

Local Spiritual Belief: Creative Posture of Dancer Mask Maker in Malang East Java

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Abstract: *This article discusses the creative posture of dancer mask makers in Malang of East Java Province. The ethnographic approach is chosen as a research method to obtain a description of the subject of the study. In the analysis process, the data are set into categories and interpreted. The result of the research shows that the creative process behind mask-making involves several stages. The first stage is wiwit, the building of commitment to mask-making. The second stage is mbakali, the drafting of the mask. The third stage is maesi, the carving of face and crown shapes on the mask. Finally, the fourth stage is telasan, the finishing of the mask. The mask-making is a creative posture shown by artisans to produce artwork to be used as dance equipment in a mask puppet show. The Malang mask artisans do not differ from wooden mask artisans in other regions in terms of materials and technique. Their mask-making process similarly involves wood as raw material, a knife as a carving tool, and slivering technique. Their mask-making skills are mostly inherited. The artisans surprisingly do not get their skills from internships but from watching, giving attention, and imitating other artisans. The creative posture is always based on local wisdom and orienting toward local spiritual beliefs. The effect of local spirituality can be found in material selection, carving techniques, and coloring patterns. The experience of mask artisans in putting local spirituality into the mask-making process needs to be reviewed.*

Keywords: *ethnography, artisans, mask, wood, creative*

INTRODUCTION

A mask is a distinctive thing that is created to cover the face of the wearer¹. The process of mask-making is varying depending on the local culture performed by the community where the maker lives. It is often

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¹ Audrey C. Rule et al., "African Mask-Making Workshop: Professional Development Experiences of Diverse Participants," *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 17, no. 2 (2015): 135–57, <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v17i2.953>.

created as a piece of equipment for performance arts. Several countries in the world have been known for their mask-making arts. The Japanese have a tradition of carving the Noh Mask, which is known for its artistic quality². On the border of Thailand-Laos, the dweller creates a mask for ancestral homage and exorcism³. Having the intention to complement the existing information about the mask, the authors try to elaborate and review the making process of traditional masks in Malang Regency East Java.

The activity of artisans can be identified from their creative process, such as making ideas, finishing work, and embellishing the work with aesthetical or symbolical values⁴. In general, what the mask maker does is not quite different from what the artist does. Both of them carry out interpretations and then transform their ideas into something valuable based on local culture⁵. In other words, either mask makers or artists think and act in compliance with the local cultural context⁶. Culture determines the material (medium) that is used to deliver messages⁷ as well as the production technique and hand skills involved in the process of message transformation⁸. Mask artisans in Central Java, West Java, and Bali use a mask as artifacts whereas the conservers of Malang mask puppets use a mask as equipment for ballet (*dramatari*)¹⁰. Javanese masks produced by traditional artisans consist of many faces including the face of a human, a demon (genie), an animal, or other characters, in which each face has various expressions.

The play of Panji Story, one of the performance art in Malang, involves masks for characters of king and knight representing Javanese

² Yufei Wu, "Analysis of Mask Art in Japanese Noh" 341, no. Icadce (2019): 104–8, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icadce-19.2019.23>.

³ Ya-liang Chang, "The Body , Merit-Making and Ancestor Worship : Mask Festivals in Thailand and Laos" 21, no. 2 (2018): 212–33.

⁴ Indah Dewi Lestari, "Proses Kreatif Seniman Rupa," *Jurnal Psikologi Pendidikan* 4, no. 1 (2017): 1–16.

⁵ A David Napier, *Masks Transformation, and Paradox*, 1st ed. (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1984), p 10.

⁶ Mukhsin Patriansyah and Ria Sapitri, "Ekspresi Dalam Seni Patung Karya Giuseppe Pongolini," *Besaung : Jurnal Seni Desain Dan Budaya* 7, no. 1 (2022): 59–64, <https://doi.org/10.36982/jsdb.v7i1.2050>.

⁷ Jurusan Seni Murni, "TRANSFORMASI MATERIAL KERTAS DALAM" VII, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

⁸ Ahmad Bahrudin, Anindita Galuh Amartya, and A Fachrizky Al-amien, "Studi Kasus Form Follows Function Dalam Karya Seni Kriya," *Jurnal Ekspresi Seni Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Karya Seni* 33, no. 1 (2017): 258–60.

