

GONDHO KUSUMA FUNCTION AND MEANING OF GENDING IN PUPPET PERFORMANCE ART IN EAST JAVA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

*Gending is a traditional music arrangement in Java-based Karawitan which is expressed by Javanese community in daily life to support their social relationship. Gending Gondho Kusuma is a music arrangement played to open leather puppet performance in East Java. It has certain function and meaning to the ritual of dalang (puppet master), especially when the ritual is closely related with dalang's other profession, which is dukun (shaman). This research utilizes qualitative perspective. Data are collected from interview, observation, and documentation. The collected data are analyzed with function theory, because this theory explains about relationship between action of human, material of this action and social system where this action is made. This analysis method can thus be called as hermeneutic. Research indicates few findings. Gending gondho kusuma is the opening music of puppet performance which is played for *suguh*, the procession of giving offerings. It involves the smoke of incense to "deliver" symbolically the ingredients of *sajen*, the offerings, for the meal of ancestral spirits, respectively the spirits of knights or kings who are presumed as attending the performance of leather or mask puppets.*

KEYWORDS: *Performance Art, Music, Gending, Karawitan, Traditional*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Culture always regulates the social life of the community, and the element of culture is many, including habit, interest, motivation, mindset, concern and others. Culture is also a structure needed to achieve an orderliness, when one can understand behavior of others [1]. Human expresses culture through painting, drama, dance, song or music which are created for the benefit of community. Therefore, culture as an art is always functional [2]. There is a famous traditional music in Malang, East Java, called *Gending Gondho Kusuma*. It is functioned as the accompanist music in the procession of *suguh* (giving offerings) and the play is led by *dalang* (puppet master) who is while doing this also casts magical spells called *sendon* and burns the incense. In Mask Puppet tradition, *dalang* sits facing the performance arena (also called as screen, or *kelir*), and this arena is signified as the metaphor of universe. The preparation begins when *dalang* holds *kayon* (*gunungan*) after pulling it up from its site and actuating several moves. The movement of *kayon* is a metaphor of life fluctuation in universe [3]. *Dalang* begins the performance by reciting *sendon*. The content of *sendon* reflects the essence of *dalang*, and at least it contains the following verse: "Alas *dalang*, *wayang* played in this arena has equal position to *dalang* (all them are human). Therefore, differentiation must be made clearly, either by voice (recited by *dalang*) or based on the character of mask worn by dancer. If *dalang* fails to differentiate characters, *anak wayang* (dancer) will face

difficulty in playing their character”[4].

Gending recited by *niaga* (players of gamelan orchestra) fulfills several functions such as creating the expected atmosphere, illustrating something, or giving kinetic emphasis (the moves of the dancers or the wooden dolls [*golek*]). Such technical issues are topics for the first-stage study, while further and deeper study shall look for (sense) the meaning behind the issues. To sense the meaning is meant to consider the complex multidisciplinary things [5]. Basically, both studies emphasize on thought. Human is *animal symbolicum*, a creature that thinks through symbols [6]. The function of symbol is closely related with art. Therefore, *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is composed by Javanese poets for a certain occasion to understand the world through idealistic way. It means that it is a kind of deep review to understand the meaning of *gending* through denotative and connotative aspects. Moreover, the review of current study is focused on the performance of Malang Leather Puppet or East Javanese Leather Puppet. The story presented in performance must be well understood by *dalang* as the main actor of performance. *Dalang* is also a person who dramatizes *anak wayang*. Because such role is similar to *wanderer* or *musafir*, thus through this metaphor, *dalang* can be said as exploring surroundings, taking a journey, and wandering around[7]. Calling *dalang* as a wanderer (*lelana*) is highlighting this entitlement. *Dalang* is also a professional, an expert and a mediator in the transmission of culture and spirituality to the community [8]. Being wanderer is a tradition that must be respected by *dalang*, and it is continually transmitted genetically through generations [9].

