

Title	In search of a means to express cultural identity in contemporary Indonesian dance
Author(s)	Fukuoka, Madoka
Citation	Osaka Human Sciences. 2020, 6, p. 37-54
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/73799">https://doi.org/10.18910/73799</a>
rights	
Note	

***Osaka University Knowledge Archive : OUKA***

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

Osaka University

## IN SEARCH OF A MEANS TO EXPRESS CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN DANCE

MADOKA FUKUOKA<sup>1)</sup>

### Abstract

This article focuses on the artists' search for identity in contemporary Indonesian dance. "Identity" in this article refers to the essential characteristics of Indonesia, termed "Indonesianness" (*keindonesiaan*). In addition to various traditional dance forms, such as Javanese court dances and Balinese religious offering dances, there are many other dance forms in Indonesia including experimental works. These experimental works are usually called, *kontemporer*, which translates to "contemporary." Although contemporary Indonesian dance is defined as an innovative and experimental genre, it is considered to have a relationship with elements of traditional Indonesian dance. Indonesian dancers and dance researchers point out that the creative activities in contemporary dance forms in Indonesia differ from those in contemporary western dances because the former cannot be freed from the elements of the country's abundant traditional cultural heritage (Supriyanto et al. 2014: 337).

This article traces the development of contemporary Indonesian dance through the description on the accomplishments of four representative dancers by discussing the Indonesian characteristics in their creative endeavors. The article emphasizes a change in the typical model of "tradition vs. modern" or "local culture vs. western culture," which has been referred to in previous research concerning Southeast Asian culture including Indonesian culture. Furthermore, the article suggests that the dissemination of artistic activities is changing. Under Suharto's Indonesia (1966-1998), artistic activities were connected to the discourses of national identity. Many artists during this time would attempt to create something new by integrating traditional elements with the western concept of art and techniques derived from western art creation. Young artists born after the 1970s, however, do not necessarily promote the construction of national culture in their creative pursuits. The cultural experiences of these artists differ according to their region and generation, so they search for characteristic elements of Indonesia that are based on their individual cultural experiences. Some of these creative works are beginning to be disseminated globally through the internet and television, and in this context, some contemporary dances in Indonesia may be categorized as a popular cultural genre because of the manner in which the materials are disseminated and consumed.

Key words: contemporary dance, *kontemporer*, Indonesia,  
"Indonesianness" (*keindonesiaan*)

---

1) This article is the English translation of the original one "Fukuoka, M.(2017). In Search of Identity in Contemporary Indonesian Dance. *Bulletin of Graduate School of Human Sciences*, Osaka University, 43, 143-160 (in Japanese)" Graduate School of Human Sciences, Osaka University, 1-2 Yamadaoka, Suita, Osaka 565-0871, Japan

## 1. Introduction

This paper will examine how dance artists search for a means to express the Indonesian cultural characteristics through the creation of contemporary dance. Many forms of traditional dance in Indonesia are widely known, including classical and folk dances such as court dances and religious offering dances, particularly those of Java and Bali, which are considered to be Indonesian cultural centers, and dances are performed as sightseeing attractions in popular tourist areas. In addition to the traditional dance forms, there have been endeavors to create and perform contemporary forms of dance, which are referred to as, *kontemporer*. Another term that refers to newly created dance is, *komposisi*, derived from the English word “composition”, in which new works are created by using some elements of traditional dance<sup>2)</sup>. However, in other genres of arts in recent years, the term *kontemporer* has generally come to refer to experimental and progressive works. As the name suggests, the development of contemporary dance has occurred alongside creative experimentation in other fields such as music, theater, and fine arts. While traditional dance is a renowned cultural symbol of Indonesia in terms of its unique features and position in society, the “Indonesianness” of contemporary dance is more difficult to characterize. It is necessary to consider the social position of contemporary dance in Indonesian modern history and the process where the artists search to express their own “Indonesianness” in their activities.

Under the Suharto regime, from 1966 to 1998, all of the contemporary arts, including dance, were promoted in the context of their relation to traditional art forms. The creation of contemporary art forms has been encouraged as a development of traditional art. During this era, there was an emphasis on creating a national culture through the preservation, succession, and development of traditional cultures from various regions (Hooker and Howard 1993: 4)<sup>3)</sup>. Art was promoted as a cultural item that was highly visible and appealing to the masses, and the influence of cultural policy in art was prominent during this time. There were active efforts to investigate, collect, and maintain the existing traditional art forms, and find effective ways to present traditional art, as well as to create new forms of contemporary art that used traditional art as the foundation. At this time, the creation of art was centered around Indonesia establishing itself as a nation-state, so it heavily emphasized that new art forms were rooted in tradition, even when, in many cases, art forms and techniques that originated in the West inspired Indonesian artists.

Contemporary dance in Indonesia during the Suharto period had been the attempts to combine traditional dance elements with new western techniques and concepts. For this reason, traditional elements of Indonesian dance can be observed in the contemporary

---

2) These terms come from “contemporary” and “composition.”