⁹ Bening Tri Suwasono, "Rupa Topeng Panji Gaya Yogyakarta Di Museum Sonobudoyo," *Jurnal Suluh* 4, no. 2 (2021): 147–66.

¹⁰ Robby Hidajat, "The Expression of Local Values in Performance Art of Malang Mask Puppet," *International Journal of Advanced Research and Publications (IJARP)* 3, no. 9 (2019): 105–9.

gentility¹¹. The Panji Story played in Malang mask puppet originated from oral tradition that tells about the romance between Panji Asmarabangun and Dewi Sekartaji¹². Panji Story is always performed as a ballet (*dramatari*) with *gagahan* as the antagonist character and *alusan* as the protagonist character¹³. Such character differentiation is also used for princesses and animals¹⁴. Each character type is differentiated through the size of the face. The character of *gagahan* has a big facial shape, whereas the character of *alusan* has a small facial shape. For instance, a princess mask as a representation of *alusan* has a small face, whereas an animal mask that represents the character of *gagahan* have usually big face¹⁵.

Furthermore, traditional mask artisans use wood as raw material, knives as carving tools, and slivering techniques as manufacturing techniques¹⁶. Malang mask is created by taking reference from puppet (*wayang*), then it is characterized by round and straight eyes, an oval face, and a pointed nose. Such kind of mask pattern has become a regular model in Java, mainly for masks used in Panji Story^{17,18}.

Instead of a formal learning process, wooden mask artisans in Malang take lessons related to mask-making from their environment. They learn by observing masks used by dancers while performing on the stage. This kind of observation is considered an aesthetic experience. During the observation, mask artisans subjectively internalize the mask shape in their minds and imagine the mask as an aesthetical concept¹⁹. This kind of aesthetical posture then generates enthusiasm to materialize the mask. Even though many factors stand behind this enthusiasm, this article focuses merely on one factor, namely spirituality. This factor is chosen since it exists beyond material

¹¹ Lydia Kieven, *Menelusuri Panji Di Candi-Candi: Relief Figur Bertopi Di Candi-Candi Zaman Majapahit* (Jakarta: KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia) Ecole Française d'Extreme-Orient, 2017), 28–34.

¹² Ponimin and Guntur, "Expressing the Robustness of Love in Ceramic Art: A Creative Approach Study," *Anastasis* 7, no. 2 (2020): 285–306, <https://doi.org/10.35218/armca.2020.2.10>.

¹³ Robby Hidajat, "KARAKTERISTIK EMPAT TOKOH PADA WAYANG TOPENG MALANG," *JOGED*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.24821/joged.v4i2.335>.

¹⁴ Hidajat.

¹⁵ Amanda Ruziana, Putri Duanta, and Universitas Negeri Makassar, "Preservation Of Local Culture Art Wayang Topeng Malangan In Padepokan Topeng Asmarabangun Art," *International Journal Of Social Service And Research* 1, no. 4 (2021): 337–40.

¹⁶ Robby Hidajat, "Fungsi Dan Proses Pembuatan Topeng Di Kabupaten Malang Jawa Timur," *Dinamika Kerajinan Dan Batik: Majalah Ilmiah* 31, no. 1 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22322/dkb.v31i1.1044>.

¹⁷ Fitrotul Hikmah Roihanah, "A Javanese Panji Romance: Analisis Struktur Cerita Panji Pada Naskah Wangbang Widèya," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah Intaj* 4, no. 1 (2014): 139–40.

¹⁸ Hidajat, "Fungsi Dan Proses Pembuatan Topeng Di Kabupaten Malang Jawa Timur."

¹⁹ Yeremias Jena, "Dari Pengalaman Estetis Ke Sikap Estetis Dan Etis," *Melintas* 30, no. 1 (2014): 22, <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v30i1.1281.22-44>.

processing. Hence, the authors can correlate this factor with a decision in a creative process.

Orientation on spirituality becomes an anvil for the creative process of mask artisans. Spirituality is a posture as well as a decision that is subjectively based on deep internal experience. This spiritual comprehension is not gotten through art creation practice but learned in an art college environment. Therefore, spiritual orientation is considered local and personal in nature. In addition, the obtained knowledge can also be used as a reference and a variance for the art creation process, especially in mask-making arts.

