



# The Creativity and Innovation of Sundanese Harmonian *Kawih Kacapi* by Ubun Kubarsah

Moch. Yoga Agung Nugraha

*Sundanese Language and Culture Education Postgraduate Study Program,  
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia  
Email: [mochyogaagungnugraha@student.upi.edu](mailto:mochyogaagungnugraha@student.upi.edu)*

## ABSTRACT

*Kawih* is generally construed as one of the popular Sundanese art. One form of Sundanese *kawih* is *kawih Kacapian*. As time progresses, the creativity of art practitioners also works according to the times. Ubun Kubarsah, one of the practitioners in the field of Sundanese *kawih* arts, creates innovations in the *Kacapian kawih* type. The term coined by Ubun Kubarsah is *Harmoni Kawih Kacapi*. This study aims to describe the innovation and structure of Sundanese *kawih* in the *Kacapi* harmonics of the Ubun Kubarsah style. The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative method, using literature study and interview techniques. This study focuses on analyzing the development of creativity and innovation of Ubun Kubarsah from the lyric system, the tone system used, and the composition of the musical accompaniment. Findings reveal that there are new song lyrics, an innovative tone system, and the accompaniment music using a new style.

**Keywords:** *Creativity, Innovation, Kacapi harmonics, Sundanese songs.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

People in every region, especially West Java, who are born of ethnic Sundanese descent, are certainly familiar with the terms *kawih* and *tembang*, certain forms of Sundanese music. However, several problems arise; one of which is that people often misperceive and err in determining and categorizing the terms *kawih* and *tembang*. These problems are caused by the lack of knowledge about *kawih* and *tembang* in the community. This lack of knowledge causes misperceptions on the part of people's understanding of *kawih* and *tembang*. The root of the problem may be due to a cultural shift, or modern culture, rendering local cultures less attractive to the original community, especially young people. This problem also occurs in schools and universities.

Sundanese *kawih* is a song material that has a *Tandak* rhythm (bound, rule-based with a constant beat), while the term *tembang* is defined as song material that has an independent rhythm (free, has no rules nor a constant beat). *Kawih* is a collection of interrelated elements that have a beautiful meaning. According to the Danadibrata dictionary (2015), *kawih* is a sound song that is not pegged by *pupuh*. Meanwhile, Rosidi (2013) states that *kawih* is a literary work that is often sung. This is in line

with the statement from Herdini (2012) that the term aesthetics can be interpreted as a philosophy of beauty.

*Kawih* lyrics have a definite structure and deep values, especially the aesthetic values in the elements of its content. This is in line with the opinion of Koswara (2013) that literature is a part of art that has its characteristics, comprising art, beauty, honesty, originality, and truth that eventually point to a wiser human life. Meanwhile, according to Hendrayana (2016), *kawih* is the mother of all kinds of music in the Sundanese culture. In its development, *kawih* was included in the Sundanese grammar before 2016. The term *kawih* in the Sundanese grammar was first entered, as can be seen from the ancient manuscript *Siksa Kanda Ng Karesian*. As far as Sundanese music is concerned, there are many types or varieties of *kawih*, such as *kawih kliningan*, *kawih celempungan*, *kawih kacapian* and others.

According to Ruswandi (2020), the creation of new works of Sundanese *Karawitan* in the context of social life is basically because of the need for themselves and society in general. The creation of Sundanese *Karawitan* is based on their needs, including their willingness to actualize their aesthetic experience. Meanwhile, the creation of Sundanese *Karawitan* is based on the needs of the general public because the artists observe social

phenomena, and they consciously need works of art according to their area.

*Kacapi* itself has several types based on their functions, including *Kacapi indung* and *Kacapi yakink* which are used to accompany songs, and *Kacapi siter* which is used to accompany *kawih* songs. Of the several types of *Kacapi* above, each *Kacapi* has its style or characteristics. First in the terms of playing techniques, each *kawih* varies in its musical compositions. Second, the shape of the *Kacapi* itself varies. One of them is *Kacapi kawih*. In the play, *Kacapi kawih* uses several picking techniques, namely *sintreuk*, *toel*, *rangeum*, *jengkalan*, and *jambret* techniques. The technique of playing *Kacapi* is adapted to the song and is performed using a pentatonic tone system, namely Sundanese scales such as *salendro*, *madenda*, and *degung*. The series of pentatonic notes in traditional Sundanese music is Da-Mi-Na-Ti-La.

