The General Artistic Orientation of Wayang Kulit in the ‘Folk’ Tradition in the Present Day

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Abstract—This study aims to analyze the aesthetics of wayang kulit performance in the folk tradition, and the research subject covers wayang kulit in the styles of East Java, Kedu, Banyumas, and Tegal. The problem discussed is the general artistic orientation of wayang kulit performance (pakeliran) in the folk tradition today. This study uses a qualitative method with an approach of art sociology and aesthetics of Javanese puppetry. The research data was collected through a library study, documentation study, observation, and interviews. The research results show that the artistic orientation of wayang kulit in the folk tradition today has changed, been combined with the keraton or court tradition and even packaged with elements of kitsch.

Keywords—wayang kulit performance, folk tradition, artistic orientation

I. INTRODUCTION

Wayang kulit performance (hereon referred to as pakeliran) in the folk tradition is a style of pakeliran that lived and developed in rural agrarian communities. The characteristics of pakeliran in the folk tradition are extremely diverse, being shaped by the individual performance styles of numerous dalang (puppeteers) and passed down from generation to generation through the performance. The performances of this dalang thrived in areas far from the cities that were former centers of Javanese kingdoms, namely in the rural, mountain, and coastal regions [1]. In East Java, there are four sub-styles of pakeliran: Lamongan, Mojokertoan, Porongan, and Malangan [2] [3]. In Central Java, there are three styles of pakeliran: Kedu, Banyumas, and Tegal. Kedu style pakeliran is divided into four sub-styles: Magelangan, Temanggungan, Wonasaban, and Bagelènan [4], while Banyumasan style pakeliran has two sub-styles: pesisiran (coastal) and lor gunung (north of the mountain) [5].

On average, the range of popularity of each of the pakeliran styles in the folk tradition is relatively narrow, limited only to the community in its own cultural area. The range of popularity of the Lamongan sub-style of pakeliran is limited to the area in and around Lamongan. The range of popularity of the Mojokertoan sub-style of pakeliran is limited to the areas in and around Jombang and Mojokerto. The range of popularity of the Porongan sub-style of pakeliran is limited to the areas in and around Sidoarjo and Surabaya. The range of popularity of the Malangan sub-style of pakeliran is limited to the area in and around Malang [2] [3]. The range of popularity of the pakeliran sub-styles Magelangan, Temanggungan, Wonasaban, and Bagelènan extends only to the areas of Magelang, Temanggung, Wonasobo, and Bagelen [4] [5]. The range of popularity of the Banyumasan sub-style of pakeliran is limited to the areas of Banyumas, Cilacap, Purbalingga, and Banjarnegara [6]. Similarly, Tegal style pakeliran is popular only in the areas of Tegal, Pemalang, and in some parts of Pekalongan.

The range of popularity of pakeliran in the folk tradition is indeed not as broad as pakeliran in the keraton tradition, and this is especially true for Surakarta style which is not only popular in the Central Javanese community but also in most of East Java. Therefore, this study aims to answer the question: what is the general artistic orientation of pakeliran in the folk tradition today? This problem is examined based on an approach of art sociology and aesthetics of Javanese puppetry.

Arnold Hauser groups art according to its cultural strata into four categories: elite art, folk art, popular art, and mass art. Each of these four categories has a different artistic orientation. Elite art exists only amongst the cultural elite or nobility, and its artistic orientation is intricate and complex. Folk art exists in, is rooted in, and enjoyed by urban agrarian communities, and its artistic orientation is spontaneous and simpler. Popular art exists in and is enjoyed by urban communities, and its artistic orientation places more emphasis on pragmatism for social entertainment and as a medium for relaxation and escape from the boredom often experienced by working people, and for this reason, it is easy to digest without the need for deep reflection or understanding. Mass art is produced by mechanical equipment and has a very diverse audience, with an artistic orientation directed towards entertainment [7].

Based on its character, the aesthetics of Javanese puppetry can be divided into three groups: the aesthetic of keraton puppetry, the aesthetic of folk puppetry, and the aesthetic of kitsch puppetry. The aesthetic of puppetry in the keraton tradition places a great deal of consideration on the compatibility of the aesthetical nuance with a particular scene, including nuances of regu, greget, sem, and nges. Regu describes a nuance that is sacred, grand, commanding, solemn, calm, and steady. Greget creates the impression of being excited, tense, hurried, awkward, rough, simple, angry, lustful, and frightening. Sem is a nuance that is pleasing, passionate, mischievous, agile, restless, flirtatious,
fluid, relaxed, and romantic. The nuance of nges creates an impression that is compassionate, pitiful, remorseful, sad, confused, upset, cold, and lonely. These four aesthetical nuances are always present and combine to form a single entity in the inner meaning and emotion (rasa) of performance [8]. The aesthetic of puppetry in the folk tradition places more emphasis on aspects of togetherness and communality. Therefore, the aesthetic of this style of performance is fluid, unadorned, and gayeng or goboyog, which means creating an impression of festivity, joy, fluidity, loudness, harshness, roughness, and agility, all uniting to form the complete meaning and emotion (rasa) of a performance [9] [10]. Puppetry packaged in the style of kitsch is oriented more towards market taste and generally pays less attention to ethical and aesthetical aspects, while prioritizing its function as entertainment, social criticism, and the like, for the purpose of satisfying the masses. For this reason, the treatment of this style of pakeliran tends to include tricks, gimmicks, glamour, sex-appeal, and sensationalism [11].

II. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method [12]. The research data was collected through a library study, documentation study, observation, and interviews.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of Folk Style

Based on its cultural locus, pakeliran in the folk tradition can be differentiated according to three main styles: East Javanese, Keduan, and Banyumasan. Each of these styles of pakeliran has its own individual characteristics. East Javanese style pakeliran always begins with the performance of the Ngréma dance, performed in two styles, male and female. This dance is performed to welcome the guests as they arrive and to invite people to come and watch the wayang kulit performance. During this part of the performance, the guests or members of the audience may dance or sing together with the Ngréma dancers, thus creating a nuance of ramé and gayeng before the wayang kulit performance starts. Keduan and Banyumasan style pakeliran are different, beginning with gending patalon like in the keraton tradition of Yogyakarta and Surakarta style pakeliran. The Ngréma dance and gending patalon both have the same function, namely to announce to the nearby community that performance of wayang kulit is about to begin. The difference is that during the performance of gending patalon the audience is not directly involved in the performance, as in the Ngréma dance.

Pakeliran in the folk tradition, whether in East Javanese, Keduan, or Banyumasan style, does not have a fixed scene structure as in the case of pakeliran in the keraton tradition (Yogyakarta and Surakarta). The order and arrangement of scenes depend largely on the repertoire of the story (lakon) presented and the creativity or sangsit of each individual dalang. Performances of these three folk styles of pakeliran do not include the kedhatanan scene, a court scene which portrays the king’s consort welcoming the king home from a royal assembly, nor do they include the limbukan scene, an intermezzo depicting two ladies-in-waiting, Cangik and Limbuk, who have just appeared before the king and his consort. These styles also contain no gara-gara scene, an intermezzo which presents the servants of the knights (Javanese: panakawan) and is not part of the main storyline. The jokes of the panakawan—Semar, Bagong, and Besut in East Javanese pakeliran; or Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong in Keduan and Banyumasan style pakeliran—are usually interspersed in the dialogue of their masters in scenes that take place in a hermitage or in the middle of a forest.

The fluid and simple nuance of pakeliran in the folk tradition is evident in the dalang’s narration (Javanese: janturan and pocapan) and in the dialogue and monologues of the wayang characters, which tend to use the everyday language of communication, with the particular dialect of each area. Although the wayang characters often use archaic words in this narration, dialogue, and monologues, it is not as frequent or complex as in pakeliran in the keraton tradition. In addition, jokes are not limited only to the comic figures (Semar, Gareng, Petruk, Bagong or Bawor, Besut, Cantrik, Todog, Bilung, Pak Mujeni, Pak Mundi), but may also be uttered by any of the other wayang figures. Even charismatic figures such as Baladewa, Kresna, Puntadewa, Werkudara, and Arjuna may engage in humorous banter. This means that the wayang characters presented in the pakeliran truly represent the lives of real people. It is not surprising, therefore, that even the figures of Werkudara and Arjuna may laugh out loud or sob woefully like ordinary people, and are not always portrayed in the serious way in which they appear in pakeliran in the keraton tradition.

The impression of gayeng or goboyog appears in the gending or musical accompaniment that supports the pakeliran and in the sulukan or dalang’s songs that help to set the mood of a scene, which tend to be loud, harsh, and performed at a relatively fast tempo. The performance of certain gending and sulukan are also interspersed with the singing of the pengrawit or musicians, in the form of call and response (known as senggakan and alok), and certain types of sulukan end with the pengrawit singing together in unison in a rhythmic vocal part known as jinem an. This kind of nuance created by the gending and sulukan does not appear in pakeliran in the keraton tradition.

B. General Artistic Orientation of Pakeliran in the Folk Tradition in the Present Day

Since the establishment of two schools specializing in the art of puppetry by the Javanese cultural elite—the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta with PADASUKA (1923) and the Kasultanat Yogyakarta with HABIRANDA (1925)—the art of puppetry in the folk tradition that had existed