Spiritual orientation has been developed by dancer mask makers in Malang from material selection through carving technique to color determination. The creative process experience of the dancer mask maker is surely going to enrich the knowledge realm of mask creation process.

METHOD

This research employs ethnography approach as research method. This approach requires the authors to directly observe and understand the research subject at the environment or location of research²⁰. The location of research comprises Sanggar Wayang Topeng Asmarabangun in Kedungmonggo Village, Pakisaji District, Malang Regency, and Padepokan Seni Mangundharmo in Tulusbesar Village, Malang Regency. In addition, informants from other locations are also interviewed to obtain data concerning mask artisans who are still active until now. As a whole, the research is conducted in Malang Regency, East Java Province.

Several interviews also include individuals known for their mask-making capacity as respondent. These individuals are Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono (67 y.o.), mask puppet master and mask carver; Sukani (70 y.o.), mask carver from Tumpang; Yudit Pradananto (56 y.o.), collector for mask and puppet; and Tri Handoyo (48 y.o.), mask carver from Kedungmonggo Village. Data analysis was done systematically with data tabulation. Before doing analysis, the validity was tested through data triangulation technique. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented descriptively and interpretatively.

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Spiritual Dimension on Material and Skills

In a cultural work context, the orientation of mask-making is local culture. Mask artisans in Malang embrace this orientation and therefore what these artisans do always represents a local action. Specifically, these artisans

²⁰ Windiani and Farida Nurul, "Menggunakan Metode Etnografi Dalam Penelitian Sosial," *Dimensi Jurnal Sosiologi* 9, no. 2 (2016): 87–92.

actually do not have expertise in technicalities or systematics underlied by knowledge. Traditional artisans grew and developed in their environment self-dependently without any help from other fellow artisans. This fact was well confirmed by Karimoen, one of mask puppet conservators in Kedungmonggo Village, Pakisaji District, Malang Regency. As an example, Raminten, the ancestor of Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono that was known as an eminent mask maker in Malang surprisingly became a mask maker in the 1930s by accident. In that year, floods wiped off all crop fields. Raminten encountered a piece of wood drifted by streams and then took the wood home to be used as firewood. Instead of burning the wood in the furnace, Raminten intended to make a mask from that wood. Surprisingly, Karimoen also started to make mask after finding wood, particularly a chunk of wood on his farmland. Meanwhile, Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono made his first mask from a tree nearby *pundhen desa* (village holy place). After getting permit from the elders, the tree was chopped down and used as material for the mask.

Suroso, Malang dancer mask maker, said that among the trees used as raw material in mask-making consist of *pohonpule* (*alstonia scholaris*), *pohon dadap* (*erythrina subumbrans* [hassk.] merr.), *pohon cangkring* (*erythrina lithosperma mig.*), *pohon kembang* (*canangium odoratum*), and *pohon nyampo* (*calophyllum inophyllum L.*). However, these kinds of trees are already rare in nowadays. People believed that those trees have *tuah* (magic power), especially for those growing on river banks or in sacred places. As an alternative, Malang mask makers use *pohon sengon laut* (*Atocasia macrorhiza schott*).

The first experience of Karimoen in mask-making was not discovered at his home. Karimoen made his first mask by the crop field while grazing his castles. He hid the mask at the cattle shed because he did not want his parent to know about that. He used a knife called *pangot*, which is indeed intended to be used for shaving and carving the mask. The main function of *pangot* is for *meraeni*, namely to carve the face shape of the mask²¹²².

A similar experience in mask-making was also told by Kangsen, a mentor in the Mask Puppet Society of Wirabakti in Jabung Village. He made his first mask silently in his room at night. All family members did not know what he did. He was known for his introvert and self-reflection but all members of mask puppet society give their respect to him (Pramono, interview in 2022).

Despite many different ways used to hide the mask, the parents of these elders find out what they do at last. Anger was highly bursted to them by their parents but the fury was subsided to a considerate demeanor. Mask-

²¹ Hidajat, "Fungsi Dan Proses Pembuatan Topeng Di Kabupaten Malang Jawa Timur."

