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CULTURAL RESILIENCE OF *KEJAWEN* ADHERENTS IN SURAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

Kejawen is a view of life system adhered and still maintained since it contains deep cultural values and still related to the ancestor teachings. In this current era, *Kejawen* needs resilience method to confront the challenges described as ability of individual or community to survive, adapt, and grow. This research used qualitative method and Focus Group Discussion with phenomenological approach. The selection process of the informants was conducted by snowball sampling technique and the initial selection of informants becomes a key to find next informant. Data collection was carried out by interview, observation, and documentation. Validity testing of research data used source triangulation technique by interviewing *Kejawen* adherent. The research findings showed that the appearance of inhibiting factors becomes challenges for *Kejawen* adherents in Surakarta to preserve its existence. The challenges were responded by the adherents through several strategies as their resilience form. These strategies included adaptation to current development through innovative use of technology as media in spreading cultural tradition to keep it relevant to young people.

Keywords : *Kejawen*; Resilience; Culture

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a country which has many cultures. Starting from Sabang to Merauke, Indonesia has traditions, arts, customs, languages, and unique values as national identity, and they are also important assets which must be preserved and inherited (Kiswahni, 2022). Since realizing the importance of culture as national identity, Indonesia enacted Law Number 5 of 2017 concerning Cultural Advancement. This law provides clear definition about culture. The definition of culture is stated in the Article 1, Paragraph 1 which contains everything related to society's creation, feeling, will, and work of art. Society has capacity to comprehend, interpret, and form culture as national identity (Saryono et al., 2024). This definition clearly shows that culture plays a role in forming a nation's character.

One of regions becoming center of cultural diversity and having influence in Indonesia is Java Island. Based on population census in 2020, Java Island dominated the population in Indonesia by 56.10%. This is in line with Javanese ethnic, which is the largest ethnic in Indonesia with a population of 95.2 million people (Triwibisono & Aurachman, 2021). The domination of Javanese ethnic is one of the factors which make Javanese culture easy to develop. Furthermore, the tradition and culture of Javanese ethnic is known as *Kejawen* (Kiswahni, 2022).

Kejawen is a system of belief which embraces deep relationship with God (*manunggaling kawula gusti* - the union of the creature with the Creator) and a belief that human's behavior will have merit to help them achieving their spiritual goals (Hermina, 2024). The concept of *Kejawen* consists of view of world life; the view of merit, sin, goodness and badness, the view of *Kejawen* about God, nature, and concept of *sedulur papat limo pancar* (a local Javanese's symbol which teaches universal values of brotherhood, balance, and wisdom). Based on *Kejawen* teachings, there are two realms of humans; macrocosm and microcosm. Macrocosm reflects on view of life about universe which is full of supernatural power, while microcosm refers to how humans view the real world, including the humans' relationship with environment, social life, and everything which is able to be observed by five senses (Setianingsih et al., 2022). *Kejawen* is the result of blend of various religious sects and native beliefs of Javanese society. As time goes by, *Kejawen* evolves along with religion believed

by its followers, and then it is often referred as *Islam Kejawen* (Islam which has become deeply ingrained in Javanese culture and tradition). It is similar to statement stated by Professor Veth which has been simplified by Koentjaraningrat that *Kejawen* is Islamic heritage practiced by Javanese people. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is transformation of *Kejawen* concept which is initially rooted in Hindu-Buddhist, yet it is finally closer to Islamic teachings. Abdullah Safiq also explained that Islamic style developed in Java is more closely integrated with *Kejawen* teachings, so that it has its own characteristics. It appears in the tradition of *merti dusun* (traditional ceremonies for expressing gratitude to the Creator), *kupatan* (religious tradition related to Islamic tradition), and *slametan* (Javanese ritual tradition symbolizing social unity), etc., which can still be found in Muslim community in Java (Rahman & Irama, 2022).

Kodiran, in one of his writings, also identified cultural line of *Kejawen* in some regions in Java, such as Banyumas, Kedu, Yogyakarta, Madiun, Malang, Kediri, and Surakarta. Other regions, which are not mentioned, are known as Coastal and East End areas (Koentjaraningrat, 1984). However, among those regions, the cultural centers of *Kejawen* are Yogyakarta and Surakarta.

