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The Transformations of *Tarawangsa* Traditional Music in the Ritual Ceremony of *Bubur Syura* in Sukaluyu Village, Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia

ABSTRACT: *There are various art forms in West Java, starting from dances, music, fine arts, to theater. Based on the research results, it was found that there were more or less 300 types of arts spread in various cities and regencies. However, some of them are “dying”, or in a “severely critical” condition, and some have even disappeared. In other words, the traditional arts of West Java have dwindled in number, even the existing arts are in the danger of extinction. Among these “dying” arts, there are still some that thrive and continue to be loved by the supporting communities. One of the surviving arts is the “tarawangsa” traditional music developed in Sumedang area, especially in Sukaluyu region, Girimukti Village Administrative, North Sumedang District, Sumedang Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Meanwhile, there has not been much in-depth research on local wisdom, ultimately in the domain of traditional music. Hence, this paper would like to discuss one of the research outcomes concerning the transformations of “tarawangsa” traditional music. The issues covered include: “tarawangsa” songs, the “laras” (scale) played, and its development in Sukaluyu Village, Girimukti Administrative Village, Sumedang Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Based on the research results, there are two important assumptions: firstly, the transformations of “tarawangsa” traditional music are immanent in nature, namely they happen because of the creative process of the artists; and secondly, the transformations take place because there is contact between Sukaluyu artists and other area artists.*

KEY WORDS: *Transformation, “tarawangsa” traditional music, ritual, local wisdom, Sumedang area, and creative process of the artists.*

INTRODUCTION

There are various art forms in West Java, starting from dances, music, fine arts, to the theater. Based on research results by Enoch Atmadibrata & Atik Sopandi (1997) and Ganjar Kurnia & Arthur S. Nalan (2003), it was found

that there were more or less 300 types of arts spread in various cities and regencies in West Java, Indonesia. However, some of them are “dying”, or in a “severely critical” condition, and some have even disappeared. In other words, the traditional arts of West Java have

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dwindled in number, even the existing arts are in the danger of extinction.

Among these “dying” arts, there are still some that thrive and continue to be loved by the supporting communities. One of the surviving arts is the *tarawangsa* (two-stringed musical instrument) traditional music developed in Sumedang area, especially in Sukaluyu region, Girimukti Village Administrative, North Sumedang District, Sumedang Regency, West Java. To date, *tarawangsa* traditional art has been the only accompaniment art for *bubur syura* (porridge for celebrating the *Syura* month) ritual ceremony that continues to grow and develop in line with the ritual ceremony upheld by the communities.

In the midst of the rushing influence of non-traditional music on the communities, *tarawangsa* is able to survive. Furthermore, it is not only performed in the ritual ceremony of *bubur syura*,¹ but also in other events, such as birth ceremony, construction of a new house, and other events held by the communities. This phenomenon indicates that *tarawangsa* traditional art still retains people’s interest and is even able to compete with other arts that are celebrated by the majority of the community members.

The ability to survive among the supporting communities is not an easy matter, in addition to requiring hard work from the supporters/proponents in order to sustain the art; the artists have to also continue to improve their ability and creativity in meeting the desires of their supporting communities. The non-existent efforts of the supporting communities and the artists will result in the death of an art in a community. This has been proved by the extinction of various traditional arts in West Java, due to their inability to compete with the relatively new arts; and eventually they are abandoned by the supporting communities.

The ability of *tarawangsa* traditional art to survive and continue to be favored by its supporters, among others, is due to the role of the artists who continuously attempt to

meet the aesthetic needs of the communities supporting the art. One of the attempts made by these *tarawangsa* artists is improving their ability and creativity in the musical domain on which they are focusing. With the ability and creativity, they are able to transform *tarawangsa* music, which has never been done by others.

What is interesting for me here is what kinds of transformation were made by these *tarawangsa* artists to the traditional music? Did these transformations change the essence of *tarawangsa* music as a whole? These questions will be addressed in this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The writing of this paper is based on two pieces of research that I have conducted on *tarawangsa* (two-stringed musical instrument) traditional music, namely concerning the roles of *tarawangsa* traditional music and the symbolic meanings of *tarawangsa* music in the ritual ceremony of *bubur syura* or porridge for celebrating the *Syura* month (Supriatna, 2003). Based on the research outcomes, it was revealed that *tarawangsa* traditional music has undergone transformations or changes. Analysis of the transformations is conducted by drawing upon several theories of cultural transformation or change.