²² I Wayan Wijaya Kusuma, I Made Gede Arimbawa, and I Made Sumantra, "Karakter Topeng Manis Pada Produk Kriya Kebutuhan Ruang Pertemuan Formal," *HASTAGINA: JURNAL KRIYA DAN INDUSTRI KREATIF* 1, no. 2 (2021): 125–30.

making is not an ordinary action but a remarkable deed. According to local belief, the manifestation of human or animal in mask-making should do through a ceremony (*slamatan*) which is called *telasan* (finalization). As a traditional ceremony, *slamatan* is often held after individuals finalize their study and generally organized on the month of *Selo* (eleventh month in Javanese calendar). Month of *Selo* is between two moslem great days, precisely Idul Fitri and Idul Adha. Hence, it is not recommended that people arrange wedding ceremony on this month (Pramono, interview in 2022).

The other interesting and unique case is the case of Sukani. Although he has mask-making experience for almost 25 years, he still feels troubled in making the mask. Even, he cannot finish his mask many times. The critical stage for Sukani is on *mraeni*, where he finds difficulty in materializing the mask character. As a carpenter, Sukani is supposed to be able to manage the wooden things, including the mask, but his capability is surprisingly not enough for mask-making. The other surprising part of his story is that Sukani, just like mask-making elders, found a piece of wood during the flood, brought the wood home to be used as firewood, and developed an intention to make a mask. Regardless of his previous failure, Sukani finds his success in making the mask at the age of 60 years old. He then celebrated this success by organizing *slamatan* (Sukani, interview in 2020).

Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono began binding up with mask-making in early 2020. The covid-19 pandemic has brought him into a mask-making situation. He also held *slamatan* after finishing the mask as it is done by Karimoen and Kangsen. In general, the ceremony of *slamatan* is usually carried out after the stage of *maesi*, where the mask makers have finished shaping and painting the crown of the mask (Pramono, interview in 2022).



Fig. 1 The Offerings (Photography by Robby Hidayat, 2021)

Figure 1 depicts the tradition inherited by the descents of Karimoen in Kedungmonggo Village. This tradition requires them to make an offering by putting the masks (those that are used in mask puppet shows) on a special shelf or cupboard. The offerings consist of a set of masks and burned incense, and it is held every night of *Jum'at Legi* (Friday on Javanese market day of Legi). There is a belief that several masks may have magical power, hence the absence of ritual for the mask can lead to some trouble (Suroso, interview in 2021).

Yudit Pradananto, an observer of Malang mask, investigated the elders of Malang mask conservers. He found that these elders are hesitant to sell their mask collection because most of them believe that their mask has a soul. These masks are considered sacred and stored on a special shelf for heirlooms or even kept above the wardrobe. The mask accompanied by incense is covered by white cloth inside the shelf or wardrobe. Therefore, if the shelf is opened, the smell of the incense will pervade and sting the nose (Pradananto, interview in 2021).

Malang mask makers believe that trees qualified as mask material must have reached a certain age and undergone their life. As informed by Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono, old mask makers in Malang always perform special rituals before chopping down the tree as raw material for the mask. The tree candidate is stabbed with a lath of iron and waited overnight. If the iron has gotten loose from the tree, then the tree is allowed to be cut down. If the iron still remains in place, then the tree is prohibited to be brought down (Pramono, interview in 2022). The felled tree is given marks to indicate that the log is not flipped over.



Fig. 2 Mask-making process in Karimoen's workshop

(Photograph by Robby Hidayat, 2020)

As shown in Figure 2, the pieces of the tree are kept in a dry place, precisely next to Karimoen. The workplace for mask-making can be in the kitchen or the house yards. The process stage in Figure 2 is the stage of *mbakali* (making the draft for the mask), namely scrutinizing mask design.

After getting the feel of the mask, then Karimoen develops ideas to make a certain character that needs to be carved on the mask. After getting the idea, he analyzes the drafted parts (*bakalan*) of the mask, such as nose size and distance between eyes. During the analysis, he recites prayers with intention that the carving of the mask will produce expected character. The mask characters that require prayers during the analysis are Klana Sewandana, Raden Gunungsari, and Sekartaji (Handoyo, interview in 2020). Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono asserted that every mask created by artisans is like a reality of life, which is called *Kasunyatan* in Javanese term (Pramono, interview in 2022).