According to Rahayu (2020), there have been many changes in the *Kacapi* play, both in terms of technique and the style of the *Kacapi* play itself. Currently, many art practitioners use *Kacapi* with a diatonic tone system as an instrument, adjusting to western music so that it can be used to accompany Sundanese pop songs, dangdut, and even Indonesian pop songs. According to Irawati (2020), popular music in particular and popular culture, in general, is an inseparable part of human life today in various parts of the world. As of today, Sundanese style *Kacapi* harmonics has been increasingly popular among the Hususna community in West Java. Hendrayana (2017) stated that in 2010 the album "Enjing Deui" by Ubun Kubarsah turned to be the reference of *kawih* styles.

A study on the above musical creation has been done by Tardi Ruswandi's (2020) titled "Creativity of Mang Koko in Sundanese Karawitan". His research (2020) focuses on creativity in musical instruments. The present research seeks to find out the results of creativity and innovation carried out by Ubun Kubarsah on Sundanese *kawih*, the contents of which are contained in the lyrics of the song, and the structural elements in the lyrics of Sundanese *kawih* in the style of *Kacapi harmonian*. This research is also expected to increase understanding of *kawih*, because failure in distinguishing between *kawih* and *tembang* can lead to misunderstandings in societies.

## 2. METHODS

The method used is descriptive qualitative whose purpose is to describe and explain a problem, for example regarding circumstances, conditions, situations, events, activities, and others (Arikunto, 2010). This qualitative method suits the needs of the researchers to analyze the harmonic innovation of *Kacapi Sunda kawih* by Ubun Kubarsah. The steps used are observation by listening to

the musical work periodically to identify the patterns. The interview was conducted at Ubun Kubarsah's house.

The interviewees were Yadi Piteuk, who is the arranger for the Sundanese *kawih* song and Ubun R. Kubarsah as the composer of the song *Harmoni Kawih Kacapi*. Documentation studies were also conducted to meet the completeness and validity of the data obtained. In this research, documentation studies and literature studies are used. According to Sugiyono (2018), documents are records of events that have occurred. Documents can be in the form of writing, drawings, or someone's monumental work. Documents in written form cover diaries, life histories, stories, biographies, policies, and any other documents in the form of images, such as photos, live images, sketches, etc.

The documents contained in this study are in the form of photo images and video clips of songs. The literature review technique is an activity of studying, researching, and identifying existing reading materials with the research carried out.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Technically, when playing *kacapi* to accompaniment of the *Kacapi* harmonic songs, *dirangeum* and *toel* techniques are used, with a little use of the *jengkalan* technique, which indicates that at the technical level playing the *Kacapi* is still maintaining what is there. There is no urgent shift in the processing of the play's technique. This indicates that the development of *Kacapi* at the technical level does not get a portion to be developed.

The development of *Kawih Kacapan* tends to be very rapid. *Kawih Kacapan* in the songs of Ubun Kubarsah is a continuation of *Kacapan* music which started in a long journey, until finally, it becomes a culture and tradition in the life of its supporting community, especially the community from West Java. *Kawih Kacapan* has inherited the aesthetics in terms of lyrics and musicals, subsequently created theoretical concepts, and contributed to people's lives. *Kawih Kacapan* runs dynamically adjusting to the dynamics of its socio-cultural environment. The existence and continuity of *Kacapi*'s music cannot be separated from the aspect of transmitting *Kacapi*'s playing skills, its contribution to the development of musical culture, and the expansion of its work, a shift in the perspective that underlies the thoughts or tendencies that cover these aspects. as a work, aesthetic, creative work, passing on skills through training and education, often occurs in music, especially in *Kawih Kacapan*. This fact shows that the existence of *Kacapi* music is not static, but is open and can adapt to the dynamics of the social life of the supporting community.

The historical origin of the Sundanese *Kacapi* musical instrument itself seems difficult to trace, but at least

Kacapi has been used to accompany Sundanese pantun performances since 1518 AD. Furthermore, in the Old Sundanese manuscript “Siksa Kanda Ng Karesian” the term *kawih* has been discussed, so it can be called a Kacapi tool.