METHOD OF RESEARCH

Research uses qualitative perspective. Type of research is a descriptive study concerning with empirical aspects. *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is a commonsense *gending* in Javanese *dalang* world. However, the prominent user is only found in Malang, East Java, when this *gending* is used to accompany performances of Malang Leather Puppet or Malang Mask Puppet. *Gending Gondho Kusuma* has an important meaning to this region and is also symbolical. Therefore, this review aims to reveal the meaning of *gending*. Data are obtained from interview with informants, such as *dalang* and *pengendang* (the leader of orchestra). These informants include: Gumunadji (70 years old), a *dalang* of Malang Leather Puppet; Moch. Soleh Adipramono (64 years old), a *dalang* of Malang Mask Puppet; and Sumantri (65 years old), a traditional music composer in Malang. Data of interview are confirmed with data of observation. The observation itself is done by watching performance of Malang Leather Puppet and Malang Mask Puppet. Method used here is structural functional. The analytic theory is applying the interpretation of Clifford Geertz who conducts a review on Javanese Religion in East Java, Indonesia [10].

DATA EXPOSITION

Malang Leather Puppet is popular event in 1970s with great audiences on interest. Some villagers are the lovers of expressive presentation in Malang Leather Puppet. Indeed, both Malang Leather Puppet (also called *Jeng-Dong Puppet*) and Malang Mask Puppet are played with unique and distinctive musics or *gending*, and one of them is *Gending Gondho Kusuma* recited by *niaga* when *dalang* is about starting the performance[11]. Another distinguishing feature is *kendangan* pattern (Sumantri, interviewed on 21 July 2015). One *kendangan pattern* to accompany *Gending Gondho Kusuma*, which is considered deeply meaningful, is *ngendewan* pattern. Such pattern is also played to accompany Beskalan Dance, and this dance symbolizes fertility [12]. The moves in this dance include extending left-hand to the side and bending right-hand to the navel (*pusar*). Foot steps are turned around into four directions until body position is facing to the screen.

The final form is called four-direction pattern continued with clock-wise movement. In accordance to Hinduism philosophy, *ngendewan* moves symbolize a method of how to read the relieves on Hindu temple, and this method is called *pradaksina* [13].

Kendangan pattern shall match with *gending*, or at least the play must be consistent to the general technique of playing music instrument. *Gending Gondho Kusuma* recited in Jeg-Dong Puppet has some distinctions. Until now, no specific way has been found to develop a deep learning on this *gending*. The attractiveness of *gending* has attracted interests among the lecturing staffs at the Department of Puppet Mastering in Indonesian Art Institute of Surakarta. On 5 August 2015, Suyanto, a Doctor in Puppet Mastering, graduated from the Department of Philosophy in Gadjah Mada University of Yogyakarta, and Darsono, the chair of the Department of Puppet Mastering in Indonesian Art Institute of Surakarta, along with their students, have done observation and documentation at Padepokan Among Roso administered by Ki Sumantri (popularly named as Sumantri *Jeg-Dong*) in Bangkalan Krajan Village, Malang City. The informants of their study are well knowledgeable about *gending* presentation techniques, either as a part of karawitan ensemble or as illustrative presentation of Jeg-Dong Puppet.

Relevant to this writing, *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is one of several *gending*s considered as sacred. Moch. Soleh Adipramono (61 years old) is a *dalang* of Malang Leather Puppet from Tumpang with many experiences. He admits that *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is a charismatic *gending* with magical contents. Adipramono's grandfather, Tirtowinoto, always plays this *gending* before he starts performing Leather Puppet. Also, Karimun, the legendary figure of Malang Mask Puppet from Kedungmangga Village, has asserted that *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is a *gending* that must be played after the presentation of Patih Dance. Kasnam (57 years old), a *dalang* of Malang Mask Puppet, acknowledges that *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is sacred, charismatic, and filled with magical nuances. The play of *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is often accompanied with burning the incense.

Burning the incense during *suguh* is a spiritual deed. It is reasonable because *dalang* is telling stories about kings, knights, and old-days people, and therefore, *dalang* needs the presence of spirits of the characters to be told. It is believed that spirits gathering around *dalang* will tell the stories of their life. Thus, before story-telling begins, *dalang* will ask for permission, apology or request to the spirits to convince them to not disturbing the story-telling (Gumunadji, interviewed on 5 August 2015).