Cultural transformation is possibly caused by various factors and kinds of power that emerge spontaneously in a community to which the culture belongs; or, according to Malinowski, it can possibly occur because there is contact with different cultures (cited in Purwanto, 2000:105). Transformation takes place because culture is not static. Even without interference of the incoming foreign cultural elements, a certain community’s culture will certainly change by the passing of time.

In a culture, there is always certain freedom among the individuals; and this freedom introduces variations in prevailing ways and the existing variations eventually become shared property that in the future come to be parts of the culture (*cf* Ember & Ember, 2006; and Ihromi ed., 2006:32).

Culture is dynamic, it will continuously change throughout human’s experience; and there is no single culture that can escape

¹*Syura* or *Aasyura*, in the context of Islamic tradition, is 10th day of *Muharram*, which commemorates Prophet Muhammad’s grandsons, Hassan and Hussein, Day of Atonement. See, for example, John M. Echols & Hassan Shadily (2003:33).

from changes. On the other hand, culture is also stable, namely there is no major cultural transformation that takes place in a single night; the thread of continuity is followed through by each culture. Hence, transformation must always be considered based on stability (Meriam, 1964:303).

E.M. Rogers & F.F. Shoemaker (1971) and Hari Purwanto (2000) stated that if the source of change comes from the inside, it is called "immanent change". Meanwhile, if the source of change is coming from the outside, it is called "contact". Immanent changes occur if there is a new idea created and developed by the members of a community without any external influence, and eventually, the new idea is disseminated to the whole social system. On the contrary, if the changes are "inter-system" symptoms, it means that the new idea comes from outside of the social system (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971:17; and Purwanto, 2000:170).

By referencing several theories of transformation above, it can be inferred that *tarawangsa* traditional music is a part of Sumedang community culture that has also undergone transformations, as with other traditional arts that have experienced changes as a result of contact with the outer world. Radio, recording cassettes, and TV (Television) have to some extent changed local community's habit, ultimately the younger generations. They have shifted their active participation in folk performances (the medium in which they play their own traditional musical instrument and dance in group) into passive participation/appreciation (by merely sitting or lying down, listening to the music or watching people dance on television). Such situations have discouraged the younger generations' interest in traditional performing arts (Devung, 1997:38).

Transformation or change in *tarawangsa* traditional music is also highly dependent upon the supporting communities. It means that whether or not transformation takes place in *tarawangsa* music is highly dependent upon the will or desire of the supporters of this music. However, considering the dynamic nature of the music, *tarawangsa* music will continue to undergo transformation, even

though the supporting communities do not desire the changes.

This phenomenon is at least caused by the fact that *tarawangsa* music is one of performing arts taught or inherited orally by teachers to their students (usually by fathers to their children) by means of directly observing, listening to, copying, and practicing it. Thus, there is no formal guidance. Everything is based on interpretation, both by the teachers and the students, so that addition, subtraction, and changes can happen in one or two generations only (Sumardjo, 2001:11).

Departing from the explanations above, the writer opines that transformations occur in *tarawangsa* traditional music due to two influencing factors, namely: *first*, the factors from within *tarawangsa* music itself, in this case the artists and the supporting communities who are the agent of change; and *second*, the factors from the outside, namely various factors that can change the desire and interest of the communities in *tarawangsa* traditional music.

TARAWANGSA TRADITIONAL MUSIC

One of the traditional arts functioning as ceremony and entertainment media for the supporting communities is *tarawangsa* (two-stringed musical instrument) traditional art, or what is familiarly called *jentreng* or *ngek-ngek*. To this date, the meaning of the term *tarawangsa* commonly used to call the art, remains a mystery for the users and in the existing literature. Nevertheless, Jakob Sumardjo revealed that the term of *trewangsa* emerged as recently as in the 15th century, namely in the literary work of *Cupak*. *Trewangsa* became *tarawangsa* in Sundanese gamelan or *rebab* in Javanese gamelan (Sumardjo, 2001:159). This probably explains why *tarawangsa* or *ngek-ngek* is often called *rebab jangkung*, because in Javanese, the term *trewangsa* means *rebab* or two-stringed musical instrument (Echols & Shadily, 2003:453).

Observing *tarawangsa* performance in the ritual ceremony of *bubur syura*, *ngalaksa*, and other events, it can be concluded that the music is a product of the Hindu-Buddhist epoch. It can be clearly seen from the intention

of the performance and several requirements that should be fulfilled for the event, such as: incense/censer, offerings, symbolic statue of *Dewi Sri* (the Goddess of Rice), tools/weapons with certain power, and the procedures of the ceremony.

