

Changes in the Function of Gendong Dance, Indonesia

(Rituals to Seculars)

Mila Aktasih, Juju Masunah
 Postgraduate of Arts Education
 Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
 Bandung, Indonesia
 milaaktasih77@gmail.com

Abstract—This article aims to describe the functions of Gendong dance from ritual to secular. The paradigm in this article is qualitative with descriptive analysis method. Gendong dance is a product of Akit tribes. The Akit Tribe is one of the inland tribes in the Meranti Islands, Riau, Indonesia. The Akit tribe have a ritual that is held once a year as a form of a sense of request for the safety and health of the tribe. In the implementation of the rituals, Gendong dance is performed as an intermediary between Kumantan (shaman) and the Sacred Guardian (spirits). Gendong dance is created from the whisper of the Sacred Guardian to Kumantan who wants a dance and rice rituals as a condition of safety and recovery. As the times developed, the mindset of the Akit tribe experienced a change. Now the Akit tribe perform Gendong dance at the Ashur circumcision event and wedding ceremony, which aims to ask blessings from the Sacred Guardian for the event to be successfully held. Besides, Gendong dance is shown to welcoming the important guests who come to the Akit tribe which finally cause the function of Gendong dance to change become seculars. This article aims to determine the development of Gendong Dance based on its function.

Keywords—*gendong dance; akit tribe; rituals function; seculars function; meranti island*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Akit Tribe has a ritual event that is held once a year. The ritual aims to ask for the safety and health of the Akit tribes. There is a Gendong dance on the implementation of the ritual. Gendong Dance is an intermediary between Kumantan (Shaman) and Sacred Guardian (spirits). This dance is performed by 4 to 6 female dancers. But now, the Gendong dance is presented at the Ashur circumcision event and the wedding ceremony, besides, it also being presented at the arrival of important guests from outside of the Akit tribe.

There was a change in the function of the Gendong dance. These changes are based on the times alteration that are increasingly advanced and make people experienced a change and development, besides, culture will also experience a shift. Changes to society are followed by changes in mindset that make a development. Like the Gendong dance that used to function as a ritual, it has now become seculars (worldly),

which eliminates the sacred form of the dance even though its purpose has similarities to requests to spirits.

According to Soedarsono, the function of dance in Indonesia is divided into three functions, namely (a) the function of dance as a ceremony; (b) the function of dance as entertainment; (c) the function of dance as a show [1]. While Sumandiyo explains five functions of dance, namely (a) dance as beauty; (b) dance as pleasure; (c) dance as a means of communication; (d) dance as a symbol system; (e) dance as supraorganic [2]. Based on these two opinions, that the function related to the existence of the dance in society is not just creative activities, but rather leads to the value and useful results for the community.

The existence of the Gendong dance has been explained in the writing of Takamasa Osawa. He recounted the existence of a Gendong dance during a wedding at the Akit tribe, Teluk Pambang [3]. It was not explained in detail about the Gendong dance. Besides, Osawa, Nur'aisyah also wrote that Gendong dance is a ritual dance originating from the Akit or Akit tribe [4]. Similarly, Erawati and Sofian explained that the Gendong dance had changed function [5].

This change in function will erode the values of the purity in the Gendong dance. But on the other hand, Akit tribes want to promote or show the existence of Gendong dance to all Indonesian people. This is what makes the dance's sacred impression begin to fade. Not only in the community, the Meranti Islands' Culture Office also wants the recognition and recording from Indonesia itself regarding the Gendong dance. Therefore, the Gendong dance began to be shown openly to Indonesian society. This article aims to find out the extent to which changes in the Gendong dance in the Akit tribe still hold on to their ancestral beliefs.

II. METHOD

The paradigm of this research is qualitative. Moleong explained that qualitative research is a research method that is used to examine the condition of natural objects, where researcher has a role as a key instrument of the research itself, and also the results from qualitative based research emphasizes the meaning rather than generalization [6]. Qualitative research

aims to describe the empirical reality behind the phenomenon in depth, detail and complete. The method that will be used in this research is a descriptive analysis method with an ethnographic approach.

Descriptive method is a method of research by collecting data based on the actual situation then the data is compiled, processed, and analyzed to provide an overview of the existing problems. Descriptive is a method of examining the status of a group of people, an object, a set of conditions, a system of thought, or a class of events in the present [7]. The purpose of this descriptive method is to make a description and describe a real situation for analysis. The situation is examined based on the collected data, then assembled, and revealed based on the problem and the determination of the solution.

Ethnographic (cultural) approach is a research method that is widely used for anthropology, especially those related to culture. Ethnography, according to Peacock's theory, refers to social scientific descriptions of humans and the cultural foundation of humanity. In ethnographic research, culture is a theoretical framework for formulating a research framework [8]. The ethnographic approach aims to analyze changes in the function of Gendong dance from a ritual to a seculars form based on the culture of Akit tribes.

