

# The General Artistic Orientation of *Wayang Kulit* in the 'Folk' Tradition in the Present Day

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**Abstract**—This study aims to analyze the aesthetics of wayang kulit performance in the folk tradition, and the research subject covers wayang kulit in the styles of East Java, Kedu, Banyumas, and Tegal. The problem discussed is the general artistic orientation of wayang kulit performance (*pakeliran*) in the folk tradition today. This study uses a qualitative method with an approach of art sociology and aesthetics of Javanese puppetry. The research data was collected through a library study, documentation study, observation, and interviews. The research results show that the artistic orientation of wayang kulit in the folk tradition today has changed, been combined with the *keraton* or court tradition and even packaged with elements of kitsch.

**Keywords**—wayang kulit performance, folk tradition, artistic orientation

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Wayang kulit* performance (hereon referred to as *pakeliran*) in the folk tradition is a style of *pakeliran* that lived and developed in rural agrarian communities. The characteristics of *pakeliran* in the folk tradition are extremely diverse, being shaped by the individual performance styles of numerous *dalang* (puppeteers) and passed down from generation to generation through the performance. The performances of this *dalang* thrived in areas far from the cities that were former centers of Javanese kingdoms, namely in the rural, mountain, and coastal regions [1]. In East Java, there are four sub-styles of *pakeliran*: *Lamongan*, *Mojokertoan*, *Porongan*, and *Malangan* [2] [3]. In Central Java, there are three styles of *pakeliran*: Kedu, Banyumas, and Tegal. Kedu style *pakeliran* is divided into four sub-styles: *Magelangan*, *Temanggung*, *Wonosaban*, and *Bagelènan* [4], while Banyumas style *pakeliran* has two sub-styles: *pesisiran* (coastal) and *lor gunung* (north of the mountain) [5].

On average, the range of popularity of each of the *pakeliran* styles in the folk tradition is relatively narrow, limited only to the community in its own cultural area. The range of popularity of the *Lamongan* sub-style of *pakeliran* is limited to the area in and around Lamongan. The range of popularity of the *Mojokertoan* sub-style of *pakeliran* is limited to the areas in and around Jombang and Mojokerto. The range of popularity of the *Porongan* sub-style of *pakeliran* is limited to the areas in and around Sidoarjo and Surabaya. The range of popularity of the *Malangan* sub-style of *pakeliran* is limited to the area in and around

Malang [2] [3]. The range of popularity of the *pakeliran* sub-styles *Magelangan*, *Temanggung*, *Wonosaban*, and *Bagelènan* extends only to the areas of Magelang, Temanggung, Wonosobo, and Bagelèn [4] [5]. The range of popularity of the *Banyumasan* sub-style of *pakeliran* is limited to the areas of Banyumas, Cilacap, Purbalingga, and Banjarnegara [6]. Similarly, *Tegalan* style *pakeliran* is popular only in the areas of Tegal, Pemalang, and in some parts of Pekalongan.

The range of popularity of *pakeliran* in the folk tradition is indeed not as broad as *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition, and this is especially true for Surakarta style which is not only popular in the Central Javanese community but also in most of East Java. Therefore, this study aims to answer the question: what is the general artistic orientation of *pakeliran* in the folk tradition today? This problem is examined based on an approach of art sociology and aesthetics of Javanese puppetry.

Arnold Hauser groups art according to its cultural strata into four categories: elite art, folk art, popular art, and mass art. Each of these four categories has a different artistic orientation. Elite art exists only amongst the cultural elite or nobility, and its artistic orientation is intricate and complex. Folk art exists in, is rooted in, and enjoyed by rural agrarian communities, and its artistic orientation is spontaneous and simpler. Popular art exists in and is enjoyed by urban communities, and its artistic orientation places more emphasis on pragmatism for social entertainment and as a medium for relaxation and escape from the boredom often experienced by working people, and for this reason, it is easy to digest without the need for deep reflection or understanding. Mass art is produced by mechanical equipment and has a very diverse audience, with an artistic orientation directed towards entertainment [7].