The opinion is strengthened by the outcomes of Mariko Sasaki's research, disclosing that in the ancient script of *Sewaka Darma*, written in the 15th century AD (*Anno Domini*), the term of *tarawangsa* was already mentioned to denote a musical instrument (Sasaki, 2007:47). Hence, it was evident that *tarawangsa* had existed in the land of Sunda since the era of Hinduism-Buddhism, long before the coming of both Islamic influence and Javanese culture in the beginning of the 17th century AD to Sundanese community in West Java.

In West Java, *tarawangsa* art or music was spread in several regions, namely Rancakalong and Girimukti in Sumedang; Cibalong in Tasikmalaya; Banjaran in Bandung; and Baduy in Banten. Nonetheless, *tarawangsa* was played differently. In Cibalong, for example, *tarawangsa* was played using the instruments of *tarawangsa/ngek-ngek*, *kacapi* (a zither-like Sundanese traditional musical instrument), and *calung* (xylophone instrument made of bamboo). Hence, the art was familiarly called *calung tarawangsa*. In Banjaran, *tarawangsa* was played using *tarawangsa/ngek-ngek* with *kacapi indung* (main zither), commonly used in the performance of Cianjuran Sundanese Songs. In Baduy, *tarawangsa* was called *Rendo*, played together with the instrument of *suling* or flute (van Zanten, 1989:109).

All *tarawangsa* arts existing in West Java have one similarity, namely it is offered or performed for the ceremony of *Dewi Padi* (the Goddess of Rice), usually called *Dewi Sri* (goddess of rice crop), *Nu Geulis* (pretty goddess), or *Kersa Nyai* (goddess power). However, in terms of performance, Banjaran, Sumedang, Cibalong, and Baduy *tarawangsa*, all have clear differences. Not only the instruments used, the songs performed are different as well.

In Sumedang, *tarawangsa* art originated from Rancakalong region. This is so because the one in Sukaluyu, Girimukti also originated from Rancakalong region, more precisely from

Cijere Village, Nagarawangi Administrative Village, Rancakalong District. Hence, it can be said that all *tarawangsa* arts in Sumedang have been disseminated from Rancakalong region. In reality, the art continued to develop mostly in the two regions, namely Rancakalong and Sukaluyu in Girimukti (Supriatna, 2003).

In every ritual ceremony held by the communities of Rancakalong and Sukaluyu Girimukti involving *tarawangsa*, both in *bubur syura* (porridge for celebrating the *Syura* month) and *ngalaksa* (kind of dish prepared with such noodles) ceremonies, *tarawangsa* played a very significant role. This was so because the position of *tarawangsa* cannot be replaced by other arts. *Tarawangsa* did not only play a role in accompanying the ceremony and for entertainment purposes, it was also the medium connecting the ceremony actors to *Dewi Sri* in the nether world.

Therefore, *tarawangsa* art cannot be substituted by other arts (Supriatna, 2003). Hence, it can also be said that in each ceremony, *tarawangsa* played a vital role as the accompaniment of the ritual ceremony to invite *Dewi Sri* along with the spirits of *karuhun*, or the ancestors, to come (Sasaki, 2007:164).

In each *tarawangsa* performance, both in *bubur syura* ritual ceremony, *ngalaksa*, and other ceremonies, the performance patterns remain the same, namely the staging of ritual ceremony songs and entertainment songs. In other words, it can be concluded that in each *tarawangsa* performance, there are two groups of songs with different functions, namely: (1) the group of songs performed specifically for ritual ceremonies; and (2) the group of songs for the entertainment of the supporting communities. Meanwhile, the number of songs performed for both ceremony and entertainment is 17 in total.

With regards to the number of *tarawangsa* songs, Mariko Sasaki divided them into two parts, namely the "main" songs and "free" songs. "Main songs" are songs accompanying the ritual ceremony to invite *Dewi Sri* and the spirits of the ancestors to come; while "free songs" are those played freely for entertainment purposes or after the ritual ceremony (Sasaki, 2007). Hence, "the main

songs” can alternatively be called “ceremonial songs”; whereas “free songs” can be called “entertainment songs”. It can be said that the “original songs” of *tarawangsa* are the “ceremonial songs” (Sasaki, 2007:169-170).

