foundation of meditation practice. Lalitha, immersed in mystical thought, responds by stating that spirituality is an occult science. Upon hearing Lalitha's answer, Uncle Har bursts into laughter.

Uncle Har is surprised that there are still people who equate practicing meditation with learning the occult. Lalitha's mystical perspective contradicts the essence of spirituality as a crucial element of the Javanese knowledge system. Therefore, the *Nuswantara* trilogy illustrates the challenges within the cultural dynamics of a society at the stage of mystical thought (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18).

"Sedulur papat lima pancer," kata Om Bayu. "Itu saja kuncinya. Betul, menyelaraskan keempat saudara tubuh duniawi kita ini dengan alam, baru yang kelima akan memancar. Orang Jawa kuno percaya, empat saudara itu adalah

yang lahir bersama-sama dengan kita; air ketuban, ari-ari, darah, dan bau.

...Keempat saudara itu juga mewakili empat sifat manusia. Kala Rodra berwarna hitam yang menguasai nafsu kejahatan. Kala Angkara berwarna merah yang menguasai amarah. Kala Wiguna berwarna kuning sebagai pembawa kecerdasan manusia. Dan, Kala Nimpuna berwarna putih yang berfungsi membedakan baik dan buruk. Keempat Kala Pengendali Raga ini, yang kita kenal sebagai Jiwa, diikat oleh sebuah pusat yang bernama Nyawa atau Roh—dengan sifat bulan yang menerangi dalam kegelapan—yang ‘berlaku’ selama kehidupan kita di dunia ini. Inilah yang disebut ‘lima pancer’ itu, sebagai pusat yang memancar.

(Candi Nuswantara, 2018, p. 280-281)

“*Sedulur papat lima pancer,*” said Uncle Bayu. “That is the key. Indeed, by harmonizing the four worldly siblings of our body with nature, the fifth will begin to radiate. The Javanese ancients believed that the four siblings are those born together with us: the amniotic fluid, the placenta, the blood, and the odor.

...These four siblings also represent four human qualities. *Kala Rodra*, black in color, rules over the desire for evil. *Kala Angkara*, red in color, rules over anger. *Kala Wiguna*, yellow in color, brings human intelligence. And *Kala Nimpuna*, white in color, functions to distinguish between good and evil. These four *Kala Pengendali Raga*, which we know as the Soul, are bound by a center called Nyawa or Spirit—with the nature of the moon that gives light in the darkness—which ‘operates’ throughout our life in this world. This is what is called *lima pancer*, the center that radiates.”)

(translation mine)

This excerpt examines the concept of *sedulur papat lima pancer*, which represents a high level of accurate self-awareness and emotional intelligence as studied in Javanese spiritual science. In this framework, the human being is viewed as the central figure (*pancer*) who governs the body. Each person is accompanied at birth by what are termed the *sedulur papat*, or four siblings. These siblings are the amniotic fluid, blood, placenta, and scent (Imani & Ropi’ah, 2021; Sari & Muttaqin, 2021).

Each of the four human siblings also corresponds to one of the four “colors” that represent distinct human traits. Black symbolizes deviant worldly desires (*Kala Rodra*), red represents anger (*Kala Angkara*), yellow signifies the desire for intelligence or virtue (*Kala Wiguna*), and white denotes the ability to distinguish between good and bad (*Kala Nimpuna*). These traits are all linked to a singular human spirit.

The concept of *sedulur papat lima pancer* emerges from a critical exploration of the origins of

human birth, which connects the microcosm (*jagat alit*) of individual existence to the macrocosm (*jagat ageng*) of the universe, forming an organized system. In essence, this ontological concept reflects the integral relationship among the universe, humanity, and the divine (Daryono & Syukur, 2023; Nurziana & Firdaus, 2025; Thohari, 2022).

This discussion illustrates that the *Nuswantara* trilogy offers profound ontological insights into the dynamics of Javanese culture. This line of thought is part of Tunggono's critical perspective, which seeks to challenge the notion that mystical thought in Javanese spiritual science is incompatible with scientific inquiry (Swingewood, 1972: p. 13; van Peursen, 2018: p. 18).

“Jadi, ilmu kebatinan itu sama saja dengan spiritual?” tanya Lalitha. “Bukannya itu yang dukun-dukunan gitu?”

Pakde Har kembali tertawa. “Itu tergantung orangnya saja, ilmunya digunakan untuk apa. Dan untuk dukun-dukunan begitu, lebih tepat dibilang supranatural sepeertinya.”

“Oh, iya. Supranatural,” ulang Iwan sambil mencerna. “Masuk akal, sih.”

(Jagat Nuswantara, 2021, p. 231)

“So, spirituality is the same as spiritual?” asked Lalitha. “Isn't that about shamans?”

Uncle Har laughed again. “It depends on the person, how they use their knowledge. And about shamans, it's more like supernatural, I think.”

“Oh, yes. Supernatural,” Iwan repeated, interpreting. “Makes sense.”