Surakarta or Solo is a city famous for its strong Javanese culture, so it is called as a cultural center city (Rumaningsih & Zailani, 2022). The long history of Surakarta was begun after translocation of Kartasura Palace, as the center of kingdom, to Surakarta in 1745. It was caused by severe damage from *Geger Pecinan* (Chinatown tumult or Murder of the Chinese). This translocation marked the beginning of establishing Surakarta as new government center of Islamic Mataram kingdom (Asasi & Sianipar, 2021). Therefore, Surakarta not only witnessed the long journey of Islamic Mataram kingdom, but also transform into a cultural center which still maintains Javanese traditions and values up to this day. Surakarta itself is a place of cultural and tradition development in Java. Javanese culture which is known as *Kejawen* is one of identities or identification mark of the Palace itself (Fitriana & Sugiarto, 2021).

The existence of Surakarta Palace and *Pura Mangkunegaran* (Palace of the Duke of Mangkunegara) also play a role in preserving Javanese culture traditions and its diffusion (Purbaningrum & Kusairi, 2023). Hence, Surakarta has strong relation to *Kejawen's* teachings and practices which is reflected in the traditions, arts,

and philosophy of life of the society. One of *Kejawen*'s traditions which are still carried out until now by the Palace is *Sekaten* (Javanese traditional festival aiming to commemorate the birthday of Islamic Prophet Muhammad). *Sekaten* is a unification of two unique cultures, i.e. Javanese and Islamic culture (Agus, 2024). *Sekaten* is not merely a religious tradition, but also a real existence of local culture which is full of spiritual and social values. This tradition works as a bridge between *Kejawen* tradition and Islamic teachings, and also to strengthen the cultural identity of Javanese society (Wahono, 2020). Thus, it becomes a method to preserve *Kejawen* culture and as identity for *Kejawen* adherents in Surakarta.

Kejawen, which has strong cultural root in people's lives, should grow rapidly, yet it actually faces various challenges in gaining recognition and protection. Nowadays, *Kejawen* has been abandoned and considered as ancient culture by some people (Kholis dalam Imron et al., 2023). It was also influenced by the spread of major religions that became official religions in the world. The model of a religion understood in Indonesia is influenced by the presence of the first religion formalized in Indonesia which requires elements such as monotheism, prophets, holy books, and institutional structures, which makes local beliefs unable to meet these requirements resulting in some of their sacred practices being seen as lacking faith because they do not adhere to the appropriate religion (Hermina, 2024). The *kejawen* believers experience social rejection, humiliation, and judgment from others as a form of discrimination that they feel in society (Mahanani, 2024).

That case is inseparable from the view of *Kejawen* customs or teachings which is often associated with idolatry due to certain practices in which it is against the religion (Liora et al., 2023). Furthermore, there are many people having lack understandings about symbolic recognition and sources of *Kejawen* teachings, so it leads to discriminatory actions toward *Kejawen* adherent (Verry & Angga, 2023). This is caused by several factors, i.e. the definition of religion stipulated by government which is in line with Western religion construction stating that a belief will be considered as religion if it has monotheistic element, prophet, Scripture, and receives international recognition (Kamal, 2023). For example, when *Sapta Darma* (one of spiritual beliefs in Java) adherent in Kalenpandan village, Larangan Sub-district,

Brebes held *ritual sujudan* (worship ritual of *Sapta Darma* adherent), it was considered heretical by local residents since they prostrated by facing east (Adzkiya & Fadhilah, 2020). The similar case was also experienced by adherents of *Pelajar Kawruh Jiwo* (science of the psyche/self-knowledge) in Surakarta, they allegedly performed unusual behavior and labeled practicing shamanism (Trinugraha et al., 2023). Besides, according to Central Bureau of Statistics in 2018, the number of adherents of beliefs in Surakarta continued to decrease up to 120 people, thus the total numbers of adherents as of 1 January 2019 were 965 people.

Kejawen has been present for hundreds of years, but today it faces many challenges, especially in responding to social pressures. This research is one of the steps to recognize and appreciate cultural diversity, especially the aspect of spirituality that is inherent as an Indonesian identity. In addition, this research helps in understanding the resilience represented by *Kejawen* as a form of local cultural strength in maintaining its relevance in the midst of the modern era. Heretofore, various researches have studied the concept of *Kejawen* as one of Javanese beliefs, and *Kejawen* in Islamic perspectives often associate to those teachings with certain religious understandings. However, there are not any studies yet discussing the dynamics which should be faced to preserve the existence of *Kejawen* through adaptation and resilience process in this contemporary era. Hence, this research is conducted to find out how resilient the culture of *Kejawen* adherents is in Surakarta.

