

# Values of Dongkrek Art as Sources to Improve Cultural Resilience

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze and describe the local wisdom values of Dongkrek in Madiun Regency as a source of increasing cultural resilience. The research was carried out for eight months in Madiun using a critical ethnography approach. It used primary and secondary data sources collected by interview, observation, and document recording. Data validation was carried out with source triangulation, while the analysis with qualitative interactive model technique. The results of the study showed that Dongkrek art had local wisdom values, including religious, moral, social, heroism, leadership, aesthetics, and justice value. These values were potential as sources of increasing cultural resilience so they needed to be socialized to the next generation.

**Keywords:** *Dongkrek, Local Wisdom, Cultural Resilience*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural interactions in the time of Industrial Revolution 4.0 were increasingly more open and intense. It had positive and negative impacts on the Indonesian people. The positives included guiding people to think in a modern way and understand multiculturalism, as well as fostering an attitude of tolerance between communities due to their interdependence. Meanwhile, the negatives included pornography and action porn. The community was also prone to alien cultures' influences so that they slowly forgot their local and national culture. Some even considered local and national culture as irrelevant and need to be abandoned. If people were unaware of their own cultural values, the local culture as part of their identity would gradually be fading. Conversely, if a community has the ability to preserve their own cultural values, their cultural values could be used as cultural guidance in navigating an increasingly more advanced and modern life.

Local wisdom or cultural values are stored in various cultural elements, including art. *Dongkrek* was one of traditional arts of Madiun Regency, East Java, that contained local wisdom and gained sustainable support from its community. However, many Madiun people did not understand its cultural values so that they were prone to fade away and be forgotten—a process that will result in the loss of identity for its community. The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand *Dongkrek* art, the local wisdom behind it, and its potential to increase

cultural resilience. Thus, this study dealt with several questions such as what does *Dongkrek* mean? What cultural values does it contain? And do the values have potential as a source to increase cultural resilience?

*Dongkrek* art can be classified as a traditional art. Traditional art is essentially the result of an expression of human desire for beauty against the background of the tradition or cultural system of the owner of the art that is passed down from generation to generation [1]. Traditional arts' articulations usually follow the demands of social changes and development, so it is adaptable and able to encourage general sensitivity of local values. The value of traditional art is often conveyed in aesthetic symbols rooted in socio-cultural-religious experiences that reflect local wisdom.

Local wisdom itself can be understood as a work of reason, deep feeling, character, mannerisms, and suggestions to elevate human dignity [3]. Local wisdom includes wise and good ideas, values, or views that are embedded and followed by community members [4]. Accordingly, customary values and norms function as source of knowledge and strategies in responding to various problems of social life [5]. Therefore, to understand local wisdom, it is necessary to examine the cultural values of the supporting community.

Cultural values according to Koentjaraningrat are concepts about something that exist in the mind of most citizens who are considered valuable and important in life [2]. Cultural values are general conceptions that organize and influence human behavior in dealing with natural and social environment, as well as with God. A

system of cultural values, according to Kluckhohn, is built in the form of a life view for its human adherents [2].

Cultural values and local wisdom serve as guideline that gives direction and orientation to the life of their community, giving signs to behave in various dimensions of life both when dealing with others and with nature [4, 6]. In analyzing these cultural values, we can examine five basic problems in life: (1) the nature of human beings, (2) the nature of works, (3) the nature of man's position in time, (4) the nature of human relations with the natural surroundings, and (5) the nature of human relations with each other [4].

Cultural values contained in local wisdom have an important role in maintaining cultural resilience. Cultural resilience contains the ability to face and overcome all challenges, threats, obstacles, and disturbances, both coming from outside and inside, that can endanger the integrity and identity of a nation [7]. According to Munawaroh, the concept of cultural resilience refers to the ability of local culture to respond to foreign cultural hegemony [8]. This cultural resilience according to Breda, Handerson, and Hatta, must always be interpreted dynamically, considering that cultural elements from outside participate in strengthening local cultural elements and not vice versa [9]. According to Lan and Manan, cultural resilience in contemporary articulation is not only unifying a nation, but also giving strength in facing the swift cultural invasion that tends to have an impact on the elimination of national sovereignty [10]. It is within this conceptual framework that the cultural values of *Dongkrek* art will be examined and its potential as a source to increase cultural resilience will be analyzed in this paper.

## 2. METHOD

This research used critical ethnography. It was directed at examining the cultural values contained by the *Dongkrek* art using emic data (informant's views) and ethical interpretation (researchers' views). It also examined *Dongkrek* art's potential as a source to increase cultural resilience.

This research was conducted in Madiun Regency, East Java Province, in April–December 2018. It used primary and secondary sources of data. The informants were selected based on specific considerations, especially their competence in explaining *Dongkrek* art. Data collection was conducted by interviews, observation, and document recording. To check the validity of the data, researchers used source triangulation techniques. The data analysis was conducted using interactive analysis techniques [11].