“Hayang nyaho di sakweh ning kawih ma: kawih bwatuha, kawih panjang, kawih lalangan, kawih panyaraman, kawih sisindiran, kawih pengpeledan, bongbong kaso, perararane, porod eurih, kawih babahanan, kawih bangbarongan, kawih tungtung, kawih sasambatan, kawih igel-igelan; sing sawatek kawih ma, paraguna tanya”.

“If you want to know all kinds of songs, such as: *kawih bwatuha*, *kawih long*, *kawih lalangan*, *kawih panyaraman*, *kawih sisindiran*, *kawih pengpeledan*, *bongbong kaso*, *perararane*, *porod eurih*, *kawih babahanan*, *kawih bangbarongan*, *kawih tungtung*, *kawih song sasambatan*. Ask to the paraguna.”

Siksa Kanda Ng Karesian

The development of Sundanese *kawih* continued in other musical genres, such as *mamaos* or the Sundanese song *Cianjuran*, *Kacapi kawih*, to the use of Kacapi in contemporary music. This sustainability cannot be separated from the role of artists who produce works involving Kacapi instruments as a means of expression. The development of the accompaniment and content of the song on the Kacapi instrument in the one-sided harmonic *kawih* Kacapi song can be said to be an expansion of the work in Sundanese *karawitan*.

The creator of the work tries to build new creative ideas by giving a different touch from playing techniques, tone systems, traditional wasp patterns, and combining them with good lyrics so that they can produce extraordinary works.

To highlight this, the researcher assumes that working on the music in this song prioritizes other musical indicators, such as modification of the tone system and processing of wasp patterns. The wasp pattern on traditional Sundanese musical instruments is important in several musical accompaniment compositions, such as the *carukan* percussion pattern on *waditra saron 1* and *saron 2* on gamelan music, *calana komprang*, *aceuk peanut*, *tong cuckoo ka mitoha* on the beats of *waditra gambang*, *mincid*, *golempang*, *padungdung* on the *waditra* drum, and several other wasp patterns in traditional Sundanese accompaniment music. Likewise, Kacapi in principle has the characteristics of wasps in the accompanying music. *Kemprangan*, *pasieupan*, *gelenyu* are wasp patterns that have become a tradition in Kacapi music. In the Sundanese musical tradition, mostly Kacapi is used as accompaniment music. Sundanese rhymes, Sundanese songs *cianjuran*, and *kawih celempungan* are a variety of Sundanese musical instruments that mostly use Kacapi as accompaniment. Based on the results of music analysis, there are many differences when compared to the typical

accompaniment style of traditional Sundanese music. The use of accompaniment patterns such as *dijeungkalan*, *diranggeum*, is less used, as well as early and interlude *gending* which no longer feature traditional idioms.

According to Ruswandi (2020), the creation of new works of Sundanese Karawitan in the context of social life is fundamentally due to the need for both oneself and society in general. Based on the results of musical analysis, there are many differences when compared to the typical accompaniment styles of the Sundanese musical tradition. The use of accompaniment patterns such as *dijeungkalan* and *diranggeum* is used very little, as well as the early *gendings* and interlude which no longer show traditional idioms. Furthermore, in terms of creativity and innovation, Uzun Kubarsah is the creator of the *kawih Kacapi* harmonics after observing the social phenomena in which today’s society prefers modern songs. However, his Kacapi version appears in a different style and is well received by the public.

The appearance of insertion notes in the songs of Kacapi harmonics and amplified by accompaniment musical instruments, especially the Kacapi and violin. In the melodic part of the song with insertion notes, Kacapi as the main *waditra* in the accompaniment of the song gives the impression that the insertion tone seems to be very dominant and is like the main tone in the tone system used. By adding 5+ (leu) and 3- (ni) tones in low notes (bass) the *waditra* Kacapi affects the ‘feel’ of the tuning of this tone system.

Tones that appear as bass musically usually give the impression of a strong ‘harmony’ function. The use of insertion tones is a creative idea from an artist. Creativity has a wide space to experiment because creativity is related to thoughts that give birth to renewal. Information is obtained by the artist from previous experiences.

