

The Transformation of *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon Dance from Being Part of Traditional Ceremony into a Dance Performed for Entertainment

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ABSTRACT

Tari Topeng or mask dance is a long-standing art heritage in Indonesia, because it functions and serves as an essential element in the life of the community where it belongs, specifically for the society in Cirebon, West Java, in performing traditional rituals and one of those mask dances is *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon dance. This dance depicts a pure human being born with no sins. Therefore, this dance is usually performed in traditional ceremonies such as *Ngunjung Buyut* (visiting the graves of the deceased ancestors) and *Mapag Sri* (the harvest ceremony). As time goes by, the *Topeng Panji* mask dance has evolved into a dance for entertainment for the Cirebon community. The increase and decrease of the frequency of the performances for this dance have been influenced by the development of society as information technology also develops.

Keywords: *Topeng Panji Cirebon Mask Dance, Traditional Ceremony, Entertainment*

1. INTRODUCTION

A dance performance is a performance that involves elements of the supporting community. Dance performances are held based on local culture in different contexts. A dance performance is usually performed at certain ceremonies related to customs and beliefs, but there are also communities that carry out this dance performance as an entertainment or recreation. Social systems and the natural environment influence the form and meaning of dances in ethnic and cultural communities. One of these dances is a dance that has developed in Cirebon society, namely the mask dance '*Topeng Panji*' of Cirebon which has existed since Sunan Gunung Jati spread Islam in Cirebon in the past. In the development of the times, the role of the mask dance '*Topeng Panji*' in the life of the Cirebon people has undergone a transformation from being a traditional ceremony dance, to a dance for entertainment of which changes can be seen from dance movements, performance procedures, performance times, clothing, accessories, and music used to perform *Topeng Panji* dance.

In ancient times, the mask dance titled '*Topeng Panji*' was considered more spiritual in nature than the

dances performed for entertainment, because in the past this mask dance was used for the *Mapag Sri* traditional ceremony (the harvest ceremony) and the *Ngunjung Buyut* traditional ceremony (visiting ancestral graves). In the Cirebon community, this dance is closely related to traditional ceremonies, ritual ceremonies, and entertainment. The mask dance has an important role for the life of Cirebon people, and it serves as a spiritual pursuit and maintains community relations in the life of the community as the mask dance has long existed in the Cirebon community. Literally, this Cirebon mask dance choreography is a compilation of an organized and well-trained human body movement. Each Cirebon mask dance movement has a pattern based on aesthetic rules and values and has religious meanings, which are aimed at spreading Islam and respect the ancestors. Until now, the Cirebon mask dance continues to be present in every traditional ceremonies held by the Cirebon people, namely the '*Mapang Sri*' traditional ceremony and the '*Ngunjung Buyut*' traditional ceremony. In a traditional ceremony that is held in Cirebon community, there are certain expressions related to various important events. These important events are commemorated or celebrated as ceremonies with a series and order which are carried

out in accordance with beliefs and traditions from generation to generation.

When examined through its movements, the *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon mask dance has more meaning compared to its few movements. The meaning and symbols of the *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon mask dance are contained in the elements of the dance performances that are displayed, namely music, clothing, make-up, and various kinds of properties. Besides having meaning and symbols, the Cirebon mask dance also acts as a communication medium, because through the movements presented, there is interaction among the ceremony participants. Each traditional ceremony participant interacts directly with the spirits of the ancestors who enter the body of the dancers who dance the Mask dance by dancing together. This Cirebon mask dance is part of art and culture, especially for traditional ceremonies. This phenomenon raises several questions, namely whether the Cirebon mask dance is able to convey meanings, and is useful for preserving the culture of Cirebon people so that the dance is able to survive in its traditional forms in the modern times.

In addition to being performed for traditional ceremonies, the *Topeng Panji* dance has undergone a transformation into a dance for entertainment performances such as welcoming guests, dance festivals and other artistic events. However, the performance of the mask dance for entertainment is very different from the performance for traditional ceremonies. This difference can be seen in terms of the duration of the dance when it is performed, namely there is no special ritual such as preparing offerings, and there is no requirement for the dancer to perform the dance, namely the dance may be performed by male or female dancers. Additionally, the duration of the performance is shorter, clothing and accessories used, and the dance music is not live gamelan music but it is from a cassette recording or CD.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Animism and dynamism have been embraced by the people of the Indonesian archipelago since prehistoric times. Animism is a belief in the existence of spirits or souls in objects, plants, animals, and also in humans themselves. Animism, according to Masroer Ch. Jb in the book 'The History of Java', is a belief about the existence of spirits or souls in things, plants, animals and humans. As pointed out by Koentjaraningrat and quoted by Darori Amin in the book "Islam and Javanese culture", all objects that move are considered alive and have supernatural powers or have a spirit that is both bad and good. With this belief, animists assume that in this world there is a powerful spirit that is stronger than humans. In order to avoid the spirit's wrath, they worship by

holding ceremonies, accompanied by food offerings and dances for the spirit.

