




Costume and Property as the Reflection of Cultural Identity in *Wayang Cumplung* Performance

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Abstract. Traditional Culture can be instituted in various forms of art, one of those is in *Wayang* traditional art (Puppet Show). This form of stage performance can be found in several regions in Indonesia, one of which is in Banyumas reGENCY with its *Wayang Cumplung*. It is originated from a ritual called *Cowongan* which is aimed at inviting rain in a dry season. However, unlike *Cowongan* rite, wayang cumplung is purely performed for the purpose of stage entertainment with zero mystical purpose. It is created with the purpose of introducing Banyumas cultural identity which are reflected from the costume and property in the performance. Accordingly, the objective of this research is to analyze the use of costume and property in *Wayang Cumplung* performance as one of the media to illustrate the cultural identity of Banyumas culture. Furthermore, besides using the concept of representation and identity, this research will also employ semiotics concept to analyze the philosophy of ornaments and properties worn as the fashion of the characters. The data of this qualitative research are collected by doing complementary techniques such as; observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, as well as field notes. From the data analysis, it shows that the costume worn by both the puppets and the players reflects the identity of local people particularly from their occupation who mostly work as farmers. In addition, the properties and ornaments in the costume contains profound philosophical meaning of cultural value taught over generations, namely being straightforward, unpretentious, vigilant, and hard worker.

Keywords: costume, *cumplung*, identity, ornaments, properties.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Culture is a sort of knowledge owned by human as social beings containing models of knowledge. This model is then collectively used by its supporters to interpret or to explain as well as to recognize their environment. Moreover, Culture is a complex and complicated unit that contains science, morals, beliefs, laws, customs, etc. [1]. *Wayang*, or puppet show performance as a form of culture is also employed as a media to explain the situation of an environment. Furthermore, human also used it as the guidance in

their daily actions in the form of behavioral and cultural object which are fitted with their situation.

The study of art performance especially the traditional one has become an important aspect of Cultural Studies. Recently, there has been a growing interest in finding contemporary form of art which is adapted from the traditional art performance. *Wayang Cumplung* is a new form of puppetry from Banyumas that is expected to be easily accepted by the public in this modern era. It is the modification of *Cowongan* ritual which was historically performed to call rain in dry season. However, *cowongan* is currently less accepted by the people as it contains magic and spells in its shamans which contradicts to the public's belief who are mostly moslems[2]. The form of innovation is that it uses a broken "*siwur*" (water dipper made from pieces of coconut shell) which is decorated with costume representing the characters being played. The selection of material used as the costume for the puppet has its particular purpose in accordance with the idea of representing the identity of *Banyumas* culture. The uniqueness of *Wayang Cumplung* which differs it from the other kinds of puppetry is that it combines the performance of the puppets and the human player. However, although the costume worn in each performance are usually corresponded with the story being told, there is a certain point concerning the costumes and property of this art performance, there are some fixed characters always appeared in each performance. They usually come on stage in the opening and sometimes in the middle of the show when it needs some bridging scenes on the stage. The unvarying feature of those characters are wearing white clothes with stains far and wide, having long hair, and utilizing some parts of crops products as the ornaments. Besides, this performance is usually performed in an open space and it uses local language as the media to convey the message of the performance. Certainly, there are some purposes wanted to be revealed by the artists in relation with representing the cultural identity through this art performance.

1.2. Problem Statement

As we know that, one form of culture is art. The embodiment of art is always related to the use of symbols, as in language that implies a form of mutual understanding among the citizens of the supporting community. Just like in other kinds of art, The embodiment of *Wayang Cumplung* is also a unity of work that can be an individual, social, or cultural expression. There have been various research investigating some forms of *wayang* performances. However, there have been only a few studies investigating *wayang cumplung*. Besides, the content of the art form as a substance of expression emphasizes various themes, interpretations or life experiences of its creator in the form of verbal and visual signs. In addition, Culture is a system of symbols, so the process of culture must be understood, translated and interpreted. Accordingly, besides employing the concept of identity and representation by Stuart Hall [3], the concept of Roland Barthes semiotics will also be used in this study to answer the problem formulation of "what sorts of cultural identity are reflected in the use of costume and property in *Wayang Cumplung* Performance?"