As explained above, the “life and death” of *tarawangsa* music highly depend on the practice of ritual ceremony held by the communities. If the ritual ceremony is no longer held, *tarawangsa* art will naturally die or become extinct. There are some causes for the communities to not hold the ritual ceremony, such as fund availability, lack of support, communities’ belief in ritual ceremonies that starts to fade, and other reasons. Furthermore, most possibly due to the fact that the ritual ceremony for *Dewi Sri* is thought to be *syirik/shirk*, an Islamic term referring to establishing “partners” to God, and the decreasing interest among players or audiences. The ceremony for *Dewi Sri* is even more rarely held, so that the opportunity to present the three arts is getting rare (Sasaki, 2007:168).

There are many arts, especially Sundanese arts, which thrive in West Java among the supporting communities. However, many of them have come to extinction and even are no longer recognized by the communities. Jacob Sumardjo, then, stated as follows:

One of the reasons why the average Indonesian performing arts that are thousand or hundred years of age have been relatively maintained and remained “intact” is because performing art is an ancient religious ceremony. The ancient communities did not dare to change a religious ceremony. Sacredness is, in fact, obtained through obedience with the old form and structure. Transformation means destruction of the sacred (Sumardjo, 2001:9).

One of the arts that can be said to survive until today is *tarawangsa* (two-stringed musical instrument) traditional art that also serves as the accompaniment for the ritual ceremonies of its supporting communities.

In terms of its development, *tarawangsa* art is categorized as traditional performing art. This is so because *tarawangsa* is an integral part of the socio-cultural-religious life of the communities, in which ritual ceremonies

are commonly performed by the members. Performing art is not a “tangible” art. A performing art begins and ends at a certain time and place. A performing art is only staged once, while other performances are the “embodiments” of the other arts, even though the content of the arts remains the same (Sumardjo, 2001:6).

Jacob Sumardjo’s opinion above implies that performing art is dynamic, where transformations will always occur from one performance to the next. This is what Jacob Sumardjo means by saying that performing art begins and ends in a certain time and place. Transformations of performing arts can happen, because of deliberate and non-deliberate factors (Sumardjo, 2001:7).

THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF TARAWANGSA TRADITIONAL MUSIC

In the performance of *bubur syura* (porridge for celebrating the *Syura* month) ritual ceremony, *tarawangsa* (two-stringed musical instrument) traditional music serves as the accompaniment to the ceremony to bring in *Dewi Sri* (goddess of rice crop) and as the entertainment for the supporting communities. *Tarawangsa* music is played by *ngek-ngek* and *jentreng* in instrumental form that bears supernatural power. The music cannot only invite *Dewi Sri*, but also put the communities in a trance when they are entertained with the accompanying music.

According to its function in *bubur syura* ritual ceremony, *tarawangsa* music is distinguished into two types, namely the group of songs commonly played for the ritual ceremony, or familiarly termed “main songs”; and the group of songs played to entertain the supporting communities, or “free songs”. “Main songs” consist of *saur* (saying), *pangameut* (remembering), *pamapag* (welcoming), *panimang* (considering), *bangbalikan* (returning), and *icikibung* (involving), with fixed number and structure for each performance. It means that the melody of the songs played, the number of songs performed, and the order or sequence of the songs staged have remained the same until today. In addition, the songs belong to this group can only be played once.



Figure 1:
The Old and New Versions of *Tarawangsa* Music

Because of its functions as ritual-ceremonial music to invite and return *Dewi Sri*, the artists play them very carefully. They avoid mistakes, no matter how small, in playing the songs. In order to avoid the unwanted things, *tarawangsa* artists in Sukaluyu, Girimukti practice seriously to gain the expected skills. Hence, the “main songs” of *tarawangsa* can be sustained and prevented from any transformation by both of the artist and supporting communities.

Different from the above “main songs”, “free songs” are a number of songs generally played to accompany the audiences in their entertainment. The songs comprise of *angin-angin* (winds), *jemplang* (turning), *degung* (sound of gong), *pangairan* (water), *guarbumi* (earth cultivation), *pancawarna* (five colors), *dengdo* (singing), *ayun-ambing* (sway), *buncis* (stringbean), *bangun* (fittingly), and *badud* (clowning). These songs can be played several times according to the desire or request of the audiences and the artists who play them.