Carrying out traditional ceremonies has a truly important meaning for the members of the community concerned. This is due to the function of traditional ceremonies, namely to reinforce cultural norms or values that exist in and apply to people's lives. Then, the relationship between traditional dance and the invisible belief in Javanese society is represented in the *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon mask dance and it is believed that, at the time of performance, the spirits of the ancestors will enter the dancer's body. In summoning the spirits, the elders or mask puppeteers prepare offerings such as frankincense or flowers. In the *Topeng Panji* dance performance in the traditional ceremony, this dance serves as ritual treatment for people who are sick, by rubbing the body parts of the sick person.

Topeng Panji of Cirebon mask dance belong to traditional folk dance. Traditional dance can be divided into three, namely classical dance, folk dance and creative dance. Folk dance is a dance that has been developing since the era of primitive society until now [5]. Basically, all activities carried out by humans are to fulfill their needs in life, such as studying, working, playing and making arts. This latter need is closely related to fulfilling aesthetic needs. The role of dance as a branch of art does not only fulfill that need, but also supports the interests of human in terms of carrying out activities. The function of dance in human life is for ceremonial purposes, for entertainment, as performing arts, and as educational media, while the function of the Panji Mask dance for life is to function as entertainment. The word entertainment focuses more on giving feeling satisfaction, without having a deeper purpose such as gaining knowledge and experience from what is seen by the viewer [3].

Cultural change, including the arts, should be oriented towards the two dimensions of time, namely the past and the present, when the development of culture is faced with the development of science and technology [4].

The performing arts is basically a part of the development of a culture that is determined by the supporting community and in its development, there would be changes. The art of dance is an element of culture that grows and develops in line with the development of humans as modifiers and connoisseurs of art. The art of dance is created because of the role of society as a cultured human, so that the art of dance is inseparable from society, on the other hand, society is inseparable from art as a necessity of daily life which is manifested into dance.

By examining its elements, meanings and functions, it can be seen that the *Topeng Panji* dance, which was originally a traditional ritual dance, has

changed its function along with the development of civilization and technological advances, which have demanded the change of mindset of the people who originally owned the dance to be more modern, because the needs of society have changed. Art is a product of society. That means if the order of people's lives changes, there will be more or less art as a product of changes in society [2]. Although there are changes in the function of this dance, it does not always mean that the dance brings changes and the order of community life in the place where the dance was created. Changes in the function of dance also does not mean that people lose its function in traditional ceremonies, because currently the dance that is presented at traditional ceremonies represents a variety of human nature and every person has unique characteristics. Past social conditions also have an influence on its progress, needs and renewal.

In the sense of performing arts, the word performance is defined as "something that is performed; spectacle (cinema, puppet, etc.); exhibition (goods)" [9]. The meaning of this word covers three aspects, namely: (1) The existence of activity actors called presenters, (2) There are activities carried out by the presenter and then called performances, and (3) There are people (audiences or listeners) of a performance. Based on that meaning, performance can be defined as an activity to present a show in front of other people.

Furthermore, performing arts is a form of performing art that is shown to the general public by artists (artists) with the aim of providing entertainment that can be enjoyed by the audience. Entertainment is always fun, because entertainment is entertaining for someone after completing their daily activities or routines in order to relieve stress and fatigue from work. Performing arts also includes activities outside of daily work activities (other types of work that are not related to the arts). Art and work activities can also be separated. Art can be understood as an activity in leisure time which means activities outside working hours to earn a living. Art is a relaxing activity to reduce tension caused by hard work in earning a living [7].

In the performing arts, especially traditional performing arts, there are various kinds of traditional performing arts that are created by the Indonesian people with various forms and structures. Basically, each region or community in Indonesia has distinct arts that are different and develops in the region or community. If the art is maintained and preserved, then the art cannot be separated from the region or community. Basically performing arts depart, develop and are owned by a certain society, so that art can never be separated from the society that supports its existence. Therefore, it is in that community that an agreement will be created, both in terms of customs, as well as the need for entertainment.