(translation mine)

This excerpt discusses Javanese spiritual science from a functional perspective. The term “spiritual” refers to the state of the human psyche—encompassing the soul, mind, heart, or inner spirit—in relation to the universe. Consequently, spiritual science pertains to matters of spirituality. However, it is often confused with supernatural science.

This confusion is illustrated in the dialogue between Lalitha and Uncle Har. Initially, Lalitha struggles to differentiate between spiritual science and supernatural science. Uncle Har clarifies that these two concepts are distinct. Supernatural phenomena exist beyond the confines of the universe's reality, while the goal of spiritual science is to align human emotions and thoughts with the actual conditions of the universe. Therefore, the practice of spiritual science is not concerned with the supernatural.

This misunderstanding highlights the shifting meanings between spiritual science and supernatural science as a part of the cultural dynamics within society. The character Uncle Har in the *Nuswantara* trilogy embodies Tunggono's functional concept of Javanese spiritual science, which interrelates humans, the universe, and God (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13; van Peursen, 2018, p. 18).

“Apa aja fungsi meditasi, Pakde?” tanya Dixie. “Yang pasti, membantu kita untuk fokus hanya di sini dan pada keadaan saat ini,” jawab Pakde Har. “Tapi, juga yang lain-lain. Termasuk self-healing, lalu juga membuatmu rileks, bahagia, dan naik ke tingkat pemahaman kehidupan yang lebih tinggi. Di saat kamu mencapai tingkat lebih tinggi, hidupmu juga otomatis berubah, secara fisik maupun mental, materi maupun non-materi.” (Jagat Nuswantara, 2021, p. 253)

“What’s the function of meditation, Uncle?” Dixie asked.

“It helps us stay focused in the present,” Uncle Har replied. “But it also brings other benefits—self-healing, relaxation, happiness, and a higher understanding of life. Once you reach that level, your life changes automatically, both physically and mentally, materially and spiritually.” (translation mine)

After explaining the general function of spiritual science, the specific application of spiritual science in meditation practice is also addressed. Tunggono illustrates this concept through the fictional characters Uncle Bayu and Uncle Har, who represent a response to certain aspects of Javanese culture. Within the story, these two Javanese spiritual experts recognize the numerous benefits that spiritual science offers to human life. For instance, through meditation, individuals become more attuned to present reality, heal inner wounds via self-healing, calm their souls, enhance happiness, and discover deeper meaning in life through elevated levels of consciousness.

These examples align with the concept of *sedulur papat lima pancer*, which relates to the broader spectrum of *jagat ageng* and *jagat alit*, as previously explained. This suggests that functional thought actively rejects the assumptions of mystical thought, which are inconsistent with the essence and purpose of meditation. Consequently, the depiction of the Javanese knowledge system in the *Nuswantara* trilogy serves as a critique of sociocultural dynamics. The author intentionally raises issues regarding the shifting values within Javanese culture, enabling them to be examined through the lens of sociological literature and the theory of cultural dynamics. (Swingewood, 1972: p. 13; van Peursen, 2018: p. 18).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussions, Tunggono's concept of Javanese locality in the *Nuswantara* trilogy represents an effort to defend Javanese culture while critiquing the sociocultural dynamics of modern society. This response arises from the clash between foreign ideologies and traditional Javanese wisdom. Consequently, many members of society struggle with cultural identity and often

neglect ancestral traditions.

This conclusion is reinforced by the analysis of mystical thought within Hindu Kejawen, frequently associated with shamans, the *jaman keris* ritual, *sajen*, and *dupa* used to invoke *dedemit*. Mystical *gamelan* music and spiritual knowledge are also linked to supernatural practices. However, these associations deviate from their original meaning and function, underscoring the need to revisit their essence within literary and cultural studies.

The *Nuswantara* trilogy repositions mystical thought by engaging ontological and functional perspectives. This is exemplified by the Dijoyo family, who preserve Kejawen Hindu traditions through rituals and worship of Ida Sang Hyang Widi Wasa within Javanese values. Acts such as lighting *dupa* and presenting *sajen* express reverence to God, the *jaman keris* preserves cultural artifacts, and *gamelan* performances serve as both spiritual and educational media. These examples affirm that mystical traditions embody cultural wisdom with ecological and social relevance.

Overall, this research highlights the role of Javanese locality in contemporary sociocultural dynamics, particularly from the perspective of a writer from Ende, East Nusa Tenggara. The *Nuswantara* trilogy functions as a cross-cultural literary document, bridging traditions and critical reflection. Nevertheless, this research has limitations, as it relies on textual analysis rather than ethnographic fieldwork, though it is grounded in the premise that literature reflects social reality.

This research provides a foundation for further research on sociocultural dynamics in literary works. Future scholars may adopt similar approaches but apply them to different subjects or contexts, thereby expanding the scope of literary and cultural inquiry. Such studies will advance the sociology of literature while preserving and reinterpreting cultural wisdom within academic discourse.

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