III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Gendong Dance comes from the tribe in Selat Akar village, Meranti Islands, Riau. Gendong dance is a greatness dance in Akit tribes. There are so many Akit tribes scattered in Riau Province, Indonesia. Some people call it the Akit tribe. The origin of the Akit tribe came from Siak Regency, but has now spread to the islands of Bengkalis, Meranti island, and Rupert Island. Gendong dance is the greatness dance in Akit tribes. Muchtadin explains that the dance originated from the Akit tribe in Rupert island, the Gedubang dance. Based on the description of the dance movement, it is the same as Gendong dance movement [9]. However, there was no source stated that Gedubang dance was the same as Gendong dance.

The Akit tribe has a ritual ceremony which functions to reject a disaster for its people. This ritual is held once a year led by a Kumantan (shaman). Kumantan is a person who can associated with a sacred guardian (spirits), while a sacred guardian is an ancestor of the Akit tribe which the community believes that he can protect the entire Akit tribe. Akit tribes in ancient times believed that healing and protection came from their ancestors, therefore, they performed a dance as a sign of respect and asking for rejecting disaster. So that, the Gendong dance is considered as a sacred one.

The performance of Gendong dance started with Kumantan, who got a message from the Sacred Guardian to offer a dance. Then the Gendong dance was performed during the ritual ceremony. The word Gendong comes from the name of a King, namely King Gendong. King Gendong had a daughter, when King Gendong died, the daughter of Gendong lamented his father by going around Green Mountain. There is no Akit tribe who knows for sure about the situation of the Kings' daughter.

The dancers of Gendong dance consist of 4 to 6 dancers. All dancers are women, this is adapted from the main character in the dance history Gendong who is a woman. The dancers must be in a holy condition (is not under menstruation), because to be in direct contact with the sacred guardian all related people must be in a holy state. As well as being a Kumantan, he must be someone who is honest and truly understands the cultural issues and trust in their ancestors.

In the implementation of the dance, there is a huge rice (offering) which is an offering to their ancestors. Before the ritual was held, the Akit tribe women would prepare huge rice (offerings). This is also the same as the provisions of the dancers, this rice is made by people who are holy or not under menstruation. Huge rice is made of rice in three-level cone shaped. The first level has three eggs, the second level is five eggs, and the lowest level is seven eggs. In addition, huge rice will be decorated with flowers. After everything was finished, Kumantan read the incantation for the safety of the ritual and the safety of the dancers. Huge rice is placed in the middle of the dancers.

Before starting the performance, the dancers will line up to spread the rice or commonly referred as a fresh flour alternately. This aims to ask for the blessing of their ancestors so that the ritual runs smoothly.

A. *Gendong dance Movements*

The movement of Gendong dance is very simple. The movement consists of two types, namely: upright movement (standing) and sitting movement. Both movements are symbolized as a sign of asking for healing to the ancestral spirits or ancestors in order to protect the tribe from all threats, cure diseases, and others related to Akit tribe's problems. The upright movement is the standing position with the foot on the ground, while the sitting movement is the sitting position like squatting but the feet is support on both toes (jengkeng).

The floor pattern in Gendong dance is circular. The dancer's hand movements are picking, the right-hand picks towards the front and the left-hand picks towards the side. This movement is done alternately until the dance is finished. The circle pattern is taken from the story of the princess going around Green Mount.

B. *Dressing and Make Up*

The dress worn by Gendong dancers are 'kebaya', batik cloth and sling. The color used by Gendong dancers is a green, because it was taken from the story of the princess going around Green Mountain. The green color is also describing the natural atmosphere that has the values of purity for the Akit tribe who were once a tribe who lived in the forest. The makeup is beautiful make up with a bun flower decoration.

C. *The Music*

Musical instruments used in Gendong dance are drums, tetawak, serunai, and gongs. Beside for the rituals of offering, musical instruments that accompany the Gendong dance are also received a spell from Bomo, this also aims to ensure that the dance performance is safe without any interference.

The implementation of the Gendong dance previously was enjoyed only by the Akit tribe as a ritual of refusing disaster, no other community knows about this dance because of access to the Akit tribe locations in the forest and far from urban centers.

Along with the development of the times, the Akit tribe experienced a change in mindset. The community wants the dance performance to be held at all major events. Gendong dance is also shown in weddings as Now Gendong dance is performed at the Ashur circumcision ceremony and marriage as a refusal for the host from unwanted incidents during the event. In addition, the Gendong dance is also dedicated to welcoming guests of honor. This activity is supported by the Meranti Islands Cultural Office. This was done to maintain the preservation of the Gendong dance in the Akit tribe community.

The Meranti Islands Cultural Office wants the preservation of the Gendong dance by introducing it to the public outside the Selat Akar village. They are often invited for cultural events where the tribe will display regional art, such as Gendong dance. Beside the Riau region, this dance was also featured in the capital city, Jakarta. Seeing this situation, there was a cultural change that made the ritual function shift in the Gendong dance become secular.