In addition, in each of the performances, the artists have the freedom to interpret each song they play. The artists are allowed to play the songs according to their own assumption and aesthetic interpretation. The artists attempt to always develop their abilities and skills in playing each instrument of *tarawangsa* that becomes their specialization. For them, developing the abilities and skills in playing each *tarawangsa* instrument is a must in order for *tarawangsa* traditional music to survive and remain to be loved by the supporters.

The development made by the artists of *tarawangsa* in Sukaluyu, Girimukti is not only focused on the field of skills for the techniques of playing each instrument, but also on the creativity in arranging songs, especially those accompanied by *kacapi* or *jentreng*, a kind of plucked stringed instrument. Even though the songs remain the same from year to year, the creativity of the artists makes the songs sound more melodious and attract the audiences to dance.

This is so, for most of the songs played have been rearranged by the artists. The arrangement results in increased attractiveness of the songs, so that even though *tarawangsa* music does not use *kendang* (a two-headed drum) instrument, the audiences of the music can be stimulated to dance. For example, the arrangement of *jemplang* song played by *jentreng* instrument can be seen in the notation in figure 1.

From the notation of *jemplang* song in figure 1, differences can be observed. The notation of the old version of *jemplang* looks very simple, the tones played with the right hand are not many and only to fill in the second and fourth beats in each bar. Meanwhile, in the notation of the new version, the tones played look more complex, filling all the available beats. The tones played with the left hand in both versions share similarities. Differences in the horns of the two versions highly depend on the artist’s interpretation in stressing the sense of *kendangan* (membrane in ear) to the song.

Tarawangsa traditional music is called

sasaka tujuh belas titiban ti Mataram (the seventeen legacies from Mataram kingdom in Central Java) by the supporting communities. The term of *sasaka tujuh belas* (the seventeen legacies) is taken from the number of songs in *tarawangsa* traditional music, namely six songs commonly played to accompany the ritual ceremonies, namely: *saur* (saying), *pangameut* (remembering), *pamapag* (welcoming), *panimang* (considering), *bangbalikan* (returning), and *icikibung* (involving); and eleven songs to accompany communities' entertainment, namely: *jemplang* (turning), *ayun-ambing* (sway), *pancawarna* (five colors), *angin-angin* (winds), *dengdo* (singing), *degung* (sound of gong), *sirnagalih* (tasteless), *buncis* (stringbean), *badud* (clowning), *pasawahan* (rice cultivation), and *limbangan* (washing).

However, considering the fact that the number of songs played in today's *tarawangsa* music performance is more than seventeen, the term of *sasaka tujuh belas* is no longer relevant to be used to call the traditional music of *tarawangsa*.

An increase in the number of songs from the previous number (seventeen) means that in the repertoire of *tarawangsa* songs, there are new songs created by the artists. Hani, one of the artists of *tarawangsa* from Sukaluyu, Girimukti, stated that:

[...] indeed, there are currently relatively new songs, which are *bangun* (likes) and *pangairan* (waters). I myself don't know who created them, because I learned the new songs from the *tarawangsa* players in Racakalong. The two songs become the songs most requested by the community members to accompany them in dancing (interview with Hani, 17/7/2014).

CONCLUSION

Based on the above explanations, it can be inferred that the activities conducted by *tarawangsa* (two-stringed musical instrument) music artists in Sukaluyu, Girimukti, Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia can be categorized as transformational activities. The transformations are not only able to change the songs commonly played for *tarawangsa* musical performance, but also increase the love of the supporters for

tarawangsa traditional music that they have had for years.

The resulting transformations in *tarawangsa* traditional music is not only immanent in nature, they can also occur as a result of contact with things outside the art itself. The immanent transformations occur due to an increase in the ability and creativity of the artists themselves to arrange the songs in *tarawangsa* traditional music. Hence, the transformations can make *tarawangsa* music more interesting for the audiences. However, even though transformations have been made by the artists, the essence of *tarawangsa* music is still intact and unchangeable.

Another thing that can be inferred is that transformations of *tarawangsa* traditional music take place, because there is contact between Sukaluyu's artists and *tarawangsa* artists from Rancakalong region in Sumedang. The contact between artists from the different regions allows for a dialogue and exchange of abilities and experiences to take place among them. One of the impacts of the contact is that in the performance of *tarawangsa* music in Sukaluyu, Girimukti, there are new songs that were previously unfamiliar for the supporting communities.²

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²**Statement:** I would like to declare that this article is my original work; so, it is not product of plagiarism and not yet also be reviewed and published by other scholarly journals.

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