3) Hooker and Howard described that “the national culture is defined as a combination of the high points (*puncak-puncak*) of all the regional cultures of Indonesia, a hybrid mix of the best of existing cultures in the nation” (Hooker and Howard 1993: 4).

dance of that era. Although modern contemporary dance, which is referred to by the term “*kontemporer*,” is not necessarily based on traditional dance, there are some cases where there is still a connection to traditional culture, as I will further describe in Section 4. While the main focus of the creation was to present the concepts for new works that investigate new forms of physical movement, there was a connection to traditional dance in regards to the ideas behind a work’s conception. Indonesian contemporary dance is considered to be a genre that occupies a somewhat ambiguous position that includes dualistic aspects, which are both progressive and traditional.

This paper examines the history of contemporary dance in Indonesia and provides the overviews of four prominent contemporary dancers and their activities from their history to the present day. Through this investigation, I focus on the changing process of what constitutes the juxtapositions of “traditional vs. contemporary” and “local vs. western culture,” which are part of the mainstream conceptualization of Southeast Asian culture including Indonesian culture. Furthermore, I consider the changing position of contemporary dance alongside the development of visual media.

There have been many cases where the artists face the problem of how to express their “Indonesianness” in their creative activities. In particular, there have been significant changes over time in artists’ cultural experiences and their connection to the art traditions that serve as a foundation for their work. In the period where cultural creation was emphasized to strengthen the national unity, many creative activities converged on the discourse concerning the establishment of a nation-state, as they were meant to represent the high point of national culture. For contemporary artists today, however, the quest for expression of Indonesian characteristics is not necessarily directly tied to the establishment of national culture. Since Indonesian artists’ cultural experiences differ depending on the time and place of their birth and upbringing, the term “Indonesianness,” refers to a plurality that is rooted in the variety of the cultural experiences of the artists.

Below, the process of the development of Indonesian contemporary dance will be examined by considering four representative dancers, including their works and activities, from the dawn of Indonesian contemporary dance to the present.

## **2. Choreography Techniques**

The concept of “contemporary dance” in Indonesia is thought to have been introduced in the 1950s. In 1955, Martha Graham (1894-1991), a pioneer of American modern dance, led a dance troupe to Indonesia, where they gave a public performance. She was invited to Indonesia after teaching a Sumatran-born dancer in America. As a result of this trip, three young Indonesian dancers received scholarships to travel abroad to the United States, Europe, and other parts of Asia to study ballet and modern dance (Sediyawati 1998: 154). Today, these

three dancers are regarded as the pioneers of modern dance in Indonesia (Mulgiyanto 1995: 95). Seti-Arti Kailola, from Sumatra, continued to pursue creative activities after returning to Indonesia. Later, she moved her base to the United States. Wisnu Wardhana, from Central Java, was the creator of many excellent works and was also a dedicated educator. Bagong Kussudiardja (1928-2004) was a dancer who operated a studio in Bantul near Yogyakarta, Central Java. Of these three dancers, Bagong's activities are described in the most detail in section 3.

Through learning western modern dance and ballet, these three Indonesian dancers acquired techniques for creating stage performances that included the opportunity for new forms of physical expression. These techniques have continued to the present-day dance works. During the Suharto regime, creative work was promoted as pertaining to the preservation, succession and development of local culture. The influence of this cultural policy is reflected in the curriculum of dance courses at the National Institutes of Arts.

In the dance course at National Institute of Arts (*Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia*) in Bandung where this author studied, there were three types of examination for the undergraduate students.

The first was a demonstration of one's abilities as a traditional dancer, and it involved a traditional dance presentation. This is termed *penyajian*, which is derived from *saji* (to serve). Usually, these examinations were solo performances and the focus is on the perfect performance of an existing work of traditional dance.

The second stage of examinations was termed *gubahan*, which is derived from *gubah* (to change), and it tested one's ability to modify a traditional dance in order to choreograph a new dance. This involved various degrees of changes to traditional dances. At the most elementary level, it was the practice of combining a variety of dance movements without changing the music. At the upper level, the choreography of a dance might change in order to include multiple dancers. The degree of change might be quite dramatic, and it might even include changing the music. Despite incorporating elements of traditional dance, the piece was to be regarded as an original work. At this stage, a dance might either be performed solo or as a group.

The third stage was termed *komposisi*, or *kontemporer*, where the dancer pursued the creation of new bodily movements as a form of self-expression. Although traditional dance was not usually part of the dance's structure at this stage, the boundaries of the second stage, *gubanan*, and the third stage, *kontemporer*, sometimes overlapped, and some works still demonstrated a connection to traditional dance. For example, this institute of arts has an examination category for students in the graduate school termed *kelompok bertema* (themed group dance), in which a work that is rooted in a specific theme is performed by multiple dancers. In principle, this is meant to be based on a traditional dance genre, however, the choreography and music both have to be newly created pieces. This may be considered

an advanced form of a *gubahan*, but it may also be considered a form of *komposisi* or *kontemporer* with influences from traditional dance. Since the purpose of this examination is to test a student's ability to choreograph a work that incorporates multiple dancers, the student does not need to perform in the dance. Musical composers may also be separate creators. This stage is a test of one's ability to create and produce a work, which includes the human resource management skills that are involved in the production.