METHODS

This research used qualitative method and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Qualitative research method was conducted by direct collecting data in natural environment or in actual condition to deeply comprehend and interpret phenomenon occurred (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Moreover, the approach used in this qualitative research was phenomenological approach which understands the events of human life within the framework of society's thinking and behavior as comprehended and thought by each individual (Nasir et al., 2023). In addition, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a type of interview involving an interaction between researchers and six to eight participants to dig information, point of view, or to confirm a finding of observation result. In this research, FGD was used to obtain data concerning the

resilience of *Kejawen* and *Kejawen* in context of society's urban life in Surakarta.

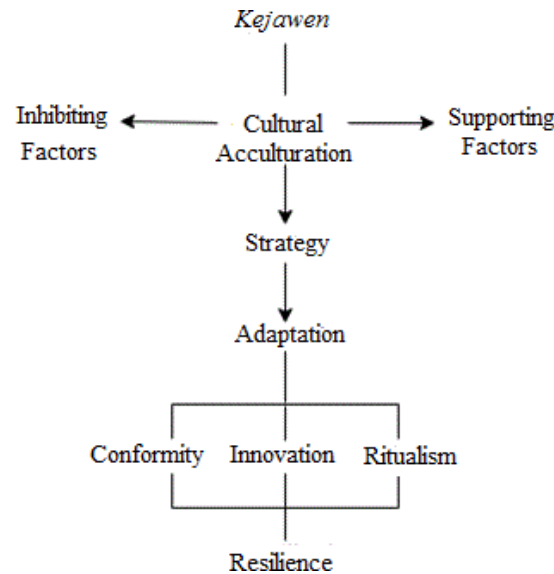
Source of data in a research refers to subject or informant in which the information collected to support the research process (Tersiana, 2018). Source of data is distinguished in to two; primary data source and secondary data source. In this research, primary data source was directly obtained through interview with the informants who are *Kejawen* practitioners. Furthermore, this research also used relevant secondary data to this research, such as journals, articles, and Javanese society books.

Additionally, the technique used in this research was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is technique of collecting sample in which initial selection of informants becomes a key to find the next informant. The obtained information comes from the first informant will be used to identify other individuals who have similar characteristics. Next, the new informant will introduce more potential informants (Suhartanto et al., 2023). The data collection of this research used interview, observation, and documentation. The interview was conducted with the informant who was relevant to this research; they are *Kejawen* adherent figures, members of Surakarta Palace, and cultural observers who have been involving for long time in preserving tradition and Javanese culture, while observation was conducted by directly observing the ritual of *Kejawen* adherents. In the meantime, the documentation which was used including voice recorders during the interview, photos or images recording *Kejawen* ritual activity, media used, and worship place.

Validity testing of data obtained from this research used source triangulation technique. Source triangulation was conducted by checking the data obtained during research through several sources or informants, so the conclusion was obtained from the data which have been analyzed by the researchers (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). In this research, source triangulation used interview with a key informant, it is *Kejawen* adherent which has status as one of faith-based organization figures in Central Java.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Resilience Process of *Kejawen*



Essentially, *Kejawen* is known as a teaching which is believed originating from Javanese society. *Kejawen* is acculturation between original cultures of Javanese society and religion entering and developing in Java, such as Hindu, Buddhism, Christian, and Islam. Acculturation within *Kejawen* can be viewed in the tradition activities of *sekaten* (Javanese traditional festival aiming to commemorate the birthday of Islamic Prophet Muhammad), *slametan* (Javanese ritual tradition symbolizing social unity), *nyadran* (a tradition of praying for deceased ancestors), *labuhan* (a ceremony to wash things away at the sea for respecting and maintaining the balance of nature), *ruwatan* (a ceremony to get rid of the badness), etc. This acculturation process experiences various challenges because of factors which support or inhibit the sustainability of *Kejawen* teachings in this life, especially in Surakarta. Thus, effective strategy is needed in order to maintain *Kejawen*'s values and practices. As response to changes, *Kejawen* adherents conduct various adaption through conformity, innovation, and ritual adaption. This process becomes resilience form of *Kejawen* in Surakarta which allows the teachings to survive though it encounters various challenges. The resilience concept of *Kejawen* within this research is portrayed as the ability of individual or adherent community to survive, adapt, and grow amidst the challenges of life.