A change in culture is caused by the tribal people. Culture will continue its life through individuals who are always changing, because of the differences between culture and each individual. Humans will live their lives to death, but culture will not undergo such a cycle. Culture will continue to be supported by the community in enriching the content and new discoveries to achieve the best possible adaptation. Like adding new elements to refresh the culture and release elements that are no longer in accordance with the circumstances. Primitive culture will also experience change. The stages of change are not the same for all cultures, because there will be an environmental change that causes the culture to change in one period. And there can be no static culture if it received the influences from outside [10].

Ethnic identity has been defined as ‘... the degree to which individuals perceive themselves to be included and aligned with an ethnic group’ [11]. All ancestors or ancestors in each generation will have their own culture to deal with their needs, and unconsciously pass it on to the next generation. Nonetheless, it should not be assumed that discursive representations of the ‘primitive’ have inherently functioned in a negative manner, Western thinkers employed the myth of primitiveness to radically put into question existing institutions, values and habits in their own societies [12]. In traditional cultures such as those found in Islamic countries, societal values are largely shaped by religious ideology. Some studies have examined domestic architecture in Iran [13].

However, the culture also goes forward in accordance with the thinking of the people, because culture is based on individuals’ thinking. Every culture will have new individuals with new thoughts.

This change is also existing in the Akit tribe, there were new influences which made the culture of the tribe shifted

slightly from its originality. This has caused the arts to become extinct. To preserve it, they showed their art as a sign that the arts in the Akit tribe were still going on, but unconsciously actually made their art functions also change.

Changes in the Gendong dance are shown in the form of performance that turns into entertainment and welcoming guests, besides, there is also change in the clothes they wear. People want something new from the Gendong dance, so the color of the clothes were changes, no longer following the rules as in the previous ritual ceremony.

Looking at the changes in Gendong dance, the cause of the changes is the community itself which changes the function and presentation of Gendong dance. The Akit tribe have a new mindset, with individuals who are also new in their culture. If seen from the different angle, it is also the era that experienced a change that causes the mindset of the society to change, so the community will adjust their culture to the times to continue their culture.

IV. CONCLUSION

Gendong dance is a product of Akit tribe in the Selat Akar village, Meranti islands. Akit tribes use Gendong dance as a treatment ritual, but now the Gendong dance has undergone a change of function in society, which is to become a secular form. Gendong dance is performed as an entertainment at the Ashur circumcision and marriage, besides, it also become a welcoming dance for important guests who come to the Akit tribe area. Based on this change, the value of the dance will also change. This change is actually caused by the community itself. So, many new values emerge in the culture. A culture will take place according to the mindset of the people. These changes are happened as following the change of globalization that continues to advance, not only in the Akit tribes, changes in mindset also occur throughout the world community. Not entirely a change is caused by a single point, but surely there is another point that is also has a role in changing the culture. Therefore, the Akit tribe want the renewal in their culture, so that the culture can still be accepted by the community itself.

REFERENCES

- [1] Soedarsono, D.B. *Dua Pusat Perkembangan Dramatari Tradisional di Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada Universitas Press, 1972.
- [2] S. Hadi, *Sosiologi Tari*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka, 2005.
- [3] T. Osawa, “At the Edge of Mangrove Forest: The Suku Asli and the Quest for Indigeneity”, *Ethnicity and Development*, p. 185, 2016.
- [4] Nuraisyah, “Adaptasi Suku Asli Desa Jangkang Kecamatan Bantan Kabupaten Bengkalis”, *JOM FISIP*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 1–13, 2017.
- [5] Y. Erawati and A. Sofian, “Tari Tradisi Kancil pada Masyarakat Suku Asli di desa Selat Akar Kecamatan Tasik Putri Puyu Kabupaten Kepulauan Meranti Provinsi Riau,” *KOBA*, vol. 3 No.1, pp. 58–68, 2016.
- [6] L.J. Moleong, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Rosda Karya, 2004.
- [7] Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta, 2009.
- [8] Iskandar, *Metodologi Penelitian Pendidikan dan Sosial (Kualitatif dan Kuantitatif)*. Jakarta: GP. PRESS, 2008.

- [9] M.J. Limbeng, *Suku Akit di Pulau Rupa*. Jakarta: Kementrian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2011.
- [10] R. Linton, *The Study of Man*, Diterjemah. C.V Jemmars, 1984.
- [11] E.J. Kenny, and R. B. Briner, "Increases in salience of ethnic identity at work : The roles of ethnic assignation and ethnic identification," SAGE, p. 726, 2013.
- [12] F. Kurasawa, "A requiem for the 'primitive' ", SAGE, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 1-24, 2002.
- [13] N. Erdoğan, "Cultural Traditions and Domestic Space: Ağaçbekler Home," SAGE, pp. 1-16, 2017.