To this day, the influence of modern western dance techniques on Indonesian choreography is seen in the dance education programs of National Institutes of Arts. The textbook on choreography that is used at these institutes is an Indonesian translation of the book entitled *The Art of Making Dances*, written by the modern dance artist, Doris Humphrey (Humphrey 1983). The translation into Indonesian was done by Sal Mulgiyanto, a master dancer and teacher at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta at that time, who served as the Chairman of the Indonesian Performing Arts Association. The book describes how to compose works, evoke a sense of movement through time, and utilize floor patterns. It suggests that it is not just the creation of new physical movements that is important to choreography, but it is also important to cultivate the skills to effectively compose a work that is to become a production. The creation method that is presented in this textbook is rooted in the western idea that assumes a work is meant to be performed on the stage, and viewed and assessed by an audience.

At the institutes of arts, the use of textbooks regarding modern dance from western countries is one of many examples of how techniques to compose works and to present effectively the traditional dance elements to the audience have been taught and continue to be emphasized as a key part of creative activities in Indonesia.

### 3. Choreographers and Their Artistic Activities

The following is an overview of four choreographers who have made notable accomplishments in the contemporary Indonesian dance scene<sup>4)</sup>.

#### *(1) Bagong Kussudiardja*

Bagong Kussudiardja (1928-2004) was a choreographer who worked from his studio in Buntul, near Yogyakarta in Central Java. A descendant of the Javanese nobility, Bagong was interested in art from a young age and was also an active painter. In 1957, he trained under Martha Graham and his studies took him to the United States, Europe, and across Asia.

---

4) Supriyanto and others featured four prominent contemporary Indonesian dancers in their article (Supriyanto et al. 2014). Although this author does not have detailed information on all of the dancers written about in the article, the description is informative and useful. In the following description on Martinus Miroto and Jecko Siompo, this author refers to some points from the description and information contained in their article. The article presents the activities of the master dancer Sardono in several places too. This author refers to the description of Sardono in this article.

After returning to Indonesia, Bagong was an active participant in choreography. He is widely considered to have brought the concept of *kontemporer* to Indonesia together with Wisnu Wardhana (Supriyanto et al. 2014: 337). In his artistic activities, he created many works that are regarded as neoclassical dances (*kreasi baru*). In 1958, he established his studio in Bantul, named Pusat Latihan Tari, PLT, which means “Dance Training Center”. The studio is a space for young dancers to meet and interact. Many of the studio’s dancers go on to be active members of the dance scene in various regions.

After returning from the West, Bagong remained a great admirer of western dance, but he soon began to work on creating dances that were based on traditional Javanese dance. He describes this in more detail below:

Upon returning home from studying ballet and modern dance in the United States, I find that 75 percent of my techniques are based on my experience overseas. At that time I became so intoxicated with western dance techniques. Then, it came to my ideas for producing new choreography, many paths have opened to me. To face classical Indonesian dance has allowed what was once thought to be difficult to develop into something that could be developed easily. Broadened perspectives, a keener sense and ideology and the techniques I have acquired make possible to create the dance works. (Kussudiardjo 1981: 31-32).

In addition to modern dance pieces inspired by Martha Graham, such as “A Bird in the Cage” and “The Sufferer,” (Sedyawati 1998: 13), Bagong produced many works that were based on traditional Indonesian dance and theater. He established a popular neoclassical dance genre with works such as “Tari Tenun (Weaving Dance)” and “Tari Merak (Peacock Dance).” One of Bagong’s notable achievements was how he effectively arranged existing classical dances according to their composition and length, so that they may be learned in studios and performed on the stage to the enjoyment of many audiences. He also contributed to the development of the next generation by creating a space for young dancers across Indonesia to convene in workshops.

In each region, the reorganization and preservation of traditional dance was an important aspect of Indonesian cultural policy. This preservation effort was carried out in Central Java and other areas, and now the popular neoclassical dance genre is entrenched in tourist culture and dance pedagogy throughout Indonesia. Bagong’s achievements in choreograph are considered to have played a key role in the development of classical dance and performing arts in Indonesia.

## (2) *Sardono W. Kusumo*

Sardono Walyo Kusumo (1945) is a contemporary dancer from Java island. His contributions to Indonesia’s contemporary dance scene are numerous and the influence of his

work and teaching can be observed in the new generation of dancers (Supriyanto et al. 2014). After he was trained in traditional Javanese dance, he studied modern dance in New York. His work in choreography continues to be a driving force in Indonesia to this day.

Sardono was a member of a dance troupe that the Indonesian government sent to the New York Expo in 1964. After performing in New York, he remained there for a year to study modern dance (Mulgiyanto 1995: 95). He went on to attend festivals throughout Asia, Europe and other parts of the world. When the Jakarta Arts Center was established in 1968, Sardono, as a young member, conducted the first experimental dance workshop in Indonesia<sup>5)</sup>. Mulgiyanto has suggested that the American modern dance training by these young dancers including Bagong and Sardono, was the first major instance where tradition and modernity were blended in Indonesia. Mulgiyanto claims that the second major occurrence is comprised of Sardono's training period in the United States during 1964, the public performance for tourists in Central Java that began in 1961, and the opening of the Jakarta Arts Center in 1968 (Mulgiyanto 1995: 95).

Since the 1970s, while performing his works, Sardono has traveled to various parts of Indonesia to collect resources and learn about traditional dances. Occasionally, the activities led him to collaborate with local people. In Bali, he created works based on the traditional performance art of *kecak*, which is discussed in more detail later.

