



# True Self, Identity, and Peace Maker: Meaning of Reog Ponorogo

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of the Reog Ponorogo. A qualitative method was chosen in this study with case study approach. This study involved one man which were the head man of Bedrug Village Ponorogo as the informant. The result of this study indicated that there were some meanings of Reog Ponorogo. Reog Ponorogo could be as the true self, the identity of the community and the peace-maker to another. Additionally, people or even another country or another nation should have a respect to anothers' culture and anothers' art.

**Keywords:** peace · qualitative · Reog Ponorogo

## 1 Introduction

According to Simuh [1] Javanese culture is rich in symbols because in the past, Javanese people used to convey more concrete symbols to convey their ideas and ideas. At that time the Javanese were not used to thinking abstractly. The existence of Reog Ponorogo is part of the result of culture in Java. This existence illustrates the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Therefore, it is necessary to study the symbols and meanings of Reog Ponorogo with their arrangement in various media of Javanese cultural expression.

Reog Ponorogo art is a traditional art that is full of noble values. Reog as the pride of the people of Ponorogo is not only widespread in the country but also abroad. In the teachings of Asthabrata and Javanese cosmogony: "*Keblat Papat Kelimo Pancer*", Reog Ponorogo has the noble values of Javanese life. However, not many people know the meanings behind the symbols in Reog Ponorogo. While on the other hand, many Reog symbols have been reduced for the sake of commercialism so as to eliminate magical elements and cultural values in Reog. This traditional art has become a material-oriented commodity. This can be seen in the city branding program for the city of Ponorogo which presents Reog statues which are often found in corners of the city with various media so as to eliminate the magical element of Javanese art. In addition, in several performances of Reog, there are also many who leave the rules that must be met in performing the art of Reog Ponorogo.

In a previous study, the researcher and the team [2] found that the traditional art of Reog Ponorogo, which is rich in philosophical values of Javanese life, has changed in

the form of statues, gates, and other visual elements. This is an implication of the city branding program for the city of Ponorogo which is not accompanied by an in-depth study of Reog art, symbols, and the underlying Reog values. This is what causes the existence of these statues and gates only as an aesthetic element to decorate the city.

Reog Ponorogo has experienced several shifts over the times. At least Reog Ponorogo is divided into Reog Festival, Reog Obyogan, and Reog Mini [3]. As a product of art and culture, Reog needs to be preserved. Therefore, various efforts have been made by the local government to conserve Reog Ponorogo. In this case, the government carries out revitalization, reinterpretation and symbolic expression. To revitalize Reog Ponorogo, the government invites Reog artists to work together in realizing it as a cultural product. Thus was born a mini Reog and several crafts, as well as miniature Reog Ponorogo.

Furthermore, the government and artists also carry out reinterpretations and symbolic expressions of Reog Ponorogo, such as the Grebeg Suro Festival. In this festival the government and artists held a number of competitions in the Reog performance. In this performance, participants are free to express all forms of inspiration and aspirations but do not go out of the rules that have been made. In order to be legally strong, the local government has issued decree number: 188.45/101/405.13/2014 [3]. This annual activity aims to improve the people's economy and help preserve the potential of regional culture in supporting tourism in Ponorogo Regency.

The current development of Reog is inseparable from the government's efforts to maintain its cultural heritage. The hope is that future generations will not only be able to enjoy this performance but also preserve it. Even in 2019 the regent of Ponorogo issued the regent's instruction Number 556/582/405.08/2019 to hold Reog performances simultaneously in all villages in the Ponorogo district on every 11th of July [3].

The values in the Reog symbol as a cultural product are important because a culture is not only able to represent the identity of a group but also as a medium to form a visual of the group [4].

Rizali [5] sees culture as full of meanings, values, and symbols. According to him, understanding the meaning, values, and symbols is actually the same as understanding a culture that is used as a reference by the local community. Therefore, Mulyana [6] explains that each culture has its own variations of symbols, both in place, context, and time. This causes the meaning of symbols to differ from one culture to another. On that basis, Charles Sanders Peirce divides into three signs, namely iconic, indexical and symbolic [7]. Iconic sign refers to a sign that resembles the object it represents. An indexical sign is a sign associated with the object it represents. While symbolic refers to signs that do not show the natural relationship between the signifier and the signified. The relationship between the two is arbitrary (arbitrary), based on community conventions [8].

At the beginning of 2022, Indonesia was shocked by the news that Reog Ponorogo would be claimed by Malaysia [9, 10]. Hundreds of artists from 15 Reog Ponorogo groups from Temanggung Regency, held a joint prayer and action to reject Reog Ponorogo's claim by Malaysia, at the Temanggung TV Building Page, Saturday night. This is in response to the widespread news that Malaysia is rumored to be claiming Reog Ponorogo as its cultural heritage [11]. On that occasion, a number of reog artists from Temanggung Regency also gave speeches, firmly rejecting Malaysia's claim to Reog Ponorogo. Then

urged the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia to continue to oversee, so that Reog Ponorogo can be recognized internationally through UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage belonging to the Republic of Indonesia.

