

# PROLIFERATION MAP OF *TARI TOPENG CIREBON* IN WEST JAVA (1900s – 1990s)

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## ABSTRACT

*Topeng Cirebon* is one of dances in West Java which was born in Cirebon. *Topeng Cirebon* is believed to be created by Sunan Kali Jaga who then bequeathed it to his son, Sunan Panggung. It develops in some areas in Cirebon and stimulates the emergence of the new styles becoming the characteristics of respective areas. For examples, there are, *Topeng Losari*, *Topeng Slangit*, *Topeng Kreo*, and any other styles. The spreading is not only in Cirebon because *dalang topeng* performs by moving from one place to the others. In West Java, *Topeng Cirebon* exists and develops in *Indramayu*, *Majalengka*, and *Subang*. It does not develop thoroughly in Bandung but it stimulates the existence of new dance acculturated from *Topeng Cirebon* and the other dances in surrounding areas. This is challenging to be studied to reveal the process of the proliferation of *Topeng Cirebon* dance to the areas inside and outside Cirebon and also the form of the dance in those areas as the result of acculturation with the surrounding culture. The study of the proliferation map applies historiography approach and acculturation theory to see the differences of the styles among the areas. The result shows that the cultural acculturation stimulates the emergence of new style and characteristic of *Topeng Cirebon* dance. This surely enriches the vocabulary of dances in West Java.

Keywords: Proliferation, *Tari Topeng Cirebon*, Acculturation

## ABSTRAK

Topeng Cirebon merupakan salah satu bentuk tari di Jawa Barat yang lahir dari daerah Cirebon. Topeng Cirebon yang diyakini diciptakan oleh Sunan Kali Jaga yang diturunkan ke putranya yaitu Sunan Panggung. Pada perkembangannya beberapa daerah di Cirebon melahirkan gaya-gaya baru yang menjadi ciri khas daerahnya masing-masing. Seperti terdapat topeng Losari, Topeng Slangit, Topeng Kreo, dan lain sebagainya. Pesebaran tersebut tidak hanya di Cirebon saja karena para dalang topeng melakukan pertunjukan dengan cara mengamen berpindah dari satu tempat ke tempat lain. Di Jawa Barat, Topeng Cirebon hidup dan berkembang di daerah Indramayu, Majalengka, dan Subang. Sementara di daerah Bandung pesebaran topeng Cirebon tidak utuh namun memunculkan tarian baru hasil akulturasi dari Topeng Cirebon dan tarian yang ada di

daerah tersebut. Hal ini menarik diteliti karena ada beberapa permasalahan yang ingin diungkap dengan tujuan menjelaskan bagaimana proses pesebaran tari topeng Cirebon ke daerah-daerah lain di Cirebon maupun di luar Cirebon dan bagaimana bentuk tari topeng Cirebon di daerah-daerah tersebut sebagai hasil akulturasi dengan budaya setempat. Mengamati peta pesebaran ini digunakan pendekatan sejarah dengan meminjam teori akulturasi sehingga dapat terlihat perbedaan-perbedaan gaya dari setiap daerah yang disinggahnya. Hasil pengamatan menunjukkan akulturasi budaya melahirkan gaya dan kekhasan baru dalam tari topeng Cirebon dan memperkaya khasanah tari di Jawa Barat.

Kata Kunci: Pesebaran, Tari Topeng Cirebon, Akulturasi.

## INTRODUCTION

*Tari topeng Cirebon* is a quite familiar kind of performing arts in the society. This performing art is proliferated in some regions of West Java. *Tari topeng Cirebon* can be categorized as the canon one among dances in West Java. It inspires the emerging of new dances. It is canonical since some forms of dances in West Java are created by the unification of *Topeng Cirebon* with the arts in certain places. This cultural unification happens because of the moving performances of *topeng* groups from Cirebon to one place and the other. In fact the type of each regions in Cirebon also has its distinctive features. Likewise when it is spreaded to other regions in West Java. The map of the proliferation is to the regions in Indramayu, Majalengka, Sumedang, Subang, Karawang, Betawi, Bogor, and Bandung. In some places the performance of *topeng Cirebon* is almost the same as the native source. However in some other places it becomes a different type.