Similarly, Rasimoen, a mask maker from Glagahdowo Village, also performs a ritual prayer before making the mask. Rasimoen conducts what so-called *suguh* (set offerings) to *pundhendesa*, also known as *nyadrah*. If hesitance overwhelms the heart, then the prayer must be stopped and replaced by the patience to wait for '*wangsit*' (supernatural guidance). The involvement of *wangsit* has been experienced by Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono during the making of Calon Arang mask. At the time, he cannot start the stage of *wiwit* because he finds difficulty in imagining the face of Calon Arang (Pramono, interview in 2022).

The belief that a mask has a soul was confirmed by Rasimoen, a mask maker from Glagahdowo Village, Tumpang. Before making the mask, mask makers often do fasting in order to clear their minds and heart. There is a belief among them that ancestral spirits can be expected to arrive through fasting and reside in the mask. Subsequently, these ancestral spirits will accompany the dancers during the dance show²³. Therefore, when Rasimoen is invited to be a dancer, instead of wearing the mask provided by mask society, he brings and uses his own mask. Utomo, one of the mask artisans as well as the pupil of Rasimoen, explained that the behavior shown by Rasimoen represents the action of *laku* (journey of life). The dancer and mask are a unity that is needed to play the story recited by the puppeteer.

Karimeon also reaffirms that the prayer must also be conducted in the *wiwit* process. When a mask is finished at the stage of *wiwit*, then a prayer needs to be recited. This habit is justified by Tri Handoyo, one of the grandchildren of Karimoen (Handoyo, interview in 2020). After the stage of *maesi*, which is the carving of mask face, a prayer or a spiritual rite shall also be performed. There is a belief that this spiritual habit will be able to give a

²³ Musthofa Kamal, "Wayang Topeng Malangan: Sebuah Kajian Historis Sosiologis," *Resital: Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan* 16, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.24821/resital.v9i1.450>.

strong appearance to mask character. Taslan Harsono, a son of Karimoen, has a habit to hand the mask of his creation over Karimoen to hollow out “the eyes” part of the mask. He reasoned that hollowing out the eyes of a mask is the most sacred process in mask-making activities. Therefore, young artisans should give the mask to the elders who are considered proper to hollow out mask eyes (Suroso, interview in 2021).

Spiritual Dimension in the Creative Process

Too often, Malang mask artisans use a religious magical approach that represents a local experience and belief system inherited for generations in the mask-making process²⁴. The stages of mask-making are a bit different from the stages of modern art creation²⁵. The aesthetical aspect of mask-making not only lies in the art principle that constitutes either the elements or the material processing but also in the spiritual dimensions of the mask²⁶. Spiritual orientation emerged from a local belief system. Such a belief refers to a traditional credence that has a resemblance to the learning of mystical (mental) science. The current research has several findings regarding the spiritual orientation of the stages of mask-making. Each of the stages is elaborated as follows.

1. *Wiwit*: The commitment to make the mask

Spiritual practice in creating a mask has been performed by Raminten, Karimoen, Sukani, and Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono in order to strengthen the intention to create a mask. Such a practice is called *wiwit*, the early stage of mask-making. In the tradition of farmers, *wiwit* is a process of raising seedlings, which is also known as *ngurit* and it is an inseparable part of farming life. A similar tradition is also practiced by wood carving artisans in Jepara. Hence, people considered as artisans are not only reliable engravers but also farmers who are diligent to cultivate their land²⁷.

The experience of *wiwit* is a phenomenon of the work process in which the doer is not only thinking about the macro aspect but also the micro

²⁴ Martono, Iswahyudi, and Aran Handoko, “Topeng Etnik Nusantara Dalam Perkembangan Budaya Global,” *Jurnal Mudra* 32, no. 1 (2017): 123–30.

²⁵ Siti Aesijah, “LATAR BELAKANG PENCIPTAAN SENI (Background of Creative Art),” *Harmonia - Journal of Arts Research and Education* 1, no. 2 (2000): 62–74.

²⁶ Uswatun Hasanah and Fuad Erdansyah, “Prinsip Seni Rupa Dalam Menggambar Ornamen Melayu,” *Gorga : Jurnal Seni Rupa* 9, no. 2 (2020): 444, <https://doi.org/10.24114/gr.v9i2.21899>.

