

# HISTORY AND MONUMENTALISM OF THE REJANG DEWA DANCE IN BALI, INDONESIA

Ida Ayu Gede Sasrani Widyastuti\*, Saptono, Hendra Santosa, and I Wayan Sutirtha

Faculty of Performing Arts, Indonesian Institute of the Arts of Denpasar, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

**\*Corresponding author:**  
Ida Ayu Gede Sasrani Widyastuti  
[sasraniwidyastuti@isi-dps.ac.id](mailto:sasraniwidyastuti@isi-dps.ac.id)

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This study explores the evolutionary journey of the Rejang Dewa dance as a monumental dance of Bali. The objective is to elucidate the history of Rejang Dewa dance creation and identify important factors in its monumentalism process. A qualitative research model using a phenomenological approach was employed in this study. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with the dance and music creators of the Rejang Dewa dance, who served as informants, as well as an analysis of relevant audiovisual documents. We matched and analyzed the interview data interpretatively to produce a written draft, which was then validated by involving the informants. We arranged the research findings chronologically and systematically, based on the informants' confirmatory feedback. The results indicate that three main factors support the monumentalism process of Rejang Dewa dance: (1) the influence of power and policy, (2) the role of academic institutions, and (3) the historical context and evolution of art. Movement and sacred art music serve as aesthetic sources contributing to the artistic richness of Rejang Dewa dance. This demonstrates the success of utilizing local resources to create distinctive art. The long journey of Rejang Dewa dance shows that it has passed through various important historical events that have shaped its characteristics and functions. Balinese Hindu communities in Indonesia commonly use this dance for both ritual and profane ceremonial purposes. These findings have implications for strengthening cultural identity through a deeper understanding of traditional art preservation.

**Keywords:** Rejang Dewa dance; creation; history; monumentalism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Rejang Dewa dance is one of the many sacred dances performed during Hindu religious ceremonies. Currently, this dance is performed not only by local Balinese Hindus but also by the Hindu community of Nusantara. Although it may appear simple, the Rejang Dewa dance carries profound symbolic meaning. This dance was performed as a tribute and a prayer for the gods to descend to the earthly realm. It serves as a reverential homage (*wali*) to summon the celestial entities that descend into the earthly realm (Parmajaya, 2020). Despite its popularity in Balinese culture, the historical and monumental aspects of the Rejang Dewa dance remain underexplored in academic research. Conducting research on the historical features of Rejang Dewa dance and its monumentalism process requires a solid foundation and is of utmost importance. Exploring dance from a historical angle is a crucial effort to safeguard diverse cultural heritage (Akdeniz, 2019; Jaskot, 2019; Sigaki et al., 2018).

For an accurate understanding, it is essential to establish clear definitions for the terms “monument,” “monumental,” and “monumentalism” within the context of this study. A “monument” is a physical structure that represents a significant historical event, influential figure, or important concept that has deep meaning to a society or civilization (Auster et al., 2020, p. 10; Smith, 2019, p. 3). Examples include the Merlion Statue in Singapore, Wat Arun in Thailand, and Monumen Nasional (Monas) in Jakarta, Indonesia. The term “monumental” is used to define the attributes of a structure or artistic creation that is notable, sizable, or possesses outstanding importance in terms of its size, historical context, cultural relevance, or artistic merit (Groucutt et al., 2020; Inomata et al., 2020; Sharon et al., 2017). The term “monumental” can also denote a particular achievement or a masterpiece generated in a certain field or domain (Nagavajara, 2022, p. 498). For instance, the Taj Mahal in India, the Pyramids in Egypt, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, symbolize the monumental advancement of human civilization and serve as landmarks of national political achievement. Within the realm of art or cultural studies, “monumentalism” pertains to the examination of the significance, interpretation, and function of a work or phenomenon that is deemed monumental within a specific cultural or historical framework (Brumfield, 2020, p. 66). This indicates a sequence of processes for an artwork to become monumental through certain values in its artistic expression. The term “monumentalism,” within the context of this study, denotes the inquiry into the profound impact of Rejang Dewa dance on Balinese culture and society. This study investigates the historical, social, and cultural importance of this sacred dance form in Balinese culture.

This study seeks to address the research gap by investigating the historical and significant elements of the Rejang Dewa dance in Bali. The study will focus on the following questions:

1. What is the origin of the Rejang Dewa dance?
2. What key factors influenced the development of monumentalism in Rejang Dewa dance?