Strategy

Various strategies have been done to preserve Javanese values and traditions.

Surakarta as Javanese central culture holds various events to conserve the culture; one of them is *Grebeg Sudiro*. This event is held by urban-village of Sudiroprajan located near *Pasar Gede* Surakarta (one of the biggest market in Surakarta). *Grebeg Sudiro* is a form of cultural acculturation between Chinese and Javanese culture. The event has two main activities, namely *sedekah bumi* (earth charity) which means expressing the gratitude of *Pasar Gede's* sellers and local communities, and cultural carnival which performs art collaboration from two ethnics, such as typical Javanese dance, *Liong* and *Barongsai* (holy symbol of Chinese community) performance. The efforts conducted to support cultural preservation do not only rely on cultural events, but also through Javanese society's way of life which is full of Javanese noble value.

Javanese society has values which have been internalized from generation to generation. The harsh teaching style, which was used by the predecessor, begins to be left and changed into an approach making the younger generations free to express without losing their manner which reflects their Javanese identity. The values are internalized since early age through introduction to simple etiquette, i.e. respecting the elders. This approach is not only for shaping polite and refined individual characters, but also provides a basic knowledge to interact with various levels of society.



Image 1. Kejawen culture preserved through the Surakarta Palace Museum.

Current young generation grows in the era where social media, i.e. Instagram and YouTube, becomes inseparable part of daily life. Surakarta Palace and *Kejawen* adherents understand that it is important to follow current development by using those platforms as medium to preserve Javanese values and traditions. Instagram

which is managed by Surakarta Palace actively presents various kinds of information related to Javanese tradition and culture. Feeds and reels display presented in contemporary way succeed to attract young people's attention. Besides, YouTube channel of Surakarta Palace also shares various kinds of knowledge related to *Kejawen* rituals. Hence, the audiences coming from various circles can easily understand the meaning and philosophy of those rituals.

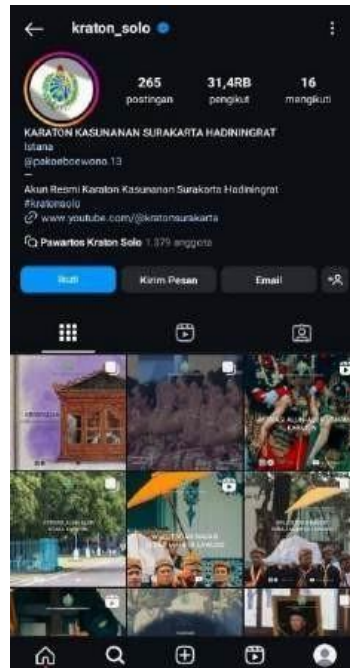


Image 2. Instagram of Surakarta Palace

Surakarta Palace has *Pawiyatan Kabudayan*, a non-formal education institution which carries out various Javanese cultural trainings. The participants take part in this *pawiyatan* based on personal awareness. All programs provided in the *Pawiyatan* are completely focused on Javanese culture and carried on for six months. The materials taught involving; *subasita* (manners), Javanese fashion, *gladhen macapat* (singing practice in Javanese), *pambiwara* (master of ceremony in Javanese), etc. Furthermore, Surakarta Palace allows young people to directly participate in *Kejawen* ritual performance, for example ritual of *caos dhahar* meant as expressing gratitude and respect to the ancestors.

Image 3. Ritual of *Caos Dhahar* in Surakarta Palace.

Another strategy used to introduce Javanese traditions and cultures is organizing cultural seminars. This seminar specially discusses and teaches Javanese values, philosophies, and traditions. Through various strategies conducted inclusively and comprehensively, negative stigma spreading in the society about *Kejawen* can be slowly stopped.