In August 2016, this author had the opportunity to see Sardono's creation at the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA), as well as, at the Malay Cultural Heritage Center, film screenings which included the documentary film and some latest videos which he made<sup>6)</sup>. There were fourteen short films by Sardono, which were shot on 8mm film, and a newly created feature film work about Java-born, Raden Saleh, a Paris-based painter<sup>7)</sup>.

5) The Jakarta Art Center is also known as the Ismail Marzuki Park (Taman Ismail Marzuki or TIM), which is named after famous Indonesian composer, Ismail Marzuki. The Jakarta Art Institute is located inside the site of the park.

6) The 2016 Singapore International Festival of Art, entitled "Potentialities," was held from August 11 to September 17 at various venues throughout the country. Artists were invited to attend from all over the world. Sardono was involved in a series of events entitled "Sardono Retrospective," which included a film screening, from August 13 to 28 at the Malay Cultural Heritage Center, and, on 21 and 22 August, a performance by Sardono which included him actively painting on a large canvas as he danced, and a performance of his latest dance production entitled "Black Sun" on 26 and 27 August at art space 72-13. The Malay Cultural Heritage Center held a special exhibition on "Javanese Heritage in Singapore," from May 29 to August 28, in association with these events. The closing performance of this exhibition was performed by a Javanese theatrical group and included a *wayang* performance by Javanese performers from Singapore, *gamelan* players from the University of Singapore, local people, as well as artists invited from Java.

7) The fourteen pieces are as follows: Borobudur 1968, Theatrical Improvisation Under the Eiffel Tower 1973, Festival de Nancy 1973, Sardono dancing with Kecak Group of Peliatan, Ubud, Bali 1971, Training "Samgita" 1969, Children's Journey: From Village In Bali to Europe 1974, Gambuh I Nyoman Kakul, Batuan Village, Bali 1971, Kecak Rina by Sardono, Tegas Village, Bali 1971, Nias Island 1978, Batak 1971, Taifun 1970, Dancing Sardono 1968, Affandi 1970, Javanese Court of Solo 1969. The 2015 digital film, "Raden Saleh After 200 Years," is about Raden Saleh, one of the earliest Asian painters active in Europe. Although it is not described in detail in this article, it is considered to be one of Sardono's greatest choreographic endeavors. The work is 1 hour and 19 minutes long, and it is divided into five parts. Parts 2 to 5 especially featured the performance of some prominent contemporary dancers. The performance took place in the performance hall of the Malay Cultural Heritage Center. The film was screened on a central screen and the fourteen aforementioned clips were all screened without audio on six additional screens—three to the left and right respectively. The film was continuously screened every day, from 10:00am to 9:00 pm, for sixteen days, from August 13 to 28, in 2016.



The short films of art performances, which were shot in the 1970s, were produced throughout the islands of Java, Bali, western Sumatra, and Nias. The contents of the films include overseas performances, the Javanese royal palace, historical ruins, and recordings of the famous Javanese artist, Affandi.

In 1971, Sardono traveled to the village of Tegas in Bali with four fellow dancers. There, he saw the local art of *kecak* which is a performance art that involves physical movements that are accompanied by a traditional chorus of male voices. At that time, the people of Tegas had not yet performed *kecak* as a stage production. Sardono and his colleague dancers worked with the local people to co-produce a *kecak* production. Sardono created a dance piece that demonstrated a fight between two groups of people in the form of a cockfight, which included vocalizations made by each side. The resulting collaboration, the *Kecak Rina*, remains as a popular event for tourists today.

In the late 1970s, Sardono frequently visited the homes of the Dayak people in eastern Kalimantan. By the 1980s, he was performing pieces that concerned environmental issues, like the well-known “Meta Ecology,” from 1979, the 1983 piece, “Plastic Jungle,” and “Lamenting Forest” from 1987 (Sedyawati 1998: 115).

Based at the Jakarta Arts Institute since 1968, Sardono has participated in various dance festivals and has been involved in the development and training of the next generation of dancers. Sal Mulgiyanto, who was involved in planning these festivals, recounts Sardono advising upcoming dancers as well as performing his works at the Young Choreographers’ Festival, from 1978 to 1985, and the Indonesian Dance Festival which began in 1992 (Mulgiyanto 1995: 96-99). The Young Choreographers’ Festival was conceived as an event for presenting the choreographers who were graduating from the various art institutions that have been established throughout Indonesia since the 1960s. In the Indonesian Dance Festival, there were not only young, up-and-coming dancers, but also experienced dancers from throughout Indonesia and those who were invited to attend from abroad (Sedyawati 1998: 118). In 1995, Sardono presented a six-hour work at the festival, which was significant in making the festival a platform for experimental art (Mulgiyanto 1995: 96).

During this time, from the late 1980s to the 1990s, Sardono was also creating works that honored aspects of Javanese spirituality, such as the Indian epics that are central to traditional Javanese theater (Sedyawati 1998: 115). The works are rooted in traditional Javanese culture.

