

Local Wisdom of *Merak* Dance as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Sundanese Dance

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Abstract

Discovering local wisdom of *Merak* (Peacock) Dance as an intangible cultural heritage of Sundanese Dance which has noble values is not only an aesthetic issue. It contains philosophical, religious, educational, and related values involving all aspects of human life which are interesting to be seen. This research uses descriptive qualitative analysis method, as an initial step in data collection by conducting field observations. Participant observation was chosen since the researcher conducted the research by being directly involved in the research object. In-depth interview techniques are conducted by selecting key informants to obtain data validity that results in a more complete and comprehensive description. This research reveals the local wisdom of the *Merak* Dance as an Intangible Cultural Heritage which cannot be separated from culture and is part of the Sundanese people's daily lives. *Merak* Dance has become an icon of West Java and has also contributed greatly to the environment. In addition, *Merak* Dance is also a reminder of the preservation of Peacocks and keeping them from extinction.

Keywords: *Merak* Dance, Local Wisdom, Cultural Heritage, R. Tjetje Somantri.

A. Introduction

Merak (Peacock) Dance that lives and develops in West Java has received a good response from the community. This is proven by its speed of development and its popularity in various circles. In the beginning of its existence these dances were only studied and taught to aristocrats and

certain students. However, in its development, the dances are also taught in public schools so they can penetrate all levels of society.

This *Merak* Dance is not only famous in West Java region, but also throughout Indonesia and even abroad which has been carried out around 1950s, namely by the existence of art missions abroad. The existence of this *Merak* dance is now still maintained and developed. These dances are still often performed both at home country and overseas. *Merak* Dance is one of the dances that are studied in every formal school or college such as SMKI, STSI, ISI all over Indonesia. Moreover, this is a subject that is always taught in Sundanese dance studios in West Java.

The existence of *Merak* dance is inseparable from the expertise of a Sundanese dancer, one of R. Tjetje Somantri's protégés, Irawati Durban. She is familiar as a dancer as well as a creator of R. Tjeje Soemantri dances. She has been creating many dances that are timeless and monumental that can be enjoyed from generation to generation. One of her dance compositions, *Merak* Dance, has become an icon of Sundanese dance in West Java.

The existence of *Merak* dance is to emphasize the opinion of Edi Sedyawati arguing that ethnic art in Indonesia has been passing through a different development path: classical faced with Folkloric (1981: 148). Sundanese classical dance art is represented by Tayub dance which later develops itself into a family of *Keurseus* dance and *Princess* dance by R. Tjetje Somantri. In contributing to the development of performance dance in West Java, dances by Tjetje Somantri are milestone in the path of the development of female dances which were previously dominated by male dances. The existence of these three types of dance colors the development and growth of dance performance in West Java. His works have distinctive characteristics as distinguishing that can be seen in his dance style. Edi

Sedyawati (1981: 26) states that style in dance can be seen from the movement, rhythm accompaniment, clothing or certain characteristics that give a distinctive impression and are supported by certain techniques that are also typical. Dance style as an expression of individual expression on the treasury of motion cannot be separated from the dance stylist. Dance as well as other works of art is a response and appreciation of all of the culture, norms, social, and education that he has obtained and all of these greatly affect the artist in giving birth to his work. As Jacqueline Smith (1985: 7) said, that a dance composition depends on a person's artistic inspiration and intuition, the mastery of a broad vocabulary as a means of expression and knowledge.

Examining the problems of *Merak* dance of R. Tjetje Somantri's style in West Java, the discussion focuses on Local Wisdom of *Merak* dance as an intangible cultural heritage of Sundanese dance. The aim of the research is to reveal local wisdom of *Merak* dance, the intangible heritage of phenomena from West Java, which have an international dimension of complex phenomenon dance involving culture, tradition, use of the human body, costumes, music, space and lighting. Many manifested and unmanifested elements combined in dance become a type of inheritance that is challenging but very interesting to maintain.

Based on those existences, the researcher confers the existence of *Merak* Dance into three aspects, namely the existence of *Merak* Dance in its influence on daily life, the existence of Tjetje Somantri's work, and the influence of *Merak* Dance in the environment. This research is significant because *Merak* Dance is one of Sundanese Dance Masterpieces by Tjetje Somantri as well as being an icon of West Java. *Merak* Dance has also contributed greatly to Sundanese community, especially for the dancers economically. This is also a reminder of the preservation of Peacocks and

guarding them from extinction. The focus of this research will reveal how local wisdom of *Merak* Dance deserves to be seen as an intangible cultural heritage as a part of Sundanese dance holistically.