By providing a historical overview and examining the significance of monumentalism, this study aims to enhance our understanding of Balinese culture. It intends to foster a greater awareness of traditional values and provide fresh insights into the role of dance within a cultural and spiritual framework, particularly in the global environment.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted a phenomenological approach. To understand the historical journey of the Rejang Dewa dance, this study utilizes Arnold Hauser’s (1982) historical perspective. Hauser underscored the need to comprehend historical and cultural settings in artistic research (Gelfert, 2012). He also argues that economic, political, and social aspects are crucial factors in shaping and driving artistic research (Fan, 2023). He asserts that artists do not operate in isolation; rather, the socio-historical context that prevails during an artist’s creative process significantly influences the resulting work (Hauser, 1982, p. 94). Conducting research from a historical perspective entails several critical methodologies, as history is intricately linked to temporal progression and pivotal events therein. Historical research comprises a minimum of four sequential steps: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Herdiani, 2016, pp. 37–42). Essentially, the research discourse adopts a diachronic approach to illustrate historical data in a sequential schema (Abbas, 2014, p. 39). Historical tracing yields invaluable insights into the chronological trajectory of Rejang Dewa dance within its specific cultural setting. However, a deeper and more consequential aspect of monumentalism has emerged. This facet facilitates a nuanced understanding of how this dance form not only persevered but also became an integral component of artistic and religious practices within Balinese Hindu society.

Based on these theories and concepts, this study begins with a view of the Rejang Dewa dance as a monumental sacred dance in Bali. Historical tracing and monumentalism have become the focus of discussions. Using a phenomenological approach, this study gathered data from the creators of the Rejang Dewa dance through in-depth interviews and relevant documents. Data regarding the history of creation and monumentalism of Rejang Dewa Dance were then analyzed and interpreted. The participants, in their roles as choreographers and composers of Rejang Dewa artworks, verified the accuracy of these interpretations and made the necessary adjustments. The results of the data verification were reviewed again to ensure the accuracy. This conceptual framework was developed to provide a theoretical basis in an effort to answer questions about the history of Rejang Dewa Dance and what are the key factors that influence the process of Rejang Dewa Dance monumentalism.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several previous studies have exposed Rejang Dewa dance from various perspectives, but still provide space for improvement. Wardani et al. (2018) revealed the form, meaning, and transmission of Rejang Dewa Dance. They identified six main movements with symbolic meanings: performing offerings to the gods and conveying moral and spiritual messages within the local community. In addition, they also found the importance of Rejang Dewa Dance in the fields of education, religiosity, aesthetics, and entertainment. Nevertheless, their study was limited to how the artistic elements of Rejang Dewa Dance are transmitted to the younger generation. Their findings are reinforced by Astuti et al. (2022) who highlighted the Rejang Dewa Dance training process at Pasraman Raditya Tegaldlimo Banyuwangi. They found that Rejang Dewa Dance training in Banyuwangi not only functions as a means of cultural preservation, but also to instill values derived from the teachings of Tri Hita Karana (three causes of harmony in Hinduism). These two studies mainly focused on aspects of movement form, symbolic meaning, educational role, and character values. Although they have discussed the artistic aspects, meaning, and sustainability, there are still unanswered questions about how the historical side of this dance found its current form and function.

The study of monumentalism in performing arts studies implies important aspects of religion and history (Charoenrat & Charassri, 2017; Peradantha et al., 2019, 2021). Elliott's study (1964) questioned the terms "monument" and "monumentality" in architecture. He found that monuments do not always explicitly convey information about their subjects, but rely on the audience's prior knowledge. Additionally, he revealed that monumentalism often involves multiple parties and collaborative processes. Shapshay (2021) explored the term "monumental" as an aesthetic category related to politics and distinct from the naturally sublime. Furthermore, Varakuta and Kupina (2021) stated that temporal changes in aesthetic preferences influence the historical variability of the concepts of "monumental" and "miniature." Nirandara and Inchan (2021) found that small theatrical works in Bangkok could be considered cultural monuments that record and reflect the aspirations, criticisms, and ideologies of society at the time. Petrova and Khromova (2022) discovered the importance of monumental art in building historical memory, especially in the Soviet-Ukrainian context. One significant insight into the monumentalism process in art comes from Soliarska-Komarchuk's research (2023) which revealed that the monumental works of artist F. Tetianych in Ukraine indicate that the final third of the 20th century was crucial in forming the philosophical doctrine and "Fripulia" poetry, the original mythopoetics of the author, as well as interesting implementation techniques and methods involving the use of industrial and consumer waste. While this research pertains to visual arts, it provides insight into how monumentalism is linked to the concept of transavant-garde aesthetics and recontextualized to convey artistic messages to society.