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Findings

The origin of *Dongkrek* art can be traced through the following *Gambuh* song:

*Keparengo amatur// Sekar gambuh amurwani atur//  
Seni Dongkrek angirto Dongkrek kang asli// Ngleluri  
budoyo luhung// Ciptane leluhur kito Semangke kang  
cinatur// Riwayat Dongkrek engkang asli// Asal saking  
Dusun Menjayan kang asli// Palang kaleng-gahanipun//  
Priyo luhur kang yoso Jamane kang kapungkur// Duk  
semono Menjayan kang usun// Katrajang eng pagablug  
akeh pepati// Tambah-tambah polah ipun// Kawulo ngudi  
usodo Berkah kang Moho Agung// Eyang Palang hang  
sakti kalangkung// Metu broto angento Dongkrek  
mauwarni// Kinaryo mbrasto pageblug// Serno tapis  
tanpo siso Suko sukur yang Agung// Poro kawulo bingah  
kalangkung// Eyang Palang aparing dawuh  
sayekti//Istinen budoyo luhung// Nirkolo suko raharjo.*  
(Allow me to speak. *Gambuh* songs start the conversation. Understand the original *Dongkrek* art. Preserve a noble culture. The story of our predecessor is now the theme of the conversation. The history of the original *Dongkrek*. The origin of *Dongkrek* art was from original Mejayan Village. *Wedana* was his position. A noble man who created *Dongkrek* in the past. At that time Mejayan Village was hit by an epidemic. The plague struck, many died. Worsening. The people were trying to find a help from the Greatest. *Eyang Palang* was very powerful. Meditating created *Dongkrek* like that (his intention). To eradicate the plague. Gone without the rest, has been graceful to the Greatest. The people felt infinite pleasure. *Eyang Palang* gave advice/advice about the truth. Indeed, a noble culture. Avoiding disaster and bringing prosperity.)

Whereas from historical sources it was suggested that the *Dongkrek* art was created by Raden Bei Lo Prawirodipuro who was then a *Palang* (position at the level of the village head during the Dutch East Indies) of Caruban in 1879. The Caruban area at the time experienced *pageblug* (food crisis) and contracted a deadly plague. In such situation Raden Prawirodipuro undertook efforts by asceticism in the mountains of South Caruban. He then got a *wangsit* (*prophecy*) that the *pageblug* that plagued the Caruban community could be overcome by expelling the *Genderuwa* (evil giant spirits) using a tool in the form of drum and match. Raden Prawirodipuro's efforts were not in vain. The *Genderuwa* can be defeated and became submissive, obedient, and willing to help Raden Parwirodipuro in overcoming the *Pageblug*.

Raden Prawirodipuro's efforts were then enshrined in an art called *Dongkrek*. The word *Dongkrek* was taken from the sound of the main musical instruments, namely "*dong*" (drum sound) and "*krek*" (sound of a match, a square-shaped wood whose one end has a jagged wooden stalk that can produce cricket sound when being swiped). In its further development, some other instruments were added, such as *gong berry*, *kenong*, *kentongan*, and *kendang*.

The show began with a fragment of dance that depicted *Genderuwa* acting inhumanely against the citizens. It followed by the appearance of Mbah Palang (Raden Bei Lo Prawirodipuro) and two middle-aged women named Rara Ayu and Rara Perot. As Rara Ayu and Rara Perot, who were Mbah Palang's aides, carried out their activities, they were disturbed by a group of *Genderuwa* whose intention was to kill them. Before the

*Genderuwa* managed to kill the women, Mbah Palang appeared to fight the *Genderuwa*. At the end of the battle, the *Genderuwa* can be defeated and willing to help Mbah Palang to overcome the *pageblug*. Mbah Palang, accompanied by his two aides and villagers, paraded the *Genderuwa* troops out of the village.

To organize and perform a *Dongkrek* show, it was necessary for the artists to involve the public, the community leaders, and the government in a mutual cooperation. *Dongkrek* was performed by a number of artists using masks depicting figures participating in the 1879 event.



Figure 1 Dongkrek Art Masks

The followings were the main instruments to perform *Dongkrek* art:



Figure 2 Dongkrek Art Instrument

Along with its development, *Dongkrek* art was performed in various activities, with the addition of characters or masks, musicals with different models and tones. It then developed into performances with different nature. First, the sacred one. It was used as a ritual of resisting disaster and danger. This *Dongkrek* was only performed once a year, with a procession involving the entire community of Mejayan village. School (*sanggar*) of *Dongkrek* art that still maintained the grip or authenticity of *Dongkrek* art without any changes was "*Krido Sakti*", led by Walgito. Second, artistic creation as a folk art. It was not sacred, no incense required, neither the presence of Raden Bei Lho Prawirodipoero's descendants. It also had a busier musical accompaniment. This *Dongkrek* still has a procession, though. The community was also invited to join the dance, participated in the performance, and even had a chance to get reward. Third, performing art *Dongkrek*. It was not sacred, no incense or walking around the village procession required, did not invite the community to participating in the dance, and there was no need for the descendants of Raden Bei Lo Prawirodipuro to be presence. It also had more musical accompaniment and was performed in a studio or a stage.