Based on its character, the aesthetics of Javanese puppetry can be divided into three groups: the aesthetic of *keraton* puppetry, the aesthetic of folk puppetry, and the aesthetic of kitsch puppetry. The aesthetic of puppetry in the *keraton* tradition places a great deal of consideration on the compatibility of the aesthetical nuance with a particular scene, including nuances of *regu*, *greget*, *sem*, and *nges*. *Regu* describes a nuance that is sacred, grand, commanding, solemn, calm, and steady. *Greget* creates the impression of being excited, tense, hurried, awkward, rough, simple, angry, lustful, and frightening. *Sem* is a nuance that is pleasing, passionate, mischievous, agile, restless, flirtatious,

fluid, relaxed, and romantic. The nuance of *nges* creates an impression that is compassionate, pitiful, remorseful, sad, confused, upset, cold, and lonely. These four aesthetical nuances are always present and combine to form a single entity in the inner meaning and emotion (*rasa*) of performance [8]. The aesthetic of puppetry in the folk tradition places more emphasis on aspects of togetherness and communality. Therefore, the aesthetic of this style of performance is fluid, unadorned, and *gayeng* or *gobyog*, which means creating an impression of festivity, joy, fluidity, loudness, harshness, roughness, and agility, all uniting to form the complete meaning and emotion (*rasa*) of a performance [9] [10]. Puppetry packaged in the style of kitsch is oriented more towards market taste and generally pays less attention to ethical and aesthetical aspects, while prioritizing its function as entertainment, social criticism, and the like, for the purpose of satisfying the masses. For this reason, the treatment of this style of *pakeliran* tends to include tricks, gimmicks, glamour, sex-appeal, and sensationalism [11].

## II. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method [12]. The research data was collected through a library study, documentation study, observation, and interviews.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Characteristics of Folk Style

Based on its cultural locus, *pakeliran* in the folk tradition can be differentiated according to three main styles: East Javanese, *Keduan*, and *Banyumasan*. Each of these styles of *pakeliran* has its own individual characteristics. East Javanese style *pakeliran* always begins with the performance of the *Ngréma* dance, performed in two styles, male and female. This dance is performed to welcome the guests as they arrive and to invite people to come and watch the *wayang kulit* performance. During this part of the performance, the guests or members of the audience may dance or sing together with the *Ngréma* dancers, thus creating a nuance of *ramé* and *gayeng* before the *wayang kulit* performance starts. *Keduan* and *Banyumasan* style *pakeliran* are different, beginning with *gending patalon* like in the *keraton* tradition of Yogyakarta and Surakarta style *pakeliran*. The *Ngréma* dance and *gending patalon* both have the same function, namely to announce to the nearby community that performance of *wayang kulit* is about to begin. The difference is that during the performance of *gending patalon* the audience is not directly involved in the performance, as in the *Ngréma* dance.

*Pakeliran* in the folk tradition, whether in East Javanese, *Keduan*, or *Banyumasan* style, does not have a fixed scene structure as in the case of *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition (Yogyakarta and Surakarta). The order and arrangement of scenes depend largely on the repertoire of the story (*lakon*) presented and the creativity or *sanggit* of each individual *dalang*. Performances of these three folk styles of *pakeliran* do not include the *kedhatonan* scene, a court scene which portrays the king's consort welcoming the king home from a royal assembly, nor do they include the *limbukan* scene, an intermezzo depicting two ladies-in-waiting, Cangik and Limbuk, who have just appeared before the king and his

consort. These styles also contain no *gara-gara* scene, an intermezzo which presents the servants of the knights (Javanese: *panakawan*) and is not part of the main storyline. The jokes of the *panakawan*—Semar, Bagong, and Besut in East Javanese *pakeliran*; or Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong in *Keduan* and *Banyumasan* style *pakeliran*—are usually interspersed in the dialogue of their masters in scenes that take place in a hermitage or in the middle of a forest.