The results of this research offer insights into the monumentality of artwork from various aspects. This research on the Rejang Dewa dance reveals a significant gap in understanding its historical dimensions and the process of monumentalism, necessitating focused investigation. This literature review shows that the concepts of monumentalism and monumentality are relevant to examining the monumental process of Rejang Dewa dance in Bali. The concept of monumentalism is not only related to the physical structure in architecture, but also to the history, environment, tradition and culture of a society. This perspective shows that, at least in the present, art can be considered monumental if it is formulated and supported by various stakeholders.

### 4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative research uses a phenomenological approach to gain an understanding of how artists experience and understand their art practice. In the context of this research, phenomenological studies aim to gain knowledge about historical phenomena and the process of the Rejang Dewa dance journey as a whole from the perspective of individuals involved in its creation (Joseph, 2020). This understanding is inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thoughts in phenomenological methodology, which reveal that the relationship between body, space, and culture is very complicated and interconnected (Oh, 2021). For him, the human body reflects a strong relationship with the understanding of space and culture (McKeever, 2022). For example, how a person recognizes and utilizes space and moves within it is determined by the socio-cultural environment in which they grow up (Kurniawan, 2019). The perception of space is intrinsically linked to the body's engagement with tangible entities in the socio-cultural environment (Sebastian, 2016). Based on this understanding, the phenomenological approach can be used in this research because it will help a lot in collecting historical facts, technical aspects, and the process of interpreting Rejang Dewa dance as a monumental cultural phenomenon, with the following research phases:

1. providing a detailed account of one's personal experiences,
2. conducting a thorough investigation of the observed phenomena;

3. contextualizing observations within the broader context of place and culture; and
4. engaging in comprehensive reflection and interpretation of the findings.

The first stage of data collection for this research involved semi-structured interviews with the dance and music creators of Rejang Dewa dance. This technique allows for flexible data collection but still leads to the core knowledge to be gained (Alfasina, 2022, p. 34). Interviewees for this study included artists who were actively involved in the production of Rejang Dewa dance, such as N.L.N. Widjadja Bandem, Tjokorda Istri Putra Padmini, and Ni Ketut Yuliasih in dance, and I Ketut Gede Asnawa and I Nyoman Windha in music. The dance experts provided oral information about the evolutionary sequence of Rejang Dewa dance in the past, offering a comprehensive explanation of the historical context, conceptualization process, and key events. Composers provided oral information on the sources of inspiration and ideas for Rejang Dewa dance music compositions. The results of the interviews were then integrated with findings from the literature review, including audiovisual documents relating to the history and evolution of Rejang Dewa dance. The purpose of this data synthesis is to match the informants' verbal accounts with supporting evidence as a basis for data interpretation. Interpretation is written descriptively. The accuracy of the interpretation of the informants' subjective experiences as well as the synthesis of literature and audiovisual data was ensured through re-verification with the informants, to strengthen the validity of the research findings.

## 5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1. History of the Rejang Dewa dance creation

The Rejang Dewa dance was jointly developed by choreographers and composers from the Indonesian Academy of Dance (ASTI) Denpasar in 1983 (which has since evolved into the Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Bali (ISI Bali) in 2025). During that period, ASTI Denpasar was executing a community service initiative (Kuliah Kerja Nyata—KKN), which also engaged students. The lack of a widely acknowledged offering dance in Bali led I Made Bandem, then Chairman of ASTI, to develop a Rejang dance suitable for all communities in Hindu religious events. To actualize this idea, Bandem enlisted multiple choreographers, including N.L.N. Swasthi Widjadja Bandem, Tjokorda Istri Putra Padmini, and Ni Ketut Yuliasih, together with composers I Ketut Gede Asnawa and I Nyoman Windha, to commence the project. The team was assigned to investigate movement models, musical components, aesthetics, and symbolic significances to inspire the creation of the Rejang Dewa dance.