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Identity and representation.

In general, to represent means to symbolize, to stand for or to be the specimen of, or to substitute for. While in the matter of culture, to represent means to share sets of concepts, images and ideas of the same culture members that enable them to think and feel about the world. In other words, to represent means to interpret the world in roughly similar ways [3]. Identity itself is a manifestation of imagination that is seen by certain parties who are interconnected in it. Stuart Hall in his work *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* [4] clarifies that cultural identity can be viewed from at least two standpoints, namely cultural identity as being and cultural identity as becoming. In the first perspective, cultural identity is perceived as a unity that is shared. The basic form of a person that resides in many people who have similar histories and ancestors. Consequently, when it is viewed from the definition described by Stuart Hall, cultural identity takes two factors that determine and influence each other in the formation of cultural identity itself, namely external factors based on the physical of a person and internal factors based on things that make someone close to each other and indirectly form identity. In relation to *Wayang Cumplung* performance, costume and property take the role as the 'unspoken language' to represent the cultural Identity of Banyumas people, considering that fashion is a powerful language that can tell people about our background, personality and also belief. So, the power of costume here should certainly be taken into consideration.

2.2 Semiotics

Culture, when it is viewed from semiotics, is an "Interconnected system of daily living that is held together by the signifying order (Signs, codes, texts)" or an interconnected system of daily living that is held together by the signifying order (Signs, codes, texts). From this concept, it is clear that semiotics can be used to study the meaning of properties and ornaments used in *wayang cumplung*. Furthermore, Umberto Eco [5] in his book "*A Theory of Semiotics*" states that the meaning of signs is the result of a convention, from a principle in cultural life. The semiotic approach becomes a bridge that connects the sign with culture, but at the same time gives a central place to the sign. If the object of study in a semiotic study is a text, then that text is treated as a sign. Similarly, if what is the subject of study is another cultural artifact (like in the properties and ornaments in *Wayang Cumplung*) then that artifact is a sign. Specifically, semiotics focuses on understanding the meaning of cultural phenomena as signs that are representative and interpretive.

With regard to the Roland Barthes model semiotics that will be used in this discussion, the core of the theory is an idea that highlights the order of significations or order of significations, namely the meaning of denotation, connotation and myth [6, pp. 118–120]. The meaning of denotation as the first order in the concept of Barthes refers to the general meaning or assumption that is clearly expressed in its terminology, while

the meaning of connotation is the meaning created by the perception of the party who reads it. The meaning of this connotation describes the interaction that occurs when a sign meets the user's emotions according to the background of people's lives and also the supporting culture.

3 Methods

Qualitative research is chosen for analyzing this study considering that it allows a researcher to see the obvious features of the social world of another social organization allowing one to examine from a broader perspective if one can see the astonishing features of an ordinary phenomenon [7]. In this case, *Wayang* is something already popular in Indonesia's traditional culture, however, this study tries to investigate the astonishing features of cultural identity reflected from the costume and property used in this art performance.

In accordance with such substance, the form of observational research is considered appropriate for this study for the discussion is more directed to the main understanding of *wayang cumplung* art in an effort to transfer information from data sources to be conveyed to the community. Moreover, this research has the nature of comprehension and transferability, as the characteristics of an observational study [8, p. 20]. Meanwhile, in particular, this research uses Ethnographic methods. This method, which is part of cultural science level that describes a group of people in order to study, observes the social level of regional society, both in terms of religion and character. Spradley suggests that ethnography is the work of describing a culture [9], and a way of studying a culture-sharing group as well as the final, written product of that research [10]. Hence, the main goal of utilizing ethnography here is to understand a view of life from the point of view of the natives

4 Result and Discussion

From the analysis done in this research, as well as from a series of observation, interviews and focus group discussion done with all relevant sides of this performance art, it shows that *Wayang Cumpulung* undeniably reflects the representation of Cultural Identity of Banyumas people. The concept of *Cablaka* as the prominent identity of Banyumas people or being wellknown as *penginyongan* culture is representatively seen in the costume and property used in this performance. The identity perceived to exist comprises being straightforward, unpretentious, vigilant, and hardworkers. Those characteristics revealed from analyzing the costumes and properties used in this art. The further discussion will show the reflection of them in further details

4.1. Straightforward

The identity of being straightforward is reflected from the choice of location to perform this art. To show the performance, mostly *Wayang Cumpulung* is performed in an open space location that enables the audience to interact well with the players or the artists.