This is challenging to be studied since each places included in the proliferation map of *topeng Cirebon* has their own distinctiveness. The similarities, differences, and uniqueness are because of the cultural acculturation between Cirebon culture and the culture of the places visited. This situation raises three questions to be answered in this study. First, how is the proliferation process of *Tari Topeng Cirebon* to several places in West Java?; Second, where does *topeng Cirebon* spread in West Java?; Third, why is the form different in each regions visited?

Chronicle method with heuristic, critique, interpretation, and historiography is used in this study to find out about the proliferation map of *topeng Cirebon*. The theory applied among other is Redfield's cultural acculturation (1936). It states that acculturation is phenomena resulting from a group of individuals having different culture coming continuously and keeping in touch who then stimulates changes in native culture of one or the two groups. This theory is used to trace the map of the proliferation of *topeng Cirebon* stimulating the emergence of new traditions and forms in the local dances.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. A short history of *Topeng Cirebon*

Based on the history known, masked arts (*seni topeng*) function as ritual media believed to unite between the middle world (human's) and the upper world (ancestor's spirit). *Seni Topeng* for Cirebon society and others' owning it is considered not only as their primordial belief but also as intangible culture of their ancestors as well as a sacred object. This belief is still alive today for the traditional society so that they still conduct a religious activity related to this belief.

However, because of the social change of the society there are changes in the form and the function. *Topeng Cirebon* was used as media for spreading Islam in 15th century (Suwanda, 2003:12). It was a very successful medium for spreading Islam. The skill of the walis in using arts as their media to spread Islam ease the society to receive Islam.

*Topeng Cirebon* with its distinctiveness becomes a canonical Sundanese dance in West Java. It is assumed to emerge from the palace as the influence of Mataram kingdom. When the glory of the palace decreased and the palace could not pay the artists, they got out of the palace and *bebarang* (performing from one place to the other). Their trip exploring west Java regions stimulated the cultural acculturation of local arts, so that the new genres of Sundanese dances emerge.

*Tari Topeng Cirebon* began to be known in Cirebon most possibly on Islam era. It was supposedly brought by *Sunan Kalijaga* from Central Java in the mission of spreading Islam (Pigeaud, 1942: 41 dan 42; Surjaatmadja, 1980: 9-10). Moreover, the writings inform about when *tari topeng Cirebon* emerge can also be found in Soedarsono's and Iyus Rusliana's. They explain about the development of dance in Islam era in West Java was seen around 16<sup>th</sup> century. The figures spreading them are Sunan Gunung Jati helped by Sunan Kalijaga. They gathered people to listen to their sermon and invited them to follow Islam by using interesting ways. They played *gamelan*, *wayang*, and dances. This also proved that arts in Cirebon has been favored by the people before Islam entered, so that the walis used this arts strategy to introduce Islam. The dance art can be enjoyed by any class of people in the society, either the noblemen or the common people (Rusliana, 2002: 45; Soedarsono, 1972: 112).

In Cirebon the *topeng* dancers (*dalang*) consider themselves as Pangeran or Sunan Panggung's line of descent, the son of Sunan Kalijaga who was interested in arts and even the dancer of *seni topeng* (Murgiyanto, 1980: 52-53; in Suanda, 2009: 18). Sunan Panggung inherited his skill to Pangeran Bagus who then also inherited it to his sons and grandsons in Losari, Bagus, and Trusmi. Since then the *topeng* tradition keep spreading to the areas in Cirebon even throughout West Java regions. Sunan Kalijaga is mythicized as the ancestor of *topeng* and *wayang* arts by the artists of *Topeng Cirebon*. They keep mentioning Sunan Kalijaga name to ask for his blessing before beginning their performance (Suanda, 2009: 19-20).