²⁷ SP. Gustami, *Seni Kerajinan Mebel Ukir Jepara: Kajian Estetik Melalui Pendekatan Multidisipliner* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2000), 251.

aspect. The orientation of *wiwit* tends to be a deeper and personal meaning²⁸. Reflectively, this orientation can be found in the personality of Kangsen, who chooses to be silent but highly enthusiastic about learning mask puppet performance art in Jabung Village. Hence, it is considered to be one of the reasons why mask puppet art in Jabung Village is still developing until now²⁹.

At the stage of *wiwit*, the mask makers shape a spiritual communication with mask material, especially wood. The mask makers may not yet have an imagination about the character in this process. But, after determining the wood type, especially the wood with magical power (*tuah* or *taksu*), the mask makers will have an idea about the character to be created.

In line with the concept of *wiwit*, magical power must be taken into consideration by mask makers in the case of cutting down a tree since several trees are believed to have gurdians. For instance, *pohon pule* (*alstonia scholaris*), a tree that usually sprouted up on a river bank, is believed to be the favorite place where genies reside. Besides that, *Pohon dadap* (*erythrina subumbrans* [hassk.] merr.), often emerges from the sacred places such as public cemetery or *pundhen desa*, is believed to be the favorite place for *gondoruwo* (a big evil with dense fur). Meanwhile, *pohon cangkring* (*erythrina lithosperma mig.*) is known as the house of red genies. On the other hand, *pohon kembang* (*canangium odoratum*) and *pohon nyampo* (*calophyllum inophyllum l.*) are trees amending house yards.

Mask makers usually prioritize old trees as a material for a mask, mainly those growing close to river streams. As told by Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono, the artisans must perform a rite before cutting down a tree, which is implanting an iron into the tree that needs to be cut off. The implanting of the iron is intended to negotiate with the tree dweller to give their consent for the tree to be used as mask material. Sometimes, the negotiation may involve the replacement of a new dwelling (tree).

In the behavior of *wiwit*, there is a concept of transferring the spirits (the souls) into raw material (wood). It denotes that mask-making needs supernatural power as its important element. Therefore, the mask created for dancers is always full of spiritually loaded.

2. *Mbakali*: Early Shape of Mask

Mbakali is an action mask identification after passing through the stage of *wiwit*. In this stage, the mask makers determine the type, shape, or

²⁸ Hasna Wijayati, "Teori Utama Sosiologi (Fungsionalisme Struktural, Teori Konflik, Interaksi Simbolik)," *Portal-Ilmu.Com* 2, no. 2 (2020): 185–94.

²⁹ Astrid Wangsagirindra Pudjastawa, Yudit Perdananto, and Varary Mechwafanitiara Cantika, "Development of Wayang Mask Craftsmen in Malang Use the Sayembara Method," *Southeast Asia Millennial Conference Proceeding* 1, no. September (2020): 1–7.

character of the mask. In the making of the Malang mask, the maker will link up the imagination (shadow) with the expected outcome from *wiwit* stage. Principally, the mask makers begin to see whether the shape of the mask will lead to the character of *gagah* or *halus*.



Fig. 3 The process of *mbakali*
(Photography by Robby Hidayat, 2020)

Figure 3 shows Tri Handoyo who undertakes the process of *mbakali*. In general, mask makers in Malang follow the ritual performed by Karimoen or Rasimoen on *mbakali* stage. To be precise, the mask makers must pronounce their intention or recite the prayer to summon certain characters, either the character of Klana Sewandana or Panji Asmarabangun.

Mask makers in Malang also act as dancers, then they know exactly the character that is expected to be created. Indeed, Karimoen, Kangsen, Tri Handoyo, and Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono has been gifted with the capability of dancing and also puppets. For these mask puppet elders, *mbakali* is like a process to summon the spirits for residing in the mask to bestow the mask

with magical power (*tuah* or *taksu*)³⁰. This kind of power is also known as the spiritual power of an artist acquired after making a total comprehension of an artwork.