In *cablaka* characteristics, it is broadly understood that Banyumas people prefer to express whatever they feel forthrightly without hiding any feelings behind the actual expression [11]. They believe that being honest is better than being nice only for social reasons. In this case, the artists of *Wayang Cumplung* aim at representing the identity of Banyumas people by showing anything being shown in the performance. If in other art performances normally have backstage area to hide the players when switching from one scene to another, in *Wayang Cumplung*, there is no back stage session. The whole activities are done openly in the eyes of the audience.

Being seen from the semiotics point of view, the main point is the nature of being “open”. Denotatively, according to Meriam Webster Dictionary, ‘open’ means having no enclosing or confining barrier, accessible on all or nearly all sides. Connotatively, it is understood as a situation when there is nothing being hidden, all are displayed amenable. From these meanings then it could be related to the identity revealed from the stage property of *Wayang cumplung*. Semiotically, it reveals the myth concept of Barthes that reflect the straightforward nature of *Banyumas* people in their daily interaction. Myths create a metaphysical knowledge system for explaining human origins, actions, and character, as well as phenomena in the world [12]. This system is the one to which we instinctively resort even today for imparting knowledge of values and morals initially to children.

In a further comprehension, the nature of openness here can also be interpreted as harmonious form among thoughts, feelings and speech. The harmony is also manifested in the openness nature of *Wayang Cumplung* performance as, they want to live equally with trivial difference.

4.2 Unpretentious

Denotatively, unpretentious means free from ostentation, elegance, or affectation. It means that the one with this characteristic does not like anything artificial or unnatural. This thing is represented by the use of basic color like white and black as the dominant colors worn by the players in *Wayang cumplung*. As has been stated before, disregarding the theme of the story being performed in each play, this art has some fixed features that are always presented in each play. One of those is the use of white rag worn by the mastermind of it. Just like in other kinds of *Wayang* Performance, the play is directed by a mastermind who is normally called as ‘*Dalang*’. The mastermind of *Wayang Cumplung* always opens and starts the show by entering the ‘stage’ wearing white rag made of low-priced garment.

White color here represents the natural and sincere character of *Banyumas* people as they always try to show who they are in forthright presence. White as the basic color that connotatively means holly, innocent, and pure is interpreted as the portrayal of human beings who are born blameless. However, in facing their life, undeniably people cannot avoid doing mischievous conducts. This fact is represented in the white costume worn by the mastermind which is covered with stains of paint residues from the previous shows. The decision of letting the residues stay in the white clothes is not without intention. Besides showing the straightforwardness of the people, it also reflects the life that is full of intrigues, once we’ve misbehaved one thing, then it will stay in people’s

mind, no matter how hard somebody tries to clean this from their life record. People can't avoid having such situation, the best thing people can do is by keep doing good things to alleviate the bad memory. This idea of doing good things is represented by singing songs and performing dance with the purpose of entertaining the audience.

In relation to the concept of identity by Stuart Hall [3], the cultural identity of Banyumas people is manifested in the form of imagination which is brought into the story by *wayang cumplung* artists who are interconnected in their performance. The choice of color black, worn by the supporting players represent the balance of life that always comprises of two opposed sides. This fact is also the reflection of unpretentious side of Banyumas people represented by *wayang cumplung*. There is a message intended to deliver in the use of color of white and black. It tells us to see anything clearly, telling the truth is the best thing to do, although for some reasons it is also acceptable to tell lies, but still, it should be in the less portion than telling the truth. In the matter of life style for example, the message intended to deliver is that someone should live their life as it should be. it tells people i.e., not to force themselves having a car when in fact they can only afford to buy a motorcycle. In other people's view probably it will be seen that the person experiences a life comfort. They could only see that from their perspectives without knowing the facts.