In colonial era, Islam kingdom was controlled by the colonizer so that the kings did not have political authority. They functioned as cultural strengthening. The Cirebon palaces supported the art and culture. In Kanoman palace there was *bedaya* dance, while in

Kasepuhan palace there were *tari topeng* and *wayang wong* (Soedarsono, 1972: 116; Rusliana, 2001:50-51). Moreover Rusliana states that when Sultan Raja Zulkarnaen sat on the throne (1873-1934) and continued by Sultan Nurbuat (1934-1935), they had high interest on arts. The dance arts that were maintained are *bedaya rimbe* dance whose all dancers are the daughters of Sultan, *topeng babakan* or *topeng kecil* which at least presented eight masks (*topeng*). They are *topeng Panji*, *Pamindo*, *Tumenggungan*, *Jingganan-anom*, *Rahwana*, *Parumiyangan*, *Aki-aki*, and *topeng China* (Pigeaud, 1938: 116; Abdurachman, 1982: 118; Rusliana, 2002: 51).

## 2. Proliferation Map

*Topeng Cirebon* spreads to several regions in West Java through *bebarang*, moving performance from one place to the other. The regions visited are Sumedang, Garut, Bandung, Tasikmalaya. The performance were favored by the society shown by many people coming to the performance. The groups of *dalang topeng* who performed were led by Wentar dan Koncer (Somantri, 1951: 28-31; Rusliana, 2002: 58).

The names of *dalang topeng* Koncer and Wentar are the alias name given by Bandung Regent R.A.A Martanegara as the reward for them. Based on information from his relatives Wentar's real name was Kudung. *Wentar* derives from Sundanese word *kawentar* meaning famous. *Dalang topeng* Wentar is more famous and closed to the noblemen. Wentar taught *tari topeng*. Meanwhile, *Koncer* group usually performed his performance for common people. Kandeg (one of famous *dalang topeng* in Cirebon) informs that the real was of Koncer was Ki Konya. The alias name of Koncer most probably taken from Sundanese word *koncaran* meaning famous (Rusliana, 2002: 58-59).

Further information is about *topeng* performance in Sukapura (now Tasikmalaya). What is meant by *topeng* here is most probably *topeng babakan*. Some informations show that the performances of *wayang topeng/wayang wong* and *topeng babakan* were always held together. It can be seen from the main characters of *wayang topeng/wayang wong* and *topeng babakan* were always the same person when performing outside the palace (Rusliana, 2002: 59).

The moving performance of *topeng babakan* as stated by Toto Amsar Suanda is *wayang wong bebarang* from Cirebon who performed to Priangan. The *bebarang* was not only in Cirebon but also to other areas in West Java. For example, one of the *topeng* group from Palimanan. The *dalang topeng* were Wentar dan Kontjer. *Topeng* from Indramayu *bebarang* to Subang, Karawang, Bekasi, Betawi (Jakarta) even to Banten. This *wong bebarang* was significantly influential to the dance existence in West Java (Suanda, 2015: 37). In Ranceekek there was one nobleman, R. Wirakusumah, asking Wentar and Kontjer to teach him *topeng*. This develops to the emergence of *tari Keurseus* and *wayang wong Priangan*. This is continued by another artist Tjetje Somantri who learned *tari topeng* from Wentar. R. Tjetje Somantri resulted in *topeng Koncaran*, while R. Nugraha Sudiredja created *tari Topeng* of three characters, later known as *Topeng Priangan*.



Figure 1: *Tari Topeng Klana Priangan*  
by Rd. Nugraha Sudiredja, dancer: Een Herdiani  
in Al-Mark Netherland 2010, doc. by Bert-yan Katshire

Priangan becomes one of the parts in the spreading of *Topeng Cirebon*. The previous figure shows the distinct difference in the costume and the dance movement as well as the accompaniment of the dance. The most important aspect of the spreading of *topeng Cirebon* to the other regions is because the performance was held by *bebarang*, urbanization, and marriage. In its development, certain areas such as Indramayu name it as *topeng Dermayon* instead of *topeng Cirebon*. Toto Amsar Suanda states that the different name for *topeng* although from the same source shows the sentiment for the ownership and regionalism. This can be proven by the stating of the area name after the word *topeng* which indicates important aspects such as the origin, style, similarities and difference of the performance (Suanda, 2009: 70-72). The following figure is one example of *Topeng Klana* of Losari style which is different from the other areas.