B. Methodology

This study uses a multidisciplinary research approach using historical, sociological, composition and performance perspectives that utilize relevant concept theories from these fields as a system of explanation with textual and contextual analysis. A historical approach is needed to uncover Tjetje's journey with his dance and how the process of inheritance took place. The steps of heuristic, criticism, *Erfassung* and *Darstellung* are applied for this research. Ernest Bernheim's stated in his book, *Lehrbuch der Historischen Method Und der Beschichtsphilosphi* (1903) quoted by T. Ibrahim Alfian (2000) that the historical method consists of four stages, namely: (1) heuristics, searching and finding historical sources; (2) criticism, to judge whether or not an authentic historical source; (2) criticism, to judge whether a source is authentic or not and how far is the truth; (3) *erfassung*, symbolic of facts obtained through source criticism or commonly called source analysis; and (4) *darstellung*, the presentation in written form.

The study uses participant observation techniques in which the observation process carried out by the observer by taking part in the lives of people who will be observed (Endraswara, 2006). Furthermore, Endraswara emphasized that the Participant Observation researcher is directly involved in his/her interaction with the object of research.

Interviews were conducted with the actors, the figures directly involved and the artists we also involved. This interview technique is corresponding with the interview method cited the book (Moleong, 2005:

186) which states that in-depth interviews are a process of exploring information in depth, openly, and free of problems and research focus and directed at the research center. In-depth interview techniques are conducted by selecting key informants in order to obtain data validity that results in a more complete and comprehensive description. The informants in this study are divided into three types, namely; base informants, expert informants and ordinary informants.

The base informant is a person who has extensive knowledge about various issues that exist in society, such as cultural figures. Expert informants are figures who are directly involved in it, who have knowledge of the ins and outs of *Merak* dance and marketing management in the promotion field, while ordinary informants are dancers, supporters who are members of the scope of the *Merak* dance (Abu Hamid, 1989: 7).

Based on the analysis of the data obtained, the truth was confirmed to the figures who knew better about the data, then carried out, especially interpretation of the Local Wisdom of *Merak* Inheritance of the Sundanese dance in West Java against the actions in the object.

Theoretical foundation is applied as a foothold in describing the Local Wisdom of *Merak* West Java dance as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. The foundation of Local Wisdom shows *Merak* dance as traditional dance contains noble values that can build the character or soul of the younger generation, so it has a wise character. These noble values are often also called *adiluhung*, which are very important values in human life. “*Adiluhung* value means beautiful and high. This word is a series of words *adi* which means *linuwih*, exceeds everything, and *luhung* means noble, high and beyond the other meaningful” (Widyastutieningrum, 2011: 73). While Intangible Heritage means, based on UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 cited from (www.kemendikbud.go.id) stated that Intangible Cultural Heritage is the practice, representation, expression, knowledge or skills, as well as artifact

object instruments, from the cultural space that UNESCO considered to be the cultural heritage of a place.

C. Results And Discussion

The discussion of this article is focused on the red thread between the world of events and the art of the *Merak* dance, which has a noble value of *Adiluhung* not only on aesthetic issues, but more than that, contains philosophical, religious, educational and related values in all aspects of human life. *Adiluhung* is associated with great powers in the universe. Then the value of *Adiluhung* work of art was created by people who have a strong imagination, so they can create something. In traditional art, life experiences that are *wigati* from the artists are expressed through art forms which are enlivened by the audience or the public. Ideas that are worked on are always grounded in meaningful life experiences and are able to be absorbed by artists. Through the medium of dance, these meaningful values are expressed as examples of *Merak* dance.

R.Tjetje Somantri's *Merak* dance choreography, which is now seen increasingly scattered in communities in various parts. Likewise, the head movements are sudden, reflecting the "arrogance" of Peacocks which realize the true beauty of their bodies. Its appearance, which adopts the essence of similarity in its animalistic reality is not merely naturalistic mimicry. Work on the tail design that the direction facing upside down compared to the opening direction of the peacock's own tail, is another side of the sensitivity of the coreographer's design. In this case, the technical constraints of the tail design related to bodily *kinesthetics* can be resolved, while the stylized motion that is carried out can be unified in all dance entities that illustrate the elegance, "beauty", and transformative elegance of animalistic visual values into values humanistic body values.