Throughout this KKN process, Swasthi Bandem observed a concerning trend among the younger generation, noting a lack of appreciation for Balinese dance at the time. While teaching traditional choreographies such as Panji Semirang, Trunajaya, Oleg Tambulilingan, Baris, and Legong Keraton, there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm among the locals, characterized by their casual reception of dance material, often chatting and joking during demonstrations by lecturers and students. Another troubling fact, according to Swasthi Bandem, was the endangered state of the authentic sacred arts originating in these regions. The sacred Rejang dances performed in *puras* by elderly women, as spiritual authorities of the respective *puras*, were exceptionally modest. They discovered that, although these sacred Rejang dances were only performed during ritual events, some of the vocabulary of movements, music, and original compositions had been forgotten. The performances of these sacred Rejang dances appeared rudimentary, monotonous, and occasionally incongruent with the modern performative tastes of the time.

These circumstances led the ASTI Denpasar team to conclude that sacred arts, especially the Rejang Dance, required rejuvenation to prevent further decline of sacred traditions in Bali. Consequently, I Made Bandem and the lecturers began to create a new dance form that drew inspiration from sacred Rejang dances from various regions across Bali. They adopted characteristic Rejang movements, such as *mentang*, *ngider*, and *nyeleog*, as sources of inspiration, restructuring their composition, performance duration, and movements to make them more structured and appealing to the audience.

The creative efforts of NLN Swasthi Widjadja Bandem, Tjokorda Istri Putra Padmini, and Ni Ketut Yuliasih were instrumental in creating a new Rejang dance. They utilized movements from traditional Rejang dances in Bali, such as *ngumbang adeng*, *nyalud*, *maserod*, *nyeleog*, *nyogok*, *ulu wangsul (ileg-ileg)*, *ngetog*, *pejalan adeng*, *mentang*, *ngotes/ngampigang senteng*, *ngayab*, *nyayangang senteng*, *ngentungang senteng*, and *nyemak senteng*, which were then re-composed to fit the dance's musical structure.

According to Yuliasih, one distinctive feature of movements within the Rejang Dewa dance is the “*ngembat*” movement, inspired by ancient Rejang dances originating from Tenganan Village, Karangasem, Bali (N. K. Yuliasih, personal communication, December 8, 2023). Furthermore, Yuliasih asserted that Rejang Dewa dance is designed with simplicity in its movement patterns. However, the essence of the offering remains intact and well-preserved in this dance. The use of simple movement patterns allowed dancers to feel and focus on the nuances of the offering. Unlike other Balinese dance forms, the Rejang Dewa dance did not exhibit



entertaining movements. This simplicity, both in the quantity and quality of movement patterns, may reflect the intended spirit of the offering, allowing dancers to concentrate and delve into the deeper meanings of welcoming deities within themselves.

The music of the Rejang Dewa dance was conceived by I Nyoman Windha, I Wayan Rai S, and I Ketut Gede Asnawa under the guidance of a senior percussionist, I Wayan Beratha (deceased). They were assisted by the artist I Wayan Suweca (deceased) in arranging the music into a cohesive form. According to Asnawa, the music of the dance form is rooted in the structure of an ancient *lelambatan* percussion ensemble in Denpasar City, employing the *laluangan* model (I. K. G. Asnawa, personal communication, December 5, 2023). Additionally, relying on the collective memory of *lelambatan* percussions during temple ceremonies and *lelambatan* training by I Wayan Konolan (deceased), along with other musicians, he rearranged sections of this music into a new form for the Rejang Dewa dance. Subsequently, alongside percussion artists I Nyoman Windha and I Wayan Rai, they composed the music for the Rejang Dewa dance. Further investigation indicates that the music for this dance form is likely inspired by *Tabuh Pamendak* from Cerancam Hamlet, Kesiman Village, Denpasar City, Bali. This assumption is based on similarities in the musical repertoire of “*laluangan*,” the arrangement of musical notes, and musical structure, which were then adapted as the basis for the Rejang Dewa dance music ideas (Art Channel, 2023, pts. 16:00–23:15).

The term “Rejang,” in the context of the Rejang Dewa dance and other Rejang dances in general in Bali, originates from the Javanese Kuna term “*Rêja*,” meaning beauty or grace (Zoetmulder et al., 2004, p. 936). In Balinese dance culture, the Rejang Dance is considered sacred and is performed as a welcoming gesture for gods and goddesses in Hindu religious ceremonies. Typically performed by women with gentle, simple movements and minimally intricate or excessive choreographic motifs, the primary focus of Rejang Dance is devotion, concentration, and sincerity in conveying offerings to deities. The delicate movements and heightened concentration in the Rejang Dance depict the spiritual beauty and grace of the offerings presented to the deities, reflected in the simplicity of movements, yet rich in profound meanings in this sacred dance. Thus, the term “Rejang,” besides denoting physical beauty, also reflects spiritual grace and values expressed through devotion and sincerity in the Rejang Dance.