The work which this author witnessed on 27 August 2016 are described below. The piece entitled “Black Sun,” which was performed in the art space named 72-13<sup>8)</sup> deals with forest fires, toxic gases, and other forms of environmental destruction. As already described, the late 1970s marked the beginning of Sardono’s period of works that focus on themes about

---

8) The art space is a remodeled warehouse by the river in the Robertson Quay district of Singapore, and the address of this venue is 72-13. The audience’s seats were arranged around a flat space and the piece was created with the venue’s layout in mind, as the assumption was that the crowd would surround the performance to watch it from all sides.

environmental issues, and the work can be also positioned in that stream. The entire piece lasted for approximately 70 minutes. In the beginning, eleven dancers struggled to stand upright in a shell similar in appearance to a boat. One dancer was at the center, surrounded by ten other dancers, while the sound of waves was heard in the background. For the next 20 minutes, the dancers, through various interactions and bodily movements, depicted increasing struggles and hardships. While the dancers' movements intensified, male and female vocalists appeared on the performance space and began to perform songs and recite poetry. The dancers threw ropes around while arranging themselves in different formations. At the performance's climax, the sound of an explosion was heard. The vocalists and dancers vocalized layers of song and tongue-twisters, while dancers violently moved and began to flee the site. When the vocalists disappeared from the performance space, the dancers returned to surround a central male dancer, and they began to make small gradual movements. A low sound played quietly in the background. All of the performers returned to their initial positions, and the performance came to an end.

According to the commentary, this work depicts a group of people drifting at sea in a small boat. Without a destination, these people drifting in a boat are burned by a black sun. Specifically, the piece focused on the Papuan people who live in eastern Indonesia. In fact, several of the male dancers in the performance were Papuan. The commentary explicitly stated that the piece "highlights the Papuans as a people who, living in rainforests, are among those who are directly affected by the destruction of nature."<sup>9</sup> Although the precise meaning of the piece's songs and poetry was unclear to most of the audience, the vocalizations and tongue-twisters were part of the distinct elements of the piece. The work was inspired by the two-minute solar eclipse that was observed in March 2016, which was a total eclipse of the sun in Indonesia. The performance commentary specifically stated that the inspiration came from the cloud-like formation of people who gathered to see the sun two minutes before it became darkened (leaflet of the performance). Through vocal performance, such as song and poetry, and the physical movements of dance, the piece expressed the current state of the world where people's livelihoods are being threatened.

Sardono has produced many modern experimental dance pieces alongside dance dramas that are strongly rooted in tradition. While some works are devoted to the Javanese traditions from which they were conceived, others are based on traditional dances from different parts of Indonesia. He has dealt with themes of the environment, such as the performance piece described above, and in the process, he has created works that highlight Indonesia's diverse regional traditions. Sardono's works, which contain a variety of themes and techniques, embody the duality of progressive and traditional elements in contemporary dance, known as

---

9) In the program of SIFA 2016, under the piece's title it was written, "Hitam kulit, keriting rambut. Aku Papua," which translates to "Black skin, curly hair. I am Papua." This suggests that the Papuan people are regarded with a certain exoticism, even within Indonesia. (cf. Program of 2016 SIFA: page 15).

*kontemporer.*

(3) *Martinus Miroto*

The legacies of the aforementioned choreographers were passed down to many artists in the generation that followed. Among these artists is Martinus Miroto (1959), a contemporary dancer from Yogyakarta, Central Java. His works portray unique themes through abstract bodily expressions. From an early age, Miroto trained in Javanese classical dance. He went on to major in dance at the National Institute of Arts in Yogyakarta, where he graduated with the highest honors as a dancer in the category of “men’s refined dance.” He also studied in The Jakarta Institute of Arts where he trained under Sardono (Supriyanto et al. 2014).

In 1986, Miroto debuted a piece entitled “Sampah (garbage),” which was inspired by people who make a living from trash and live alongside it<sup>10</sup>. The piece attracted the attention of German critics, so Miroto took the opportunity to study modern dance in Germany, from 1987-1988, as part of the Volksbun Dance School and Wuppertal dance troupe under Pina Bausch (1940-2009). Afterwards, from 1992 to 1995, he attended graduate school to pursue his Master’s degree in dance at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Miroto’s experience studying contemporary dance abroad continues to influence the techniques that he utilizes in his works. His 1995 graduation work from UCLA entitled “Penumbra,” incorporates movements based on Javanese trance dances, while other aspects, like the formations and the music, are more influenced by modern dance. The first half of “Penumbra” features the percussive musical piece, “Totem,” by Gabrielle Roth and the Mirrors, which plays while simple repetitive movements of a Javanese trance dance are performed. This portion of the piece evokes a certain folk dance that is performed on bamboo horses termed *jatilan* (Supriyanto et al. 2014: 339). There is no music in the second half, which consists of a scene where the dancer removes and confronts a mask. The idea behind this piece is said to have arisen from Miroto’s time in Los Angeles, where he spent much time conversing with himself in his mind, as opposed to his life in Java where he was surrounded by family and friends. The duet between the mask and dancer symbolizes Miroto’s internal communication between the inner and outer aspects of himself. This piece includes the work of lighting designers and costume designers, who used light and costumes in alignment with the themes of the piece (Japan Foundation performance brochure: *Dancing through time: Past and present* 1999). The utilization of western techniques can be seen in the work’s production. In 2001, Miroto established a studio by the Bedog River in Sleman, near Yogyakarta. Since 2007, he has held the Bedog Arts Festival and conducted workshops, lectures, and performances there. In 2006, he became more widely known through his leading role of

---

10) Twelve years later, Miroto developed this work further with a piece entitled “Kembang Sampah (Trash flower).” Miroto, who often conveys the socially disenfranchised in his work, has a dancer approach the stage with a mask that symbolizes women being sexually abused. The oppressed women manage to struggle to their feet.