Our field research was successful in collecting following findings:

- 1) *Dongkrek* art of different types, along with their respective properties, had the same cultural value or local wisdom which was expressed in a saying: *Sura Dira Jayaningrat Lebur Dening Pangastuti* (all bad deeds will be defeated by good and wise deeds).
- 2) The characters involved in the event were depicted through the dance moves and masks worn by the artists during the performance. Raden Bei Lo Prawirodipuro's mask symbolized a character of chivalry, wisdom, physical and spiritual strength. Raden Prawirodipuro who has serenity and determination was not easily influenced by others. He can be relied upon and was also very loyal. Rara Ayu's mask symbolized a court lady who was graceful, polite, and always doing good deeds. Rara Perot's mask symbolized an obedient and loyal maid but often spoke impolitely. The red *Genderuwa* mask symbolized an irritable and rude temper. It liked to cause trouble with others. The black *Genderuwa* mask symbolized laziness and gluttony. The white *Genderuwa* mask symbolized good character, manners, and humanity. The green *Genderuwa* mask symbolized a cruel character but still has compassion. The yellow *Genderuwa* mask symbolized greedy character adoring the beauty and luxury of wealth.
- 3) The musical instruments used in the *Dongkrek* art signified a peaceful and homely living. *Ketongan* was a sign to gather or assemble the community. *Kenong* was an introduction to the serene ambiance, marking the creation, intention, and work of the creator. *Bedug*

represented the power of the Mejayana's *Palang* as a chosen warrior, as the saying goes: *Ora Tapa Paluning Pande*. Matches were meant to clean or sweep all kinds of dangers, both visible and invisible. *Gong* signified Raden Prawirodipura as a person of virtues—*Berbudi Wibowo Laksono, Rawe-Rawe Rantas Malang-Malang Putung*. Together they eradicated *pageblug*.

### 3.2. Discussion

Considering the fragments of the story and its characters, as well as the musical instruments accompanying the *Dongkreng* performance, it can be said that the art has various cultural values, including:

#### 3.2.1. Spiritual Value

*Dongkreng* art taught us that all of the happenings in the world cannot be separated from the will of the God. Human needs to make efforts and prayers and also to willingly surrender to the Almighty in order to achieve an inner peace and not to be dissolved in sadness. This was shown by the efforts of Raden Prawirodipuro in fighting *Gendruwa* and overcoming *pagebluk*. The spiritual value of the *Dongkreng* was also obvious in its function as a necessary ritual for starting logging works.

#### 3.2.2. Moral Value

The moral value of *Dongkreng* art was expressed in the saying: "*Sura Dira Jaya Ningrat, Ngasta Tekad Darmastuti*" (every evil will eventually lose with goodness and truth). This was shown in the substance of the fragments and was expressed by the masks used in the performance.

#### 3.2.3. Social Value

There was a spirit of togetherness, harmony, and mutual cooperation behind the *Dongkreng*. This was reflected in the involvement of many stakeholders contributing to the realization of the performance as a common goal. This was also represented by the instruments with their hidden meaning.

#### 3.2.4. Heroism Value

*Dongkreng* taught heroism by the depiction of Raden Prawirodipuro who has perseverance and determination, chivalry, and was willing to make sacrifice by fighting *Gendruwa* for the sake of people's safety and well-being.

#### 3.2.5. Leadership Value

The leadership value was represented by the elders who were guiding the people wisely and responsibly, particularly in a time of hardship and difficulty.

#### 3.2.6. Aesthetic value

The aesthetic value of *Dongkreng* can be seen in the beauty of its elements, including the dance moves, costumes, make-up, and accompanying musical arrangements.

#### 3.2.7. Fairness Value

One of the values articulated in the *Dongkreng* art was the fairness implemented in society by encouraging everyone to fulfill their rights and obligations in social life, both as an individual being, social being, and God's creature.

The local wisdom and cultural values of *Dongkreng* art have been potential to provide guidance in counteracting foreign cultures that were not in accordance with the values of Indonesians, including atheism, individualism, materialism, radicalism, and intolerance. Therefore, the values and wisdoms of *Dongkreng* art deserved to be nurtured and socialized, especially among the young generations, so that they will be aware of their identity and also their capability to perceived foreign cultures wisely and critically. By doing so, the cultural resilience can be strengthened, especially among the youth and the next generations.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The local wisdom of the *Dongkreng* art was apparent in its process of creation, performance fragments, masks used by the performers, and musical instruments accompanying it. Its cultural values were ranging from religious, moral, social, heroism, leadership, aesthetics, to justice and fairness value. These values were potentials to strengthen cultural resilience. Thereby, it needs to be socialized especially to the youths and the next generations to build their awareness of their identity. It was expected that by doing so, the young generations will be able to make encounter with foreign cultures critically and wisely so that every cultural values incompatible with the Indonesians can be responded in a best possible way.

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