The title “Rejang Dewa” is a concept originating from the idea of I Made Bandem. Notably, on March 15, 1979, during the *Melasti* procession as part of the Eka Dasa Rudra Ceremony series, a typical Balinese dance known as Rejang Pamendakan was performed at the Penataran Agung Pura Agung Besakih (Figure 1). The dance was presented as an artistic offering to welcome the arrival of gods and goddesses from the *Melasti* procession or the purification ceremony centered on the sea (*segara*). Inspired by this phenomenon, Bandem developed the idea of creating a new dance form that was modern yet still rooted in traditional values. This resulted in naming the newly created dance as “Rejang Dewa.” Thus, the concept of the Rejang Dewa dance arose from Bandem’s meticulous understanding of the beauty and significance of the Rejang Pamendakan dance in traditional ceremonies, which then served as the foundation for creating a new dance form with a name that honors the essence and values of offerings to the gods and goddesses.



**Figure 1:** The Rejang Pamendak dance during the *Eka Dasa Rudra* ceremony in Besakih Temple, Bali, Indonesia (Source: Suparta, 1999)

According to Swasthi Bandem, the Rejang Dewa dance has been performed as a welcoming ceremony during state events and international forums since 1986. On February 24, 1986, the Indonesian Hindu Dharma Parisada (PHDI) held its 5th Mahasabha at the Yowana Mandala Sports Hall, Tembawu Village, East Denpasar, Denpasar City, Bali. The event was attended by President Soeharto and the First Lady (Tim Dokumentasi Presiden RI, 2003). During the opening ceremony of the 5th PHDI Mahasabha, the Rejang Dewa dance was performed to welcome the honored guests. The dance was performed by students of the ASTI Denpasar, under

the direct coordination of I Made Bandem. The 1986 PHDI Mahasabha opening ceremony marked the first time the Rejang Dewa dance was performed outside the context of Hindu religious ceremonies.

On May 1, 1986, the Rejang Dewa dance was used as part of a welcoming ceremony for the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, and his wife in Bali (Reagan Library on YouTube, 1986) (see Figure 2). At that time, the Governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Mantra, assigned two individuals, namely the Head of Protocol of the Bali Provincial Government, Anak Agung Oka Silagunadha, and the Chair of the ASTI Denpasar, I Made Bandem, to conceptualize the welcoming concept at the Hotel Putri Bali, Nusa Dua, Bali (Nusa Bali, 2017). Through Oka Silagunadha, the concept of “Bali Village” was introduced within the hotel, showcasing the socio-cultural activities of the Balinese community. This included replicas of traditional Balinese architecture (*Bale Daja*, *Bale Gede*, *Jineng*, *Merajan*), a traditional kitchen (*pawon*) complete with traditional cooking activities, and representations of ritual activities such as tooth filing (*mapandes*) and weddings (*pawiwahan*).



**Figure 2:** President Soeharto of Indonesia (standing, far right) delivered remarks and President Ronald Reagan of the United States (seated, center) at Nusa Dua, Bali (Source: Reagan Library on YouTube, 1986)

I Made Bandem played a crucial role in designing the artistic material presented to the state dignitaries. Thanks to his ideas, the Rejang Dewa dance was included as an artistic display in the hotel to create a religious atmosphere for the Balinese community within the concept of the Bali Village. The dancers were lecturers and students from ASTI Denpasar accompanied by *gamelan* musicians who were lecturers at ASTI Denpasar (see Figure 3). The performance of the Rejang Dewa dance during dinner reception was a reenactment of the socio-religious atmosphere of Balinese society. In their daily lives, Balinese Hindus usually perform religious ceremonies at temples. In these temple ceremonies, artistic and cultural elements have always played a role in enriching the atmosphere. The focus is not only on the essence and procedures of the ceremony in the religious dimension but also on local wisdom and artistry that enhance the ambiance. Notably, this representation of the socio-religious atmosphere received scrutiny from the then-Governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Mantra, out of concern that it might be perceived as desecrating the Hindu religious elements of Bali. According to Oka Silagundha, after receiving enlightenment from the priests at that time, this representation of socio-religious activities could be presented under the condition that it did not involve actual sacred elements in terms of meaning and procedures (Nusa Bali, 2017). Thus, all representations of socio-religious activities in Balinese society, including the Rejang Dewa dance, are considered pure performances in the immanent dimension, without a direct connection to specific religious ceremonies.