Tradition of *suguh* to the respectful ancestor spirits is still conserved by village communities in Malang. At certain times, traditional communities organize *suguh* ceremonies such as *suguh pundhen desa*, *bersih desa* or *wilujengan desa*. At Banjarsari village, there is a tradition called *suguh pundhen Mbah Singo*. It is a ritual which the procedure is similar to a traditional ceremony called *slamatan*, a procession of providing variety of foods to ancestor spirits [14]. If the procession is over, the remaining foods are consumed together by those present, and this banquet is followed by overnight performance of Leather Puppet. Same kind of event is also held by the communities in Kedungmangga Village, but it involves the presentation of Malang Mask Puppet. Every *Senin Legi* in *Suro* month, they organize the ritual of *suguh pundhen belik kurung*. This ritual involves Malang Mask Puppet, and *gending lir kantu* is played before the dance begins. As said by Rasimen, the gatekeeper of *pundhen* (the object of worship), *lir kantu* is the feeling of sleepy, calm and comfort (Rasimen, interviewed on 2 May 2015). After this *gending* is played, the procession of *suguh pundhen* is conducted along with the burning of straws of black sticky rice. The accompanist music of this burning

is *Gending Gondho Kusuma* and afterwards, Malang Mask Puppet is presented.

Gending Gondho Kusuma has a distinctive role not only in ritual, but also in performance. It indicates a strong relevancy and relationship between the presence of *gending* and the activities of the villagers. The tradition of Malang villagers has been preceded by the background of their history and faith, and thus there is a strong conviction to not abandon the ancestral tradition. That is why, *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is always played during the procession of *suguh pundhen desa* or before the presentation of Leather Puppet.

RESULTS

Gending Gondho Kusuma is also called *gendinglaras pelog patet 6*. When it is played, the resultant moment is sacred, calm, glorious and directing the mind toward a contemplation. Etymologically, the Sanskrit word *gondho* means scent, and *kusuma* signifies flower. Therefore, the etymologic definition of both words is “scent of flower”. Consistent with its functional aspect, *gending* is presented for opening Leather Puppet performance and *dalang* burns the incense during the play of *gending*. It involves two rituals which one enforces the other. The scent of incense represents the fragrance of merit given by patriots who sacrifice their life for defending the nation and state.

Meaning of *Gending* (Voice)

Gending is a composition of tones in Javanese music orchestra (*gamelan*) which is played in *pelog* or *slendro* instruments [15]. Sumantri believes that there are orders of chronology before *gending* is created, and it starts with *tembung* (words), continues to *tembang* (song), and ends at *gending* (music) (Sumantri, interviewed on 3 July 2014). These are three levels that must be achieved for perfection. The words spoken by human are a method to produce verbal communication. The words are linked together to represent the inherent desire, and the usual form of this desire is hope or expectation. Those words become the reality when it is uttered into a statement, called “*tembung*”. Therefore, *tembung* is the verbally expressed words indicating hope, request, or desire. The expression of hope during the ritual is called *dongo* (pray).

Two kinds of pray are expressed by *dalang*, respectively *dongo tolak balak* and *dongo slamet*. In certain ways, *tembung* can be a set of stories, or popularly called *dongeng* (fairy tale). The stories tell about ancestors, knights, kings or wise persons who successfully create the fragrant world as a scent of flower (*kembang*). What they did in the past is like giving a fragrance scent to the world, and Javanese communities call this deed as *laku utama* (a good deed), or *memayuhayuning bawana* (decorating the world with fragrance).

Started with *tembung*, the next stage is *tembang* (song). It means that voices are processed in a way that these will sound pleasantly, and while hearing them, people can feel peace, joy, and even sadness. The very simple expression of *tembang* can be found in the form of *sendon* recited by *dalang*. *Suluh* is the intoned spell aimed to keep the spirits with calmness and joy in their own realm. The most perfect form of *tembang* is called *gending*. Indeed, *gending* is a linkage of complex tones that produces a perfect song. It is called so because people can sense directly the meaning of the intoned contents without asking for explanation. *Gending* contains with universal language, namely symbols, which is useful not only for human who wants to communicate with spirits through verbal language, but also for the spirits that communicate through electromagnetic and emotional frequencies.