The fluid and simple nuance of *pakeliran* in the folk tradition is evident in the *dalang's* narration (Javanese: *janturan* and *pocapan*) and in the dialogue and monologues of the *wayang* characters, which tend to use the everyday language of communication, with the particular dialect of each area. Although the *wayang* characters often use archaic words in this narration, dialogue, and monologues, it is not as frequent or complex as in *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition. In addition, jokes are not limited only to the comic figures (Semar, Gareng, Petruk, Bagong or Bawor, Besut, Cantrik, Togog, Bilung, Pak Mujeni, and Pak Mundu), but may also be uttered by any of the other *wayang* figures. Even charismatic figures such as Baladewa, Kresna, Puntadewa, Werkudara, and Arjuna may engage in humorous banter. This means that the *wayang* characters presented in the *pakeliran* truly represent the lives of real people. It is not surprising, therefore, that even the figures of Werkudara and Arjuna may laugh out loud or sob woefully like ordinary people, and are not always portrayed in the serious way in which they appear in *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition.

The impression of *gayeng* or *gobyog* appears in the *gending* or musical accompaniment that supports the *pakeliran* and in the *sulukan* or *dalang's* songs that help to set the mood of a scene, which tend to be loud, harsh, and performed at a relatively fast tempo. The performance of certain *gending* and *sulukan* are also interspersed with the singing of the *pengrawit* or musicians, in the form of call and response (known as *senggakan* and *alok*), and certain types of *sulukan* end with the *pengrawit* singing together in unison in a rhythmic vocal part known as *jineman*. This kind of nuance created by the *gending* and *sulukan* does not appear in *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition.

### B. General Artistic Orientation of *Pakeliran* in the Folk Tradition in the Present Day

Since the establishment of two schools specializing in the art of puppetry by the Javanese cultural elite—the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta with PADASUKA (1923) and the Kasultanan Yogyakarta with HABIRANDA (1925)—the art of puppetry in the folk tradition that had existed in various areas gradually began to disappear [1]. This became more apparent after the emergence of the sub-styles of puppetry introduced by Nartasabda (in the 1960s) and Anom Soeroto (in the 1970s), based on the *keraton* tradition of Surakarta, and the sub-style of Timbul Hadiprayitna (1960-an), based on the *keraton* tradition of Yogyakarta, which resulted in *pakeliran* in the folk tradition becoming even more marginalized. People preferred the style of *wayang kulit* performance of Nartasabda, Anom Soeroto, and Timbul Hadiprayitno, which followed the *keraton* tradition, rather than the traditional folk style of performance. These conditions caused *dalang* who followed the folk style of

*pakeliran* to take a stance; either to preserve the folk tradition but combine it with the *keraton* tradition or to change direction entirely and adopt the style of *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition.

*Dalang* who have continued to preserve the folk tradition but combined it with the *keraton* tradition include Wardono and Pitoyo, both from Mojokerto. Their style of *pakeliran* is East Javanese but includes *limbukan* and *gara-gara* scenes such as are found in *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition. They even package these two scenes with two elements of kitsch, namely gimmicks and sex-appeal, characterized by the addition of an electronic keyboard and the attractively-dressed *casm Pursari* singers. One *dalang* who changed direction and began to perform in the style of the *keraton* tradition was Enthuis Susmana. His *pakeliran* was originally in *Tegalan* style but in the 1980s he began to change direction and adopt the traditional style of the Surakarta *keraton*. In the 1990s, he even started to package his performances with numerous elements of kitsch, including tricks, gimmicks, glamour, sex-appeal, and sensationalism [13].

The change in artistic orientation of *pakeliran* made by *dalang* from the folk tradition was for no other reason than to make their performances more attractive to members of the *wayang* community. They realized that *pakeliran* in the *keraton* tradition, especially Surakarta style, had the largest audiences and the widest range of popularity when compared with *pakeliran* in the folk tradition. They hoped that their new efforts would lead to higher payment than if they continued to preserve the traditional *pakeliran* style of their ancestors.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The change in artistic orientation of *pakeliran* by *dalang* from the folk tradition cannot be separated from two factors, namely the desire, on one hand, to gain popularity, while on the other hand earning a higher income.

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