**Table 1.** Kolot Kalapa album data

No	Title of Rumpaka	Writer	Rumpaka Structure	Rumpaka Code
1	Kolot Kalapa	Uzun Kubarsah	Puisi Modéren	KH/01
2	Mawar Lumayung	Uzun Kubarsah	Puisi Modéren	KH/02
3	Bulan Priangan	Uzun Kubarsah	Puisi Modéren	KH/03
4	Imut Salira	Uzun Kubarsah	Puisi Modéren	KH/04
5	Ukur Cimata	Uzun Kubarsah	Puisi Modéren	KH/05
6	Harepan	Asep Aung	Puisi Modéren	KH/06
7	Jempling Peuting	Uzun Kubarsah	Puisi Modéren	KH/07

The use of these insertion tones feels rather different when used as a 'harmony' or like a chord in Western music. The use of tones like this is certainly a new thing in the Sundanese pop order, especially when juxtaposed with Sundanese traditional music which is the basis for the development of this musical work. One side of this is a creative development that can enrich the Sundanese musical-based repertoire. The birth of new works in new packaging shows that the Sundanese *kawih* is not static but continues to experience changes along with supporting communities.

There are 15 interconnected songs. This is the main characteristic that distinguishes *Kacapi Harmonian* 'KH' *kawih* from other types of *kawih*. Here are some data about *Kawih Kacapi Harmoni* in Ubus Kubarsah's work (see Table 1).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*Kawih Harmonian Kacapi* is an innovation created by Ubus Kubarsah. This type of *kawih* is characterized lyrics by and musical accompaniment that has undergone modifications.

Among the modifications is the insertion of the diatonic tone system, which saves time when practitioners are required to change the tunings to be able to perform the desired song. In *Kawih Kacapi*, harmonics maintain what is there, meaning that there is no significant shift. Starting from this, there has been a development of the tone system used in this song by bringing up the insert tone in the low notes or Kacapi basses, such as the 3 (ni) and 5+ (leu) notes. It was completed by composers to compensate for songs that also use insertion notes. The expansion of the tone system does not change the overall pitch from pentatonic to diatonic. However, the addition of 3- (Ni) and 5+ (leu) in the low notes or basses in Kacapi affects the taste and breaks tradition. Therefore, the expansion of the tone system gives rise to these insertion notes, they produce musical compositions like Western music.

Along with that, the development of the harmonic song *Kawih Kacapi* also eliminates the wasp pattern that has been attached to traditional Sundanese music. The rhythmic patterns in traditional Sundanese music such as *sawilet*, *dua wilet*, *salancar*, *dirangkep* have completely disappeared. The results of the analysis of the aesthetic value data and the analysis of the structure in the album *Kolot Kalapa* by Ubus Kubarsah have the same objectives, namely about love for a partner or family in this world. Furthermore, Ubus Kubarsah's creativity and

innovation are significant for Sundanese songs, which are usually regulated by rules, both in terms of lyrics and music. Ubus Kubarsah creates Sundanese *kawih* songs that stick from time to time so that they are not outdated and are still loved by the community.

#### REFERENCES

- Arikunto, S. (2014). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan kombinasi* [Mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative research methods]. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Danadibrata, R. A. (2006). *Kamus besar Basa Sunda* [Great dictionary of the Sundanese language]. Bandung: Kiblat Buku Utama.
- Hendrayana, D. (2016). *Dina Kawih Aya Tembang*. Bandung: Geger Sunten
- Hendrayana, D. (2017) *Serat Keur Emay*. Bandung: Pustaka Jaya.
- Herdini, H. (2012). Estetika karawitan tradisi Sunda [The aesthetics of Sundanese traditional karawitan]. *Panggung*, 22(3).
- Koswara, D. (2013). Racikan Sastra [Literature concoctions]. Bandung: Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Daerah Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia.
- Irawati, E. (2020). Transmisi, musik lokal-tradisional, dan musik populer [Transmission, local-traditional music and popular music]. *Panggung*, 30(3), 392-410.
- Rahayu, L. S., Supriatna, N., & Sutanto, T. S. (2020). Kacapi iringan Lagu Bulan di Priangan Karya Ubus R. Kubarsah [Kacapi accompaniment to the song "Bulan di Priangan" by Ubus R. Kubarsah]. *SWARA-Jurnal Pendidikan Musik*, 2(1), 16-22.
- Sugiyono (2018). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R&D* [Research & development, qualitative, and quantitative research methods]. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Rosidi, A. (2013). *Tembang jeung kawih* [Song and kawih]. Bandung: Kiblat.
- Ruswandi, T. (2016). Kreativitas Mang Koko dalam Karawitan Sunda [Koko's creativity in Sundanese Karawitan]. *Panggung*, 26(1).

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