Figure 2: *Tari Topeng Klana Losari Style* presented by  
*dalang topeng Losari Nuranani*  
 doc. by: Herfan Rusando

The proliferation of *topeng* in Cirebon among others is to eastern Losari, that is, Desa Kadungneng. The prominent figures here were the late Rasman dan Rasbin. Meanwhile in western Losari there was *topeng* in Astanalanggar village. The two prominent figures here were the late Dewi and Sawitri. Their skills are inherited to some of their granddaughters. They are still relatively young. They are Taningsih, Nur Anani, Kartini, Srinarti, Warsono and Susana. In Beber there is no generation of *topeng* left. In Ciliwung Palimanan there were *dalang topeng* Wentar, Koncar/Kontjer, Ami, Dasih, and Suji. They are all already died and there are none of their generations inherited their skill. In Slangit there was the late *dalang topeng* Arja. His descendants inherited his skill to be *dalang topeng*. They are the late Suteja, Suparta, Sujaya, and Sujana. The others are still alive, Keni, Karmina, Nunung Nurasih, and Wiyono. *Topeng* also existed in Kreo, Gujeg, and Kalianyar. However, there are no generations continuing the practice. The other proliferation region in Cirebon which still have generation continuing the practise is Gegesik. The active *dalang topeng* here are Baerni and Baedah (Suanda, 2009: 73-74).

Outside Cirebon the proliferation areas are among others Majalengka in Bongas (Banyuwangi), beber-Ligung, lengkong-Bantarwangi, and Randegan (which has just been found for one year). *Topeng* also spreads to Indramayu specifically to Kertasena, Tambi Kidul-Sliyeg, Pekandangan, Pekandangan and Juntinyuat. A phenomenal *dalang* from Pekandangan is the late Rasinah who inherited her skill to Aerli (her granddaughter), as well as there are Wangi Indriya and Eti from Tambi (Suanda, 2009: 75). *Topeng Cirebon* existing in Indramayu is later known as *Topeng Dermayon* (dermayuan). *Topeng Cirebon* also exists in Subang, the one which is still active is in Jati village Cipunagara District. The *Dalang topeng* are the descent of Aminah and Carini. *Topeng Cirebon* in that region is known as *Topeng Menor* (Suanda, 2009: 75).

## CONCLUSION

The result of the analysis shows that when *Topeng Cirebon bebarang* (moving performance from one place to the others), it can be found out the map of the proliferation to several regions which can still be traced until now. The cultural acculturation exists in the regions which have ever been visited. The cultural acculturation between Cirebon culture and the culture of the areas visited results in two form categories of *topeng*.

First, there is *Topeng Cirebon* whose form is still maintained especially the structure of the performance, kind of dance, and the mask presented. The changes are seen in the costume and the accompaniment. The proliferation regions are to Cirebon and outside Cirebon. To Cirebon regions are among others to Losari, Gegesik, Kreo, Palimanan, Slangit, Gujeg, Kalianyar, and Gegesik. The performances are varied. Nowadays, some of them still exists, some are almost extinct, and the other are already extinct. To outside Cirebon regions are to Majalengka which is known as *Topeng Randegan*; to Indramayu later known as *Topeng Dermayon*; and to Subang regency which is later known as *Topeng Menor*.

Second, the result of the acculturation stimulates new form of dance. For example in Sumedang there is Keurses dance, in Garut there is *wayang orang/wayang wong Priangan*, in Bandung there are *Topeng Koncaran*, *Topeng Klana Priangan style*, *Topeng Tumenggung Priangan style*, *Topeng Kencanawungu*, *Topeng Tiga Watak* (Three Characters). Meanwhile in Karawang there is *Topeng Banjet*, in Betawi there is *Topeng Betawi*, in Bogor there is *Topeng Cisalak*, and in Bekasi there is *topeng Tambun*. Each of them has distinctiveness. However in the later categories, although the name of the dance uses the word *topeng* (mask), there are dances which do not use masks. For further research this is interesting to be studied.

The changes and the new forms happen because of some factors. First because of the contact or direct contact between Cirebon culture and the surrounding culture. Second because of the reciprocity between the two cultures. Third because there are changes itself, changes are stimulated by the dinamis process.

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