Setiyo in Garin Nugroho's film entitled "Opera Jawa.<sup>11)</sup>"

Miroto's works are characteristic for taking elements from traditional dance and theater to reinterpret and restructure them in a way that is based on western concepts of art works. Mask dances are popular in his native Java, and they are frequently featured in his works. However, masks are not presented in the manner of traditional dance drama, rather Miroto skillfully uses techniques that present the masks in a modern dance context, as in the case of the dialogue between dancer and mask. Despite the deliberate prominence of traditional Javanese elements in his works, Miroto does not portray traditional elements as they are but rather borrows from modern western dance techniques to pursue a unique form of expression.

An example of such works is Miroto's 1999 piece entitled "The Chant of Kunthi," which is the story of two brothers at war from the Indian epic poem Mahabharata, which is also popular in Javanese theater. This piece draws inspiration from many aspects of Javanese traditional theater and dance, which may be observed in the performance's various Javanese song and dance movements as well as the construction of the scenes. At the same time, the influence of modern dance is clearly seen in the piece's composition and performance style. Upon mastering Javanese traditional dance, Miroto has incorporated into the choreographies his experiences in the West, where he studied bodily movements and new creative concepts.

#### (4) *Jecko Siompo*

Jecko Siompo is a dancer and choreographer from Papua, who is also the creator of the new genre known as "Animal Pop". According to Jecko's definition, the word "pop" in this name is a nod to the genre's western origins and the elements changed with the times (Goethe-Institut Indonesien 2011). Animal Pop has been described as a fusion of primitivism and modernization (*modernisasi*) (Supriyanto et al. 2014: 347). Jecko Siompo's dance troupe, named "Jecko's Dance", has been actively performing within and outside of Indonesia. In Indonesia, Jecko also holds classes to guide and train young dancers. The staff members also teach children's classes at the site inside Ismail Marzuki Park in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia. While his works vary greatly, they are commonly rooted in breakdance or street dance techniques from hip-hop and incorporate animal-like movements from traditional Papuan dance. His work has become especially popular among younger generations around the world.

Jecko Siompo was born in 1975 in Ambon and raised in Papua. He is experienced in various traditional dances of Papua, as well as growing up with hip-hop dancing, which was popular in Indonesia during the 1980s. Between 1984 and 1985, he spent some time in Jakarta, where

---

11) The film is based on the Indian epic poem Ramayana, which is widely known in Java. The form of the performance in the film is based on the Javanese theatrical play named *langendriyan* performance that makes use of Javanese song and dance throughout its entirety. Miroto plays the role of the main protagonist, Setiyo, that corresponds to the hero in the epic poem Ramayana as the metastory world of the film.

he was impressed by the hip-hop street dance scene. He found that its movements and rhythms shared similarities with traditional Papua dance (Goethe-Institut Indonesien 2011). In 1993, he moved to the capital to become a music major student at the Jakarta Institute of Arts and eventually he pursued a dance major at the Institute. While at the Institute, Jecko's experience as a choreographer was influenced by training in the various regional Indonesian dances, as well as hip-hop dancing. The influence from Sardono's teaching was also prominent.

In 1998, he received an award for his choreography for the piece entitled "Goda," which marked the beginning of his career as a choreographer. In 1999, he traveled to the United States to learn about local hip-hop. He collaborated with the rock group Slank, and achieved national fame for his choreography in the 2008 Indonesian film entitled "The Rainbow Troops" directed by film director Riri Riza.

Jecko Siompo's works are numerous and with titles like, "Irian Zoom In," "Matahari itu Terbit di Papua (The Sun Rise in Papua)," and "In Front Papua," we can know that he puts importance on his roots in Papua. The below are examples of reviews his work has garnered:

"Primitivism and modernity connect"

"Dialogues between dwellers from the big city and the jungle"

"A huge contrast to the '*halus* (refined)' image the world has known hitherto from the Indonesian performing arts. Javanese slow speed court dances and Balinese more up-tempo choreographies so far have ruled the archipelago's identity and convinced audiences globally of the existence of a very subtle but also aristocratic, somewhat static, ritualized and serious tradition."

<http://latitudes.nu/jecko-siompo-about-papua-dancing-kangaroos-hip-hop>

These reviews are indicative of how Jecko's works are received as a new form of dance that has changed the former image of Indonesian dance. His works are different from the more common Javanese and Balinese dances that were previously introduced overseas<sup>12)</sup>.

Jecko's Dance has performed around the world, including several times in Japan. At the event entitled "Asia Focus: Fukuoka International Film Festival" held in 2015, this author had the opportunity to see one of their live performances for the first time.