**Figure 3:** Rejang Dewa dance in welcoming President Ronald Reagan at Hotel Putri Bali, Nusa Dua, Bali in 1986 (left). I Wayan Sueca as a drummer leads the Rejang Dewa dance music team (right) (Source: Reagan Library on YouTube, 1986)

According to Swasthi Bandem, after various state events and international forums were held in Bali, the Rejang Dewa dance was used as an academic subject at ASTI Denpasar. To foster the devotion of the Balinese people to God, the Rejang Dewa dance was introduced to the community through the Community Service Learning (KKN) course for students. Students who engaged with the community were not only equipped with popular dance genres such as *kakebyaran* or *palegongan* but also with ceremonial dances like the Rejang Dewa dance. Several community groups in Bali that once had ancient Rejang dances but had since disappeared or were no longer intact were introduced to the Rejang Dewa dance to provide opportunities for the younger generation and local women to express their devotion through dance.

The introduction and training of the Rejang Dewa dance by students participating in the KKN course consistently occurred in various villages across Bali. This initiative highlights the ASTI Denpasar's strong commitment to preserving Balinese cultural heritage. The Rejang Dewa dance remained an important component of student KKN activities, even as ASTI Denpasar transitioned from being a college in 1988 to an art institute (ISI Denpasar) in 2003. According to Peradantha, as a student of the Dance Department at ISI Denpasar in 2008, he and his group conducted Rejang Dewa dance training in Susut Village, Bangli Regency, with one of the materials being Rejang Dewa dance (I. B. G. S. Peradantha, personal communication, December 8, 2023). He further stated that the local community had requested for materials to allow young girls to participate in Hindu religious rituals at their neighborhood temples.

The monumentalism of the Rejang Dewa dance continues through the Darmasiswa Scholarship Program, which welcomes foreign students from around the world. Foreign students from countries with diplomatic relations with Indonesia are eligible for scholarships from the Indonesian government through the Darmasiswa Program, which helps them learn the language, arts, and culture. As one of the lecturers assigned to teach in the Darmasiswa Program since 2014, Peradantha explained that he formulated the Rejang Dewa dance material to introduce Balinese dance culture, not only for entertainment but also for ritual purposes (I. B. G. S. Peradantha, personal communication, December 8, 2023). Students from various countries are provided the opportunity to learn the Rejang Dewa dance and participate in dance performances at temples during temple festivals (see Figure 4). Through this international program, the Rejang Dewa dance has become widely recognized, not only among the Balinese but also among the global community. He added that this initiative aims to provide a deeper introduction to Balinese dance culture, which is flexible, universal, and socio-religiously significant. It focuses not only on teaching artistic practices to foreign students in class, but also in fostering a higher appreciation for Balinese dance art.



**Figure 4:** The Rejang Dewa dance was presented by foreign students at the Bhatara Turun Kabeh Ceremony at Besakih Great Temple in 2015 (Photo by Peradantha)

In 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated three types of Balinese dances as intangible cultural heritage: ritual dances (*Wali*), sacred dances (*Bebali*), and entertainment dances (*Balih-bali*). The Rejang Dewa dance is one of the three dances recognized as an inseparable part of the world's cultural heritage. On December 29, 2015, an award ceremony for intangible cultural heritage was held at the Ksirarnawa Building, Art Center, Denpasar (see Figure 5). This award ceremony signifies global recognition of the importance of cultural heritage in the world of performing arts. The relevance of monumentalism lies in the significant efforts to preserve, develop, and promote Bali's traditional artistic values. The reformation of traditional artistic values rooted in the Rejang Dewa dance and other dances provides evidence that monumentalism in this context is a significant step in responding to cultural crises. UNESCO's recognition of the three genres of Balinese dance affirms that these dances are not only entertainment or ordinary performances, but also have deep cultural, historical, and religious significance.