Based on some of the statements above, it can be concluded that the meaning of performance in traditional arts can be understood as a show that is presented or displayed to be enjoyed or seen. The form of the performance includes several presentation elements that are used as a means of communication to convey a certain message from the artist to the community in traditional art performances. Traditional art performances are also a form of cultural expression, which is a tool for conveying cultural values and the embodiment of aesthetic-artistic norms that develop in a certain area.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Approach

Based on the discussion about the transformation of the role of *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon dance from part of a traditional ceremony into an entertainment dance, this study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The qualitative descriptive approach is a research method used to examine problems in the work life of government, private, community, youth, women's, arts and culture organizations, so that the research findings can be used as consideration for implementing a policy for the common welfare.

3.2 Research Object

The object of this research is the change of the role of *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon dance from being part of a traditional ceremony into a form of performing arts.

3.3 Research Subjects

A research subject has an important position in the research. Research subjects must be organized before the researcher is ready to collect data. The subjects of this study were Cirebon Panji Mask dance dancers, village head, Inu as an artist in Slangit village and Slangit artists' community [1].

3.4 Research Setting

This research was carried out in Cirebon, West Java. This location has been chosen because Cirebon is one of the areas that still upholds the culture of its ancestors. The *Topeng Panji* dance is still performed by the local community as an effort to preserve local culture.

3.5 Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques can be performed in a variety of settings, methods, and sources. In qualitative research, data collection is carried out in

natural settings (natural conditions), and uses primary and secondary data sources. Then, data collection techniques are mostly carried out by participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis method used by the researcher is descriptive qualitative analysis. The qualitative descriptive analysis is an inductive process, which means that the analysis is carried out after the data has been obtained. Then the findings are developed into a formulated hypothesis. Furthermore, the researchers look for data repeatedly, so that the researchers can state whether the hypothesis is accepted or rejected based on the data collected.

3.7 Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, researchers used triangulation, which is a data collection technique that combines various data collection techniques and existing data sources. By using triangulation techniques, the data obtained is more consistent. Triangulation further ensure the validity of the data obtained. Therefore, by using triangulation techniques in data collection, the data obtained is more consistent, thorough, and certain.

This study used triangulation in terms of data sources and data collection methods, in which researchers looked for data from more than one source as a comparison between one piece of information and another, namely by observation and interviews with sources. Researchers conducted interviews with more than one source. This aimed to obtain valid data and find a match between one another. This step is taken so that the results of observations and interviews can be compared.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 General Views on Cirebon Culture and Community

The culture that has grown and developed in Cirebon has been greatly influenced by the acculturation of immigrant culture with the culture of the indigenous people. However, as an area which borders other parts of West Java which is Sundanese in majority and the Javanese-speaking region of Central Java, Cirebon has developed its distinctive culture. Cirebon is a mixture of the two. The migrants and the indigenous people adapt, complement and accept each other in the implementation of their daily lives. The performers of traditional arts in Cirebon generally refer to idolised dancers called '*dalang*' (puppeteers). *Dalang* is not only applied to people who play *wayang* (both shadow puppet and stage-

show performers), but the word is also used to describe people who have certain skills or are leaders in the performing arts. Mask dancers are also called *dalang* (puppeteers), the leaders of the "*genjring*" (a local acrobatic performance) groups are called '*dalang genjring*', dancers and '*berokan/barongan*' (traditional monster dance) performers are called '*dalang berokan*'. This also applies to artists from other fields of arts.

4.2 The Topeng Cirebon Mask Dance

The *Topeng Panji* mask dance originated from the '*Panji*' story that developed in East Java. *Panji*'s story is romantic in nature, emphasizing heroism. This story describes the meeting, separation, and reunion of a prince named *Raden Panji Inu Kertapati* (His Majesty *Panji Inu Kertapati*) with his wife named *Sekartaji* or *Candrakirana*. The events experienced during this odyssey are then described using masks depicting various characters in mask performances [6].

In the 14th century, Cirebon residents were not familiar with Islam and still adhered to Hinduism and Buddhism. Then, the ulama came by introducing art which was later used as a medium for preaching the Islamic religion which represent the improvement of knowledge about Islam within the community. Examples of such da'wah tools are *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) and mask dance. *Wayang kulit* is the embodiment of syari'at, which is the real manifestation, and in the teachings of Islam, sharia is an absolute requirement for a *salik* (spiritual path traveler) to Allah, without the existence of sharia that person's endeavor in life is meaningless. Sharia is the rule of life that leads people to the ultimate destination in the afterlife.