Matrix 1. Strategy of *Kejawen* Resilience

Strategy Form	<i>Kejawen</i> Adherent	Surakarta Palace	Cultural Observer
Family	Early introduction to Javanese ethics and values		
Social Media	The use of YouTube and Instagram to introduce <i>Kejawen</i> traditions		-
Community	Organizing cultural seminar	-	Holding Grebeg Sudiro Event
Education	-	a. Organizing various <i>Pawiyatan Kebudayaan</i> b. Allowing young people to directly participate in the <i>Kejawen</i> ritual	-

Adaptation

Kejawen has an open outlook. It means that *Kejawen* does not directly resist external elements, yet it receives them openly through adjustment to local values to make it remains balance. This strategy is viewed as society's effort to "adapt" to external influences while still keeping in line with modernity without ignoring their cultural root as identity and life guidance. Then, conformity emerges as one of active responses to *Kejawen* cultures in maintaining social harmony. Conformity is an adaption form in which an individual follows the goals and ways accepted by society. Hence, in *Kejawen*, it is viewed as acceptance to spiritual and cultural values existed in the Javanese society, such as values of *guyub rukun* as social harmony, *tepa selira* as appreciative attitude, and *nrima ing pandum* as acceptance of all provisions of the Creator. Those values make *Kejawen* different, because it is considered as view of life prioritizing the balance of human relationship with each other, universe, and God. Javanese society who still carries on *slametan* (Javanese ritual tradition symbolizing social unity), *sekaten* (Javanese traditional festival aiming to commemorate the birthday of Islamic Prophet Muhammad), *nyadran* (a tradition of praying for deceased ancestors), or earth charity will make effort to maintain the harmony between ancestor traditions and Islamic values by complying the methods which have already accepted by society. *Kejawen* demands the individuals to follow traditional teachings by maintaining harmony in the family, society, and universe for minimizing conflict or tension in life. Nowadays, even though the society is experiencing social and economic demands, they, who carry *Kejawen* principal, keep holding on to cultural forms and moral teachings to achieve inner peace and harmony in life.

Adaptation process conducted by *Kejawen* adherents then provides space for innovation. The innovation can be seen in individual who accepts the culture in new ways which are more relevant to current development. The use of virtual space, such as the use of social media, in this case is YouTube, becomes one way which the adherents can socialize and stop negative stigma of *Kejawen*. Due to the change in function to be tourist attraction, *Kejawen* adherents are having difficult time to pray in public sphere. Thus, they must ask for permission to local administrators first.

Initially, the ritual was sacredly and intimately performed in open space, yet it is now performed in the closed space, such as a house. Several ritual elements have changed too. For example, *takir* (container made of banana leave) which is replaced by plastic container, though it does not omit its basic values. The Palace of Kasunanan Surakarta and Mangkunegaran Palace have role in preserving *Kejawen* ritual through big rituals, such as *Kirab Suro* (an event to celebrate Islamic New Year) and *Sekaten* (Javanese traditional festival aiming to commemorate the birthday of Islamic Prophet Muhammad) which can draw the young people's attention. Additionally, the Palace succeeds in introducing and maintaining the preservation of *Kejawen* tradition by conducting commercial approach and traditional art performance.



Image 4. *Kejawen* adherents worship at home.

Innovation, which is presented through commercialization, leads individual continuing to preserve the practice by following existed rules. Even though, the goals of the practice are no longer relevant. This phenomenon is known as Ritualism. It can be seen when the individual still carries on the ritual or tradition, such as *nyekar* (visiting family grave by sowing flowers) or earth charity. Yet, it is only a formality or heredity custom without understanding the spiritual meaning. The tradition is carried out merely to fulfill the custom and there are no deep spiritual intentions and beliefs. However, *Kejawen* teachings warn that a ritual should not become an empty routine, but it must be carried on with an awareness of its meaning and purposes of each action.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of *Kejawen* Resilience

Meaning and purpose awareness of ritual can be a stimulation for *Kejawen* resilience as strong foundation to preserve identity in facing challenges. The other

factors which also support resilience of *Kejawen* are *Kejawen* values, the role of ritual, tradition, and social support which continues to live in the society. Ritual and tradition such as *slametan* (Javanese ritual tradition symbolizing social unity) and *nyekar* (visiting family grave by sowing flowers) which are still carried on reflecting that the tradition is still maintained and becomes a form of cultural heritage preservation. Besides, Javanese people also internalize the values of ancestral teachings through *Kejawen* cultural acculturation. It shows that the effort of value system preservation roots in manner, courtesy, *guyub rukun* (social harmony), *tepa selira* (appreciative attitude), and *nrima ing pandum* (acceptance of all provisions of the Creator). Manners in *Kejawen* reflect on the compliance towards local norms and customs. For example, speak politely by using polite Javanese language and respect the elders and others. Those values are not only taught by nuclear family, but also through social interactions in environment such as neighbors and relatives. Hence, it works as individual behavior guidance as well as social mechanism which strengthen solidarity and identity of the community.