**Figure 5:** The Rejang Dewa dance being performed at the UNESCO award ceremony at Ksirarnawa Building, Denpasar Cultural Park, Bali in 2015 (Source: Bali Arti & Dinas Kebudayaan Provinsi Bali, 2015)

The Rejang Dewa dance is a masterpiece created by various artists, including N.L.N. Widjadja Bandem, Tjokorda Istri Putra Padmini, Ni Ketut Yuliasih (dancer), I Ketut Gede Asnawa, and I Nyoman Windha. This dance was created under the supervision of I Made Bandem, the then chairman of ASTI Denpasar. The creation of the Rejang Dewa dance marked a conceptual shift in the understanding of ritual dance. Traditionally, Rejang dances in Bali were strictly confined to religious rituals. At that time, the offerings were interpreted as spiritual homages to the gods. However, with the creation of the Rejang Dewa dance, the concept of offering has expanded both vertically and horizontally. This means that the welcoming dance is no longer aimed solely at transcendence but also at immanence. This is reinforced by Padmini's statement that the dance was initially presented as a welcome gesture to guests (T. I. P. Padmini, personal communication, December 5, 2023). However, over time, the Rejang Dewa dance came to be recognized as a form of sacred Rejang dance. This reflects a new paradigm that is more flexible, where, besides being an offering in Hindu ceremonies, this dance also functions as a respectful gesture to welcome honored guests.

In its function as a welcoming dance for honored guests, the Rejang Dewa dance no longer involves sacred elements in its performance. This means that no artistic elements of the dance, such as costumes, props, or dancers, are elevated to the spiritual dimension. Conversely, if the Rejang Dewa dance is intended for ritual purposes, a process of sacralization is required. Sacralization involves elevating something ordinary to a higher, sacred, or divine status in a religious or cultural context through specific ceremonies. For example, when the Rejang Dewa dance is performed in a spiritual context, dancers undergo special rituals with specific instruments in the temple courtyard. This process elevates the dance to a sacred dimension in the context of ceremonies held in sacred places. When comparing the performance of the Rejang Dewa dance as part of the welcome ceremony for President Ronald Reagan to its traditional performance at Besakih Temple (compare Figures 3 and 4), differences can be observed in the dancers' attire. The dancers at the presidential welcome event did not wear crowns (*gelungan*), whereas in the dance performed at Besakih Temple, they wore complete crowns (*gelungan*). This signifies the sacred symbolism of the Rejang Dewa dance, not only in the sacralization process of the dancers but also in the use of dance crowns.

The origin of the Rejang Dewa dance is rooted in a profound historical and cultural process that underscores the interplay between preservation and innovation. Developed by I Made Bandem and his colleagues at ASTI Denpasar in 1983, the dance emerged as a response to the declining interest in sacred Balinese arts among younger generations and the need to rejuvenate traditional sacred dance forms such as the Rejang. The choreographers and composers of the Rejang Dewa dance in this project drew inspiration from sacred dance and music models found throughout Bali. This approach aimed to maintain the essence of the dance's religious nuance while presenting it in an aesthetic form that is more universally acceptable. In terms of movement composition, the choreographers borrowed the aesthetic concepts of *ngider* and *nyeleog* movements, which focus on the dancers' hand gestures, while incorporating the Leluangan gamelan from Kesiman Village, Denpasar, as the main source of musical inspiration. The steps taken in this creative process reflect a concrete effort by choreographers and composers to bridge traditional aesthetics with the needs of modern art that is more flexible and dynamic. The creation of this dance serves as a reflection of the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, which can coexist harmoniously and remain relevant within the socio-cultural development of society. The functional evolution of the Rejang Dewa dance, from a sacred ritual performance to a dance for welcoming state guests, demonstrates the strong adaptive response of Balinese culture. The careful distinction between the sacred and the secular, as emphasized by Bali's Governor from 1978 to 1988, Ida Bagus Mantra, ensures that the spiritual significance of the Rejang Dewa dance remains intact while preventing potential misunderstandings regarding its function and meaning within the community. Thus, the history of the Rejang Dewa dance serves as evidence that traditional arts can inspire innovation that remains relevant to contemporary needs through a critical and creative approach.



## 5.2. The monumentalism of the Rejang Dewa dance

The monumentality of the Rejang Dewa dance is not only due to its aesthetic richness but also because of its long historical evolution and broad cultural significance. Three key factors that play a role in the process of the monumentality of the Rejang Dewa dance, as found in this research, include: (1) the influence of power and policy, (2) the role of academic institutions, and (3) the historical context and artistic evolution. The combination of these factors makes Rejang Dewa dance a cultural heritage with profound local, national, and international significance.