In the style of the Animal Pop genre, the dance performance proceeds with several dancers performing gestures and movements that imitate animals and insects. The performance contains many segments where no music is played and only rhythmic sounds, dancer's cries,

---

12) His work has also received pointed criticism. Sal Murtiyanto, a leading figure in the Indonesian dance scene, wrote an essay about the performance of some contemporary dance productions (Mulgiyanto 2001: 77-78). In the essay he criticizes Jecko's works. His article also criticizes other works, particularly regarding multiculturalism and the challenges of addressing the ways in which aspects of traditional culture are utilized in modern works. Mulgiyanto uses such terms as "cultural borrowing" or "appropriation," in his critique. These terms may also be crucial to the creation of new works based on Indonesia's diverse traditional dance cultures.

vocalization, or the singing of folk songs can be heard. The choreography continues so that every movement of the dancers appears to be carefully choreographed rather than improvised. During segments without music or rhythmic sounds, there is still a sense of timing to the movements that is conveyed through other means, such as the dancers' synchronization, when the gestures of certain dancers deviate from the others' movements at certain times, as well as their whispers and cries. A movement or cry that stands out from the group disrupts the harmony of the dancers' united formation, where they are grouped together in a mass, and acts as a signal to transition to the next part. A characteristic of group dance is when there is a progression that demonstrates conformity versus deviation.



Picture 1 Performance of Animal Pop in Asian Focus: Fukuoka International Film Festival 2015

While Papuan cultural elements may be seen in the incorporation of movements that are reminiscent of animals, the occasional music has its foundation in hip-hop and mixes sound samples and existing songs in Indonesia. In this performance, the dancers wear short-sleeved shirts, and spats without any discernable regional affiliation. Also the dancers perform barefoot, which many be considered another connection to Asian dances.

While these performances are popular among young admirers of Asian hip-hop through television and the internet, they have also spread around the world as a new genre based on hip-hop with a Papuan twist within the context of experimental contemporary dance performances. The characteristics of Jecko Siompo's activities is that he established one particular genre that is based on both hip-hop and Papuan dancing.

#### 4. Conclusion

All of these four dancers were inspired by modern western or contemporary dances, and they incorporated these techniques into their compositions that were rooted in traditional regional dance. They searched for the way to present the elements of "Indonesianness" in their work. Although all of the dancers share the perspectives of expressing Indonesian identity in contemporary dance, the process by which each dancer finds their own practice may differ

from generation to generation.

In the discourse on contemporary dance among Indonesian researchers and dancers, the following has been said regarding the term *kontemporer*:

Many of Indonesia's contemporary dancers create works that are culturally rooted while also innovating the dance culture. They reinterpret and reclaim (dance) through bodily expression and techniques and exhibit their own brand of Indonesianness—*keindonesiaan*—that has yet to be expressed by anyone else. In the West, “contemporary,” meaning “new,” conveys a pure expression of the dancer's self. Here, “pure” refers to freedom from existing dance systems or genres; the form is always abstract and conveys a strong message.

On the other hand, the *kontemporer* of Indonesia, introduced by Bagong Kusssudiardja and Wisnu Wardhana, differs from this western concept. In the culturally rich country of Indonesia, one cannot desert tradition, so forms that are freer and more expressive are altered in a way so as to not cast aside the techniques and rules of traditional dance. Tradition will continue to be preserved, even as traditional idioms move toward modern, postmodern or other new genres of dance (Supriyanto et al. 2014: 337).

This excerpt captures the unique characteristics of contemporary dance in Indonesia. As far as this excerpt is concerned, the word *kontemporer*, also encompasses a legacy of tradition in its meaning, as the foundation of contemporary dance is traditional dance. While, it is common for contemporary dance, which is referred to as *kontemporer*, to not be based on traditional dance, it is also true that many cite Indonesia's abundant dance traditions when they describe the differences between Indonesian and western contemporary dance. As described in section 3 (1), Bagong experimented in innovation when he returned to Indonesia from Europe and the United States, then he was also specifically committed to modernizing Javanese traditional dance. Sardono, as described in section 3 (2), created a diverse body of work with the social theme, including works that were made to honor Javanese culture. He was deeply fascinated by the traditional dances of other regions, besides those of his native Java, and looked toward those traditions for inspiration. Miroto, as described in section 3 (3), has the approach to creating innovative pieces by incorporating a strong sense of Javanese tradition. He sometimes creates the composition based on western concept of art work. These three dancers developed their idea of contemporary dance based on their roots in Javanese traditional dance and drew inspiration from the dance tradition in Indonesia especially in Java. They created the dance works based on the concept of dance works in the western dance and utilized the techniques of western contemporary dance. Jecko Siompo, as described in section 3 (4), also drew inspiration from the dance tradition of his native locale, Papua. He established a new dance genre based on the integration of western hip-hop and physical movements in Papuan dancing.

Although they were affected by the techniques and concepts of modern western dance, they did not abandon their own art tradition. Through the creative activities, all of them face their art tradition in a reflexive way and they search for how to present the elements of “Indonesianness” in their work. Through the consideration of their artistic activities, we can see the co-existence of the elements of local traditional culture and modern western culture in their work. It is necessary to deconstruct the typical model of “traditional vs. modern” and “local culture vs. western culture.” Artists in Indonesia contend with Indonesian tradition, history, and regional diversity in their pursuit of self-expression.