Values preservation as resilience form also encounters various challenges inhibiting its continuance. Stigmatization and negative view of the society consider these cultural practices are strange and irrelevant. Moreover, internally, due to society's stigmatization, young people will be doubt and skeptical to carry on the tradition taught by the elders or ancestors. It is influenced by the dominance of other teachings which create new metanarrative and increasingly shift *Kejawen* cultural teachings. Hence, young people, who do not fully understand the values of Javanese cultures, doubt to internalize and continue the tradition. The lack of public sphere for cultural expression also becomes an obstacle, because there is no place for cultural interaction and celebration.

Matrix 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of *Kejawen* Resilience

Factors	Adherent	Surakarta Palace	Cultural Observer
Supporting Factors	a. <i>Kejawen</i> as enculturation result of local tradition is easier to be accepted by the society. b. The concept of ancestors, who are respected and regarded as medium in communication with God, encourages the society to keep continuing the tradition of <i>Kejawen</i>. c. The Constitutional Court Decision of 2016, which recognized <i>Kejawen</i> beliefs and allowed the adherents to include their beliefs on their ID card as “Belief in Almighty God”, gave legitimacy and support for <i>Kejawen</i> practice. d. The ability to adapt <i>Kejawen</i> practice in to modern context, such as introducing the tradition to children in a fun and easy to understand way.	a. The existence of education and training in the field of art and culture, such as Javanese fashion and MC in Javanese language, help young people to understand and preserve the tradition. b. The implementation of ritual and tradition is still conducted by society, i.e. event of <i>Sura</i>, who maintains the continuity of cultural practice. c. Javanese society still holds strong traditional values, i.e. mutual cooperation, courtesy, and respect for ancestors, which become integral part of the daily life.	Javanese society has high awareness about the importance of respecting the ancestors, which reflects in various rituals and traditions, such as <i>slametan</i> and earth charity.

	e. Javanese society still holds strong traditional values, i.e. mutual cooperation and respect for ancestors, which become integral part of the daily life.		
Inhibiting Factors	a. Limited funds and resources for supporting cultural preservation activities, especially in smaller communities. b. Daily activities and family responsibilities are able to reduce available time to participate in <i>Kejawen</i> practice, for young people in particular. c. Lack of understanding of the society regarding <i>Kejawen</i> practice can create obstacles in carrying out the ritual in public space. d. The lack of understanding of <i>Sapta Dharma</i> and <i>Kejawen</i> among wider community, including young people, can lead the disappearance of practices and traditions.	a. <i>Kejawen</i> is often considered as mystical or heresy practices which can reduce the interest of young people to be involved in this tradition. b. The lack of understanding regarding <i>Kejawen</i> among wider community, including young people, can lead the disappearance of practices and traditions. c. The pressure coming from official religions which demand the society to choose one religion can obstruct <i>Kejawen</i> appreciation. d. The lack of understanding regarding culture and tradition among young people can lead the disappearance of cultural practices.	Concern about losing young people who are not interested to continue <i>Kejawen</i> tradition, especially if they do not have emotional closeness with those practices.

CONCLUSION

Cultural resilience of *Kejawen* Adherents in Surakarta shows the ability to survive and adapt to socio-cultural changes and current situation through several strategies. They are early age introduction of values, young people involvement in *Kejawen* community, procurement of *pawiyatan* (institution) based on Javanese culture, performance of cultural events, and social media utilization as medium to spread *Kejawen* using modern approach. The strategies conducted by *Kejawen* Adherents are adaptation form carried out in this era. This adaptation includes conformity, innovation, and ritual. Conformity refers to adaptation to the development of the era. This adaptation is carried out by *Kejawen* Adherents using development technology which can create innovation in the ritual tradition and its spread. Furthermore, Cultural resilience of *Kejawen* in Surakarta is formed by combination between strategy of values preservation and the use of technology in the preservation. Even though the challenges faced by *Kejawen* Adherents in Surakarta are quite complex, the adaptation is still possible to keep the teachings relevant in the current time. In addition, this adaptation represents *Kejawen* culture which has ability to survive and grow in current era and ability to maintain the existence of the teachings identity.

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