4.3. Vigilant

Wayang Cumplung is named under the main property used as the puppet being played by the 'dalang'. The puppet is made of coconut shells with poor-shape condition that in Javanese language is called as "*cumplung*". Usually, the hole appeared on the coconut is caused by the squirrel gnawing it. The vigilant sense reflected from the poor shape condition of coconut shell here is that in life, people should always open their heart and mind both to criticize and to be criticized. The form of the coconut shell, which at a glance seems not to have any bad condition, reflects the readiness of someone's brain to be vigilant in viewing this life. Of course, it is not a good experience to have when someone is being criticized, accordingly, Banyumas people send their criticisms in an inoffensive way. It is just like when a squirrel gnawing a coconut shell. It doesn't leave a cracked form of the shell, instead, it only leaves a-small-neat-hole which is sometimes undetected and bare eyes cannot notice if a hole is there. However, that neat hole leaves a permanent damage on the shell that it cannot be consumed properly due to the impairment. From this fact, then *cumplung* connotatively is interpreted as a readiness to anticipate any harmful things in life. Banyumas people love peaceful interaction in their society. By keeping the concept of vigilance in mind, *Wayang cumplung* tries to send the message that people have to respect others if they want to be respected. In this matter, the knowledge system of myth is the one to which we instinctively resort even today for imparting knowledge of values and morals initially to our next generation [12]. The moral message reflected from the connotation and myth of semiotic analysis here saying that even if there are some agitated feelings stay in their mind, people should be able to express more tranquility to other people in order to have harmonious life.

4.4. Hard-workers

The reflection of Banyumas people as the hard-workers is represented by the use of crops ornaments and long hair wig as parts of the fashion in their costumes. The majority of people in this area work as a farmer. To achieve the best harvest is the main target of all farmers, and to bring it into reality, farmers have to work hard in order to get the best commodity of their crops. Among the crops ornaments used by the players usually used in *Wayang Cumplung* are dry corn leaves, dry straws, pumpkins, rice with stalks, cassava, and music instruments which are made of bamboo. As has been mentioned before, the interaction that occurs when a sign meets the user's emotions according to the background of people's lives and also the supporting culture [6]. Those properties symbolize the supporting culture announcing the best achievements of the farmers as the result of their hard work and patience. Farmers need to work hard from the process of planting the seeds, fertilizing the soil, exterminating the bother of pests, trimming, pruning up to the harvesting process that needs extra patience and skills in doing so. To show their pride of success in passing those series of hard-work then the crops are exhibited to public in the forms of ornaments and properties in this performance.

The use of wigs is another form of hard-work reflected in *Wayang Cumplung* performance. Specifically, semiotics focuses on understanding the meaning of cultural phenomena as signs that are representative and interpretive [5]. Denotatively, just like the nature in planting crops, it is not an easy thing to let somebody's hair grow long. Connotatively, it needs extra patience and a series of treatment to get a length of hair. Then at the next level of interpretation, it can be understood as the form of the hard-working nature of Banyumas People.

5 Conclusion

From the discussion and explanation presented in the previous section, it is revealed that costumes and property used in *Wayang Cumplung* represents the cultural identity of *Penginyongan* culture as the other term of describing Banyumas people. It also shows that *cablaka* concept is not only found in Banyumas language dialect, instead, it is also found in other forms of art culture [13]. The identity of Banyumas people is reflected from the use of costumes as the denotative object. Those properties are then interpreted connotatively and resulted in the interpretation of Banyumas People Characteristics. Costumes and properties of *Wayang Cumplung* Performance which are basically using white and black color, low-priced garments, and stained clothes as well as from the use of properties and ornaments like long-hir-wigs and crops product reflect the nature of being straightforward, unpretentious, vigilant, and hard-workers. Besides those findings revealed in this study, there are still other representations found in this performance, but this study limits the discussion only on those four results to answer the problem statement.

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