### 5.2.1. Influence of power and policy

The policies and influence of the government, both local and national, in the process of monumentalizing the Rejang Dewa dance show a strong interconnection. The policies of the Bali regional government, which received approval and endorsement from the Central Government through the inclusion of the Rejang Dewa dance as one of the cultural attractions at important national and international events, significantly impact the global recognition of this dance. Moreover, UNESCO's inclusion of this dance as one of its intangible cultural heritages affirms the government's policy and diplomacy. This recognition, in addition to strengthening the international recognition of the Rejang Dewa dance, also affirms its status as a monumental cultural artifact. Thus, it is clear that government policy intervention plays a crucial role in shaping and strengthening the Rejang Dewa dance as a monumental dance to this day.

### 5.2.2. Role of academic institution

Besides the central government, the role of the ASTI Denpasar academic institution is crucial in the process of the monumentalization of the Rejang Dewa dance. This role is realized through initiatives in community service activities and its consistency in disseminating this dance throughout Bali. Standardizing the dance's choreography and music gives it a fixed form for dissemination. The next important step is to teach this dance to students at ASTI Denpasar so that these students then become cultural agents, spreading this dance to their respective hometowns. ASTI Denpasar, which also implements the *ngayah* program, or community service through the performance of ritual dances during religious ceremonies at various temples throughout Bali, always performs the Rejang Dewa dance, so this step also includes efforts to promote it to the community. With these steps, ASTI Denpasar has not only laid a strong foundation but also consistently and sustainably shaped the monumental status of the Rejang Dewa dance.

### 5.2.3. Historical context and evolution of art

Its evolutionary creation process explains how academic institutions play a role in the preservation and innovation of sacred art in Bali. The history of this dance strengthens the position of Rejang Dewa Dance in the development of dance art in the modern era. Through its history, this dance has proven to be more than just an academic innovation but also a universal cultural expression. Through the introduction of its historical context, the Rejang Dewa dance can be seen as one of the important milestones in the adaptive evolution of Balinese art, deeply rooted in tradition. So, the historical background is an important part of the process of monumentalism. It's not just a story about how things came to be; it's also a key part of understanding how the meaning of the Rejang Dewa dance changes over time and how it fits into Bali's cultural heritage.

Thus, the monumentalism of the Rejang Dewa dance is realized thanks to the interconnectivity between government policies, the role of academic institutions, and historical evolution. All three contribute significantly to the artistic form, artistic meaning, protection, international recognition, and sustainable preservation. These findings show that monumentality is not an instant process but rather the result of a consistent and continuous evolutionary process, supported by various parties. Government policies provide authority and protection, academic institutions play a role in academic innovation and preservation, while historical records serve as important evidence in interpretation. The integration of these factors proves that the Rejang Dewa Dance has reached a monumental stage as one of the forms of Balinese cultural heritage.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The monumental status of Rejang Dewa dance is a result of an evolutionary and continuous process. Since its creation in 1983 by artists from ASTI Denpasar, this dance has demonstrated how strong interconnectivity between government policies, academic institutions, and historical factors plays a crucial role in its recognition and preservation as part of Balinese artistic heritage. This study highlights the influence of government policies and power, particularly through cultural programs initiated by local and national governments. In addition, ASTI Denpasar, as an academic institution, plays a fundamental role in documenting and transmitting the artistic elements of the Rejang Dewa dance. This step is crucial to ensure its continuity as part of Bali's cultural identity. These factors are further reinforced by the historical context, where its

evolutionary record becomes a notable milestone worth studying in the development of dance art in Bali. This historical context produces a deep cultural understanding of traditional local dances that are universally accepted with more flexible functions. This study emphasizes that monumentality in the context of dance creation refers to works that not only possess aesthetic value but also profound historical and cultural significance. Although it has successfully revealed historical evolution and pivotal factors in the monumentalism process, this study still opens up opportunities for development through studies of art based on artificial intelligence (AI). As part of art education and its relation to religious rituals and cultural heritage, it is important to develop knowledge about how this dance can be easily learned with the help of AI, especially for the younger generation. Using AI to combine the results of this study with those of other studies will give us more information about how to make art learning more immersive. For example, dancers can use virtual reality and motion capture to get direct feedback on technical aspects like the accuracy of their movements, rhythm, and body posture. This approach will contribute to a more holistic strategy for preserving and advancing the existence of the Rejang Dewa dance and other dances in the future.

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