3. *Maesi*: Carving the Face

The word *maesi* is rooted in the Javanese word *paes*, which means making up of the face. This term is used to name the mask-making stage that involves technicalities. According to Taslan Harsono, the son of Karimoen, the most sacred process of making up a mask lies in the process of hollowing out “the eyes” part of the mask. Such spiritual orientation insists that hollowing out the mask's eyes is as if giving life to the mask. Those who are deemed worthy to become a medium of giving a life are the elders, uncluding ancestors, who are called *pundhen*. A giving life process is called *nguripi* since the Javanese term for giving life is *nguripi*, which is rooted in the word *urip* meaning alive.

After the mask's eyes are hollowed out, the character type of the mask becomes clear whether it is *gagah* (rough) or *alus* (soft). Clifford Geertz associates these two Javanese terms with the expression of senses³¹. The *gagah* masks, especially those with *prenges* (grimace), are shown as creepy with fangs and sharp teeth protruding from the mouth. Meanwhile, the *alus* masks are indicated with a smile, which is therefore suitable to be used by the character of a princess. Under this understanding, the process of mask-making is like *kasunyatan* (the reality of life), which comprises *laku* (journey of life) that must be undergone to attain the end.

The next process in the *maesi* stage is to carve the *jamang* (crown). Because Malang masks are mostly identified with a foliage-patterned crown, some masks are furnished with dragon mouths at the part of *sumping* (the decoration of the left and right sides of *jamang*). The coloring process is also needed to match the color and the character. The *Maesi* stage is technical and the inspiration is taken from the carving of a leather puppet.

4. *Telasan*: Finalization of mask-making

In the modern art context, *telasan* is a way to make perfect. The word *telasan* is also defined as a final touch to make the mask equivalent to an heirloom, which therefore makes the existence of the mask quite

³⁰ I Nengah Mariasa, “Taksu and Pangus As An Aesthetic Concept Entity of Bali Dance (A Case Study of Topeng Tua Dance),” *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education* 15, no. 2 (2015): 107–12, <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v15i2.4557>.

³¹ Clifford Geertz, *Agama Jawa: Abangan, Santri, Priyayi Dalam Kebudayaan Jawa* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2013), 189.

significant³². The action of *telasan* is not technical because the mask makers are no longer touching their work. Although their hands are already away from the mask, it is needed to have spirit or soul, precisely like a newborn baby. Sometimes, masks are made as new characters to complement the existing characters. Consequently, when the new mask is used on the stage, the dancer must know and understand the character of this new mask personally. In this situation, the dancer positions and regards the mask as a reality that helps to play the story. This is a relationship that makes the mask considered as the element of *laku* (journey of life).

This final stage also involves a special rite. A new mask is often brought to *pundhen desa* as an object of the rite called *stren*. There is an expectation that through this rite, the mask will have a supernatural power equivalent to that of heirlooms.

CONCLUSION

The making of Malang masks is considered unique either in its process or systematics because the making process involves spiritual power owned by the makers. The spiritual belief among mask makers insists that the mask is the house of spirit or soul. Inviting the spirit is a process that gives magical power to animate the mask during the show of mask puppet ballet.

The spiritual process can form the mask to have charisma. In order to achieve charisma, mask makers therefore must select appropriate raw materials, carving techniques, and finishing processes according to local power which is represented by traditional rites.

The stages of mask-making from *wiwit* (start or beginning) to *telasan* (finalization) show the manifestation of spirituality (mentality) orientation. The comprehension of spirituality leads to the understanding of *urip* (life). Therefore, every mask represents *kasunyatan* (life reality) that contains *laku* (life journey), which involves the encounter between the antagonist and protagonist characters.

List of illustrations

Fig. 1. The Offerings, photo by Robby Hidayat, 2021

Fig. 2. Mask-making process in Karimoen's workshop, photo by Robby Hidayat, 2020

Fig. 3. Column eating lion from Medvedgrad, Archeological Museum in Zagreb, photo by Filip Beusan The process of *mbakali*, photo by Robby Hidayat, 2020

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³² Arif Suharson, "Topeng Klasik Gaya Yogyakarta Dan Kreatif Modern Karya Supana Ponowiguna Kajian Fungsi, Gaya, Dan Struktur," *CORAK Jurnal Seni Kriya* 7, no. 1 (2018): 44-53.

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