According to the coordinator of the event, Sutopo, the event was a form of concern and rejection of the attitude of neighboring Malaysia, which was reported to be unilaterally claiming Reog Ponorogo as their own. Even though it is clear that Reog Ponorogo is a national cultural heritage, originating from Ponorogo, East Java.

However, in fact, Malaysia has no intention of submitting the Ponorogo culture to the UN agency [12]. In the future, this problem will become the main focus of the government in maintaining the sustainability of the ancestral cultural heritage which has clear historical evidence.

Value is something abstract, but it becomes a guide for people's lives. Suyatno [13] argues that value is the ability that is believed to exist in an object to satisfy humans. Value is a very important measure in human life as a guide for every human behavior as a social being. Culture and art contain values that are very important for people's lives. A developed country is a country that can balance technological progress while maintaining its cultural values. A developed country is a country that stands firmly with its resources, natural wealth, and cultural diversity, so that it is firmly rooted in its independence and self-confidence. To become a developed country, a country must be serious about developing its local potential or advantages. The potentials that exist in each region must be developed in accordance with the conditions of each region.

The local advantages of each region vary greatly. With the diversity of regional potentials, the development of regional potentials and advantages needs special attention from local governments so that local children are familiar with their own regions and understand well about their own potential and values, as well as regional culture. One of the local highlights of the Ponorogo area is the Reog Ponorogo art. Reog is one of the famous arts from Indonesia which is still active and known by all Indonesian people and even foreign tourists. The Ponorogo district government has registered the Reog Ponorogo art as a copyright property of the Ponorogo Regency.

Value is a very important measure in human life, value is a guide for every human behavior as a social being. Culture and art contain values that are very important for people's lives. The reality that appears now is the lack of awareness of the younger generation about the importance of values from local culture and arts, so it is very unfortunate if these values cannot be used by the younger generation as provisions for their lives. One of them is the value in the art of reog Ponorogo, the values contained in the art of Reog Ponorogo need to be explored so that it can be implemented into the subject matter. The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of the Reog Ponorogo.

## 2 Materials and Methods

This kind of research is a sort of descriptive qualitative research, and the case study methodology was employed in this study. Case studies, according to Yin [14], are a better research technique when the primary topic of a study is how and why, when there

is minimal chance that the events being researched can be controlled, and when the research is focused on current occurrences (present) in the setting of actual life. This research uses a qualitative case study approach that aims to explore or build a proportion or explain the meaning behind reality [15].

According to Sugiyono [16], when viewed in terms of data collection methods or techniques, the data collection techniques carried out in this study were two methods, namely observation and interviews. Observation aims to observe informants, so that researchers can understand the actual conditions. Interviews, researchers will find out more in-depth things about informants in interpreting situations and events that occur. The type of interview used in this study is a semi-structured interview. While the informants in this study were Mr. Parlan (56 y.o) the headman of the Bedrug Village, Ponorogo. The researcher took the location in Bedrug Village, Ponorogo, West Java.

Data analysis was carried out by data reduction, namely obtaining themes or classifications from the research results. The second is the data presentation stage, namely, the researcher provides an organized presentation of the data collected and analyzed previously. Third, the stage of drawing conclusions based on findings and verifying data. The reduced interview verbatim data were coded using Arabic numerals. For example, D was for initial, I3 which means the third interview and 2-4 is for a conversation line that shows data or answers to questions.

In order to test the credibility of the data, it is done by checking the data to the same source with different techniques. In this study, researchers used time triangulation and method triangulation techniques because researchers wanted to know more deeply and aimed at cross-checking informants to know very well about the Reog Ponorogo in Bedrug Village, Ponorogo.

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

Value is a very important measure in human life that is used as a guide in every human behavior as a social being. Culture and art contain values that are very important for people's lives. One of them is the value contained in the art of Reog. Reog is a traditional ballet originating and developing in the Ponorogo district, East Java. The values contained in a culture, especially Reog Ponorogo, need to be explored further so that Reog is not only a spectacle, but also can be a guide that teaches the virtues of life.

##### 3.1.1 Reog as a True Self

The head of Bedrug village, Parlan, said that reog was 'ingrained' in him. Since he was born, his parents introduced Reog to him. He also stated that from long long ago, Reog is a hereditary from the ancestor of Ponorogo. So that, he mentioned that Reog as a true self.

*"Yeah, of course, since I was born, Reog is like in my blood. Like I was born for Reog. It is true, and maybe it is also my destiny." (P/I1/34-36)*

*"...as long as I know, Reog is from Ponorogo..." (P/I2/11)*

*"It (Reog) is originally from Ponorogo and its from our ancestor..." (P/I2/37)*

### 3.1.2 Reog as an Identity of Community

Parlan also said that Reog itself, is originally from Ponorogo. If there is another district or another country have a claim for Reog, it is very unfortunate. Another people or even another country cannot have a claim for Reog. Reog is from Ponorogo, so that Reog must be preserved by Ponorogo people or even Indonesian, not by another country. To him, Reog is a symbol of Ponorogo people.