The mask dance is the embodiment of the tariqa. Tariqa comes from the word '*thariqah*' which means '*path*'. The path in question is the way to become a devout person, to be a person blessed by Allah SWT. Practically the tariqa is a collection of physical and mental practices that aim to bring someone to become a devout person. After the ulama came to Cirebon to learn all the leasures and culture of Hindus and Buddhists, the ulama entered Hindu and Buddhist circles with art. Art later became one of the leasures and cultures of Hindus and Buddhists. Finally, Sunan Gunung Jati brought a dance, namely a mask dance to the Cirebon area as a means of spreading Islam through the mask dance. Sunan Gunung Jati's position in Cirebon at that time as a king made it impossible to spread Islam himself. Finally, Sunan Gunung Jati sent Sunan Kalijaga to assist him in spreading Islam in Cirebon. Sunan Kalijaga was ordered to sing or become a '*bebarang*' mask performer. The '*bebarang*' mask performance is done by performing the dance from one place to another. The term

'bebarang' (*topeng bebarang*) mask is known to the Karawang area in West Java.

The strategy to spread Islam by using this mask dance is carried out from village to village which aims to attract the attention of the community through the movements and strains of the gamelan or music so that everyone watching is interested in learning, and watching the mask dance performance again. People who watched the performance were asked to declare shahada to be able to learn the mask dance, and eventually many people were interested and wanted to learn. Introducing Islam was not immediately done by reading the Al-Qur'an and prayer, but with the strains of gamelan or music in which the meaning of each instrument containing Islamic teachings. Similarly, the dance movements were taught one by one along with the meaning of each movement that is connected with the teachings of Islam. The method of spreading Islam through mask dance has been successfully accepted by the wider community and until now the mask dance is still being preserved and introduced to every generation in Cirebon. Cirebon mask dance consists of five main masks (guise) depicting the characters Panji, Samba (Pamindo), Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Klana. The five characters in the mask depict Islam. This can be seen from every meaning of the mask worn in the dance.

The term mask that exists among the Cirebon people is formed from words with different meanings. The two words which give the term mask are 'ketop-ketop' which means shiny, and flat. The term is taken from two shiny, flat objects of coins, hanging from the front of the dancer's head covering [8]. When the word mask is associated with someone's name, usually the name is used for the mask dancer concerned, such as 'Jana's mask', 'Keni's mask' and so on. If the word mask is associated with the name of a place, then the word will indicate the place of origin of the group / group or the residence of the '*dalang*' (puppeteer) in question. For example, the Palimanan mask is a type of mask from the Palimanan area.

4.3 The Topeng Panji Mask Dance

This *Topeng Panji* mask dance possesses a delicate character. The dance movements are always soft and mostly infrequent. The mask, which was white and without elaborate ornamentation, depicted the sanctity of a newborn human. The dancer's face does not need to be made up, the face is left natural. The facial expression (Wanda) of the Panji mask shows someone who is pious, if he speaks words, the voice is gentle, the movements are smooth or soft, but the music is loud, the choreography is mostly slight, and this maybe one of the reasons why this dance is less favourable for ordinary audiences. The *Topeng Panji*

mask dance is accompanied by the song *Kembang Sungsang*.

Panji is defined as the hero in Javanese culture, and this character wears a mask. The Panji concept is a union of two old religious concepts and Hinduism. The Panji mask is a symbol of the presence of a king's spirit or a god incarnating in the king, which is in accordance with the Panji myth that mentions that the character always disguised himself during his wanderings looking for his lover. Similarly, Candrakirana was also in disguise. This "disguise" is a cover or mask that hides his identity. They would meet sometimes, but because of disguise, they would not recognise each other. In fact, both of them fought each other in battles. In the accounts of the old Majapahit kingdom, there was a marriage between Panji and Candrakirana. The Panji mask dance is a dance to present the paradoxical powers and forces in the universe.

In this dance, the characteristics of male and female are presented. The creator, god himself, is represented through the myth and symbol of Panji. Panji is a paradox in itself. It is male and female, it is sun and it is moon, it is day and night, it is sky and earth, it is harsh and gentle, it is visible and invisible, it is life and death, it is past and future. Time and space are paradoxical within this deity and this mask dance has a gentle character.