Meaning of *Gondho* (Scent)

Perfumery situation created by human is a medium to facilitate their spiritual contact with spirits because spirits

cannot make verbal contact with human. Human with capability in the spiritual aspect may be able to create spiritual communication through universal language called “symbols”. Cassirer declares that human is a creature with efforts to produce something that will be communicated through symbols [16]. When *dalang* burns the incense before performing Leather Puppet is a symbolical communication, and the incense is always placed on a piece of *genteng* (house roof made of earthenware). This procession is symbolically understood as an effort to develop a spiritual contact with “God above”.

The orientation toward “God above” is a cultural concept inherited from the idea that has been institutionalized in the age of ancient Java. Ancient architecture in East Java always involves three strata, namely *bhurloka* (base/foundation of a building, or *umpak*), *bhuwarloka* (wall/pillar), and *swarloka* (roof)[17]. Sumantri explains that Javanese spiritualism recognizes three realms: dark lower realm where the evil spirits remain (devils and wicked genies); vague middle realm, where human and animals belong to; and bright upper realm occupied by the sacred spirits. *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is a way to connect all those realms (Sumantri, interviewed on 21 May 2014).

Genteng, a terracotta earthenware used for burning the incense, is an instrument for symbolical action. It helps escorting the sacred spirits, the souls of heroes or knights (*kusuma*), and the spirits of kings, to go home and unite with “the other gods” from which these spirits obtain their magnificence. *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is recited to smoothen this process. *Gondho Kusuma* means the scent or fragrance of flower, and thus, it tells about the fragrance of the souls of the deceased heroes after they die for defending the rightness, as told in fairy tale of knights in overnight Leather Puppet performance. One example is a tale of *Gatutkacasraya* which takes a period of ancient Javanese age. By the middle of the night, it is presumed that the ancestor spirits are visiting and giving bless for those who sincerely show their care and empathy to the good deed of the ancestors. In other words, ancestor spirits are called to enter into human world[18].

Meaning of *Kusuma* (Flower)

As previously stated, the definition of *kusuma* is connoting the behavior of human with noble character. This kind of human can be the ancestor with humility, the knight who fights bravely in the battle, and the king who lives wisely and always submits to God way. All of them help creating the world into the beautiful place.

In analogy, king is *kusuma*, while prince is the descendant of *kusuma*. Thus, the child of the king is described as *traheng kusuma* (the descendant of the king) *rembesing madu* (with the blisses of the flowing honey). As a consequence, all princes always do *pujabakti* to their ancestors. This *pujabakti* is also conducted by Hayam Wuruk to his grandmother, Sri Raja Patni. Special ritual conducted to respect the ancestor spirits of Majapahit kings is called as *sradha*[19]. This King Hayam Wuruk’s ritual is then conducted by the communities in Kedungmangga Village before Mask Puppet performance, but this ritual is renamed as *nyadran*[20]. The ritual of *nyadran* involves visiting the cemeteries of the deceased parents and relatives on *ruwah* (the month of spirits). During the pilgrimage, the pilgrims recite pray and spread flower on the grave. Flower is a symbolical language to glorify the deceased and to ask for good service from them. The recited pray is usually to request a mercy from God and to expect that God will decide to put the spirits into a calm and peaceful place. Pray recitation is also meaningful to fragrance the spirits in their realms. Calmness and peacefulness in the spirits realms will impact positively on the life of descendants of the spirits.

CONCLUSIONS

Prayers must use poetic words, dramatic recitation, and deeply-hearted speech if they want to show hope and

request through their pray. Melodious words can vibrate the minds of prayers which may help them to drive into the dimension of past memories. The memories deserving for glorification may include the services of respected people, such as the ancestors who are noble at the time, the patriots who bravely struggle for rightness, the courageous princes who defend the kingdom, and also the kings who successfully maintain and keep the peacefulness of the world. All of them are called “kusuma”. It is fragrant name and equaled to the fragrant scent produced by musk oil, incense or black rice straw. The distinctive *fragrance* is needed to communicate with the spirits. *Gending Gondho Kusuma* is a symbol accumulated esthetically from *tembung*, and then developed into melodious poetic expressions. The recitation of *sendon*, the magic tones, is meant to glorify the spirits of the kings, and it is expected that their story presented by the performance will give guidance (*tuntunan*) to the audience communities.

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