We can also see the changing perceptions of contemporary dance as a genre. The works of the choreographers of the Suharto era were the result of innovating traditional culture, and so they were regarded as one category within the genre of national culture. Traditional dance choreographies were created in a form that was appropriate for stage performances, and they play an important role in promoting “Indonesianness” through public entertainment for tourists, overseas audiences, important government officials and at art festivals. Various genres of contemporary dance have been presented as an innovation of tradition at both national and international dance festivals, overseas performances, and so on. While differing from traditional dance troupes, such as those of court dances, contemporary dance has been positioned as a new form of Indonesia’s artistic heritage. In this sense, contemporary dance could be regarded as occupying a position that is near to that of national culture. In the case of the artists of the post - Suharto era, such as Jecko Siompo, not only is his dance practice based in western-originated hip-hop, but also the way his dance has been disseminated and consumed through street performance, the internet, and television supports the idea that contemporary dance is akin to popular culture. Dance, as a genre, may have been seen as inconvenient to access in the age of cassettes and the analog media of the 1980s, and the CD age that followed. However, due to the propagation of visual media and recent development in video sharing systems and small-scale personal media<sup>13)</sup>, dance has become more widely disseminated. The dance genre has been greatly influenced by the media, as it has garnered mass appreciation through live performances, the internet, and television, especially from Asian hip-hop enthusiasts. In this sense, contemporary dance today is closely connected to popular culture too.

The research on popular culture in Southeast Asia tends to focus on the fusion of art traditions from certain regions with the art of other regions, the West, or other art genres that have crossed global borders through mass media to become widespread and entrenched in society (cf. Manuel 1989). In the case of Jecko Siompo, he endeavored to redefine the western-originated pop cultural phenomenon that was popular in Indonesia in 1980s by adding

---

13) Heryanto described how new media environment has intervened and reshaped social lives across the globe at many levels. In the description, he pointed out the new media environment in Indonesia (Heryanto 2014: 9-14).



his own flavor as an Indonesian artist from Papua, and reintroducing the dance genre to the world. Through this process, he seeks out elements from his own artistic traditions. Artists of Jecko's generation had the cultural experience where modern western culture was popularized through various kinds of media.

The distribution and consumption of culture that spreads beyond a region's local framework have been characterized as a global cultural flow that exists as part of globalization (Appadurai 1996). Many active artists, not only dancers, are part of a generation in which globalization and commercialization are considered to be obvious influences in artistic pursuits. Unlike previous generations, in which artistic creation played a major role in shaping and maintaining the national identity, the cultural experience of younger generations, born after the 1970s, has been intimately connected to an influx of western culture through globalization and information sharing. Aspects of their cultural identities have been developed in a community of information sharing that is not necessarily consistent with the geographical space they occupy. Under such circumstances, there are the cases where new generations of artists face the challenge of satisfactorily expressing themselves within western art genres with which they have become familiar<sup>14)</sup>.

---

14) This is not only seen in dance but also in the various kinds of art forms, such as music or film. The leading film director, Riri Riza, talked about his personal cultural experience and his first co-directed film entitled "Kuldusak " in 2015. He pointed out his passion for rock and other western music during the time he spent watching Hollywood movies in his young age. He spoke about the film as follows: " I thought I could create my own new interpretation from my experiences with western culture. This is how I came to create a work that expresses the deadlock that is young people's lives in the city. We wanted to free ourselves from the traditional imagery and themes found in Indonesian film at that time. " (from the Asia –Focus Fukuoka international film festival symposium, September 20, 2015). Eventually, Riri Riza turned his attention toward the regional diversity of Indonesia, and he created works that were set in other areas besides the capital, Jakarta.

## References

- Appadurai, Arjun. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press. (Public Worlds Volume 1)
- Heryanto, Ariel. (2014). *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture*. NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press.
- Hooker, V. M. and D. Howard. (1993). Introduction. In V. M. Hooker (ed.) *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, Oxford University Press, pp.1-23.
- Humphrey, Doris. (1983). *Seni Menata Tari. (The Art of Making Dances.)* translated by Sal Mulgiyanto, Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta. (Originally published in 1958 in English.)
- Japan Foundation Asia Center. (1999). *Dancing through Time: Past and Present*. Performance brochure.
- Kussudiardjo, Bagong. (1981). *Tentang Tari (Notes on Dance)*. Nur Cahaya.
- Manuel, Peter. (1989). *Popular Musics of the Non- Western World: An Introductory Survey*. Oxford University Press.
- Mulgiyanto, Sal. (interview article) (1995). At the Threshold between Unity and Diffusion: Indonesia Arts Now. *Art EXPRESS Quarterly*, No.6 (Spring Issue 1995), pp. 94-103. Shinshokan (original text: Japanese)
- Mulgiyanto, Sal. (2001). Multiculturalism and Reinvention of Tradition: Recent Practices in Dance Making in Indonesia. *Contemporary Theatre Review*. Vol. 11-Issue 2: pp.69-81
- Sediyawati, Edi. (ed.) (1998.) *Indonesian Heritage 8 Performing Arts*, Archipelago Press.
- Supriyanto, Eko, Timbul Haryono, R. M. Soedarsono, Sal Mulgiyanto. (2014) Empat Koreografer Tari Kontemporer Indonesia Periode 1990-2008. *Panggung*. Vol. 24 No. 4: pp. 335-350

### Websites Referenced

<http://latitudes.nu/jecko-siompou-about-papua-dancing-kangaroos-hip-hop/>  
(Accessed March 7, 2016)

Goethe-Institut Indonesien 2011 An interview with Jecko Siompo: Imagining what might be.  
<https://www.goeth.de/ins/id/en/kul/mag/20445855.html>  
(Accessed March 7, 2016)