This dance is performed at the beginning of the ceremony. According to sources, Panji comes from the Javanese word *siji* (one or first), *mapan sing siji* (believe in the One). The dance movements are always subtle, minimalist and mostly still. Mutinah (the mask puppeteer from Gegesik, Cirebon) testified that dancing the Panji mask was like a human who lived but died, died but lived. This expression explains that the Panji mask does not move much, like a person who is dead but alive, alive but dead. If you look at the source of the text, the Panji mask dance contains elements of contrast or paradox, because the movements and music are opposite to each other. The motion is subtle, but the music is loud. This contrast is described as a person who is able to control his desires and is not easily seduced by anything worldly. The depiction of pious muslims that have achieved *makrifat* or *insan kamil* (a truly pious follower), whose actions will not be shaken at all when facing various kinds of trials. That person would remain calm and *tawakal* (surrendering to the faith of God). *Makrifat* humans are always aware that disturbances and their lives all depend on Allah. Surrendering and being sincere are the characteristics of a person's life at the *makrifat* level.



Figure 1 *Topeng Panji* (A Panji Mask)

4.4 The Transformation of *Topeng Panji* Mask Dance

The mask dance of *Topeng Panji* is a solo dance that is performed by one dancer. Previously, this dance was part of traditional rituals in Cirebon. every time the Panji Mask dance is performed in a traditional ceremony, the host must prepare the necessary elements, namely the offerings and produce that are placed around the traditional ceremony place. Judging from the movements displayed, the duration of the performance is longer. Mask dance clothing and accessories must also be plain white like the color of the *Topeng Panji* mask. The make-up looks simple and only uses face powder without adding any other types of makeup because when dancing, the dancer will use a mask. The *Topeng Panji* dancers are usually elderly because those dancers are believed to have an ability to connect with spirits. In other words, there is a belief that they can communicate with ancestral spirits and this mask dance uses live gamelan music played by 'Nayaga' (gamelan players).

During its development, the *Topeng Panji* dance has undergone changes. This mask dance, which was originally performed at traditional ceremonies, now can be staged or performed for entertainment events. This change can be seen from the omission of rituals to provide offerings before the performance, easier dance movements so that the duration of the performance is shorter, the clothes that are worn are not only in white but more colorful with accessories in other colors such as red or black, and *Topeng Panji* dancers do not have to be elderly. The dance music has been recorded and does not use live gamelan music.

5. CONCLUSION

Performing arts in traditional arts, especially dance, can be viewed as art forms that are presented or displayed to be enjoyed or seen. In art performances in particular, dance is a manifestation of several presentation elements that are used as a means of communication to convey a certain message from the artist to the community in traditional art performances both for traditional ceremonies and for entertainment. Traditional art performances are also a form of cultural expression, means for conveying

cultural values and the embodiment of norms that develop in a particular region.

In this study, the researcher collected data or searched for these data in the Cirebon area of West Java, because Cirebon is an area that is well known for its mask dance and its mask dancers. In the Cirebon area, mask dances, especially the *Topeng Panji* dance, are still preserved. This is because the *Topeng Panji* dance is a complement to the *Mapag Sri* and *Ngunjung Buyut* traditional ceremonies.

The *Topeng Panji* of Cirebon mask dance is a dance created by Sunan Gunung Jati as a medium to spread Islam in the Cirebon region. In this study, the writers have examined one of the mask dances that is the *Topeng Panji* dance because this dance has different characteristics and uniqueness compared to other mask dances.

A dancer performing the *Topeng Panji* dance portrays a character and traits that reflect someone who is refined, pious, and patient. These characteristics and characteristics are reflected in the costumes or clothes that are worn characterized by white in each of its parts such as the mask, shirt, pants and cloth. Apart from that, its character can also be seen from the smooth and fewer dance movements.

At present, the *Topeng Panji* dance of Cirebon still functions as a dance for traditional ceremonies as well as an entertainment dance for the Cirebon people. Apart from functioning as a traditional ceremonial dance and entertainment, the *Topeng Panji* dance can also be used as a medium for educating young children or learning in schools to preserve indigenous culture, respect the beliefs of others, learn to work together and learn to obey the existing norms.

For the younger generation and especially for the Cirebon people, they are expected to participate in preserving dance arts. One of them is by preserving the *Topeng Panji* dance by participating in a dance studio to learn the dance, because the dance is a legacy from their ancestors to be passed on to posterity. It is hoped that along with the development of society, the *Topeng Panji* dance can be preserved and would not disappear or shift because of the emergence of more modern arts or culture.

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