*“(Reog) is from here (Ponorogo), another country cannot claim arbitrarily.” (P/I1/67)*

*“No. They cannot own this (Reog).” (P/I2/12)*

*“...Reog must be preserved by young people. For us, Reog could be just a culture, but for them (another country), Reog could be something special. So, we must take a good care of it...” (P/I2/22-24)*

### 3.1.3 Reog as a Peace-Maker

Parlan said, Reog could be a peace-maker as long as another people appreciate its beauty and not arbitrary claim it. The history of Reog also said that, Reog is told of a king who will protect his people from enemies. When the king is victorious and can subdue the enemy, they become coexist. That's why, people should have a respect with another.

*“Initially, Reog was from a king who would protect his people from enemies. Then the enemy lost and surrendered and became coexist”. (P/I1/12-14)*

*“...with this story, it is hoped that people will understand that maintaining peace is important and appreciate the efforts of the ancestors.” (P/I2/39-40)*

## 3.2 Discussion

Ponorogo Regency is located in the western region of East Java Province with an area of 1,371.78 km<sup>2</sup> which is administratively divided into 21 sub-districts and 305 urban villages. The boundaries of the Ponorogo Regency are: in the north it is bordered by Madiun, Magetan, and Nganjuk Regencies; to the east it is bordered by Tulungagung and Trenggalek Regencies; the south is bordered by Pacitan Regency; to the west it is bordered by Pacitan and Wonogiri regencies (Central Java Province). One of the local superiors from the Ponorogo area is Reog art. Reog is an art that is still active and is known by all Indonesian people and even foreign tourists. The Ponorogo district government itself has registered the Reog Ponorogo art as a copyright belonging to the Ponorogo Regency.

Culture is defined as the beliefs, values, and attitudes practiced and accepted by members of a group or community [17]. Culture is a complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities, as well as habits acquired by humans as members of society, the elements of forming behavior supported and passed on by certain members of society [18]. Culture that is formed for members of a particular society on the basis of certain cultural values will affect the behavior of its members [19]. Company culture will affect the managers and workers in it. School culture will affect the school community, and so on [20]. So that, culture is all activities

carried out by humans from generation to generation, either abstract or concrete, except those that are instinctive [21].

Value is a very important measure in human life as a guide for every human behavior as a social being. Culture and art contain values that are very important for people's lives. The value of an art and culture is a very valuable national heritage. The values contained in an art or culture will not appear by itself if we do not try to reveal them in line with the many foreign cultures that enter Indonesia.

Art as a medium for self-expression is suspected to be able to express and become a medium for reflecting socio- cultural dynamics that have universal and contextual potential as a driver of awareness for the spirit of tolerance, maintaining diversity, and building peace [22]. Art is the result of human and cultural expression. Art is able to act as a medium of brotherhood and peace that can foster a sense of pride in its owner [22]. Then, a high appreciation through artistic activities will result in mutual respect and mutual care for the diversity of one's own nation's culture and foreign cultures. The role of art that is multicultural can be used as a unifier of the nation and the glue of brotherhood and peace between nations with the human ability to respect and appreciate each other's existence [22].

The results of the documentation study state that the art of Reog Ponorogo in its current form is the final form of a long process that contains religious and educational values. The religious values in question are the existence of several words in Arabic which eventually became part of Reog, which means to carry out Islamic da'wah can be done through art or entertainment. The educational value meant here is educational value, in this entertainment Reog not only provides entertainment, but also gives its own meaning to the audience, for example in the story there is a lesson on how a king should take a stand, and listen to the opinions of his subordinates.

Cultural units are different from political units. Culturally, traditional arts are generally considered to be communal property, not individual property. It has to do with today's mindset. The mindset in question is that there is a claim that requires Indonesia to register its culture with UNESCO so that it will not be lost and taken over by other parties. However, he said, it is not enough just to be registered, but also to be treated. The young generation of Indonesia today must feel that they have a traditional culture. Of course, with a note, cultural actors must also adapt to the times, making traditional culture interesting for today's young people.

## 4 Conclusion

The government must also take part in efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritages. The trick is to provide legal protection related to intangible cultural heritage, so that it is not easily claimed by other countries. Reog Ponorogo which is being proposed as an intangible cultural heritage belonging to Ponorogo Regency, East Java, Indonesia to UNESCO. Considering that in the midst of this effort, there is Malaysia which is also working on the same thing. Khofifah reminded the importance of documenting and tracing the history of every cultural heritage owned. Because to recognize this as part of the assets owned, administrative documents are needed as authentic evidence. The issue of historical documentation was still a weakness in the submission of Reog Ponorogo as an intangible cultural heritage to UNESCO.

The researcher advises the following researcher that if they are interested in investigating related themes or research topics, they should look into research on the meaning of Reog Ponorogo by the indigenous people who live in Ponorogo and by migrant or by other head men who were living there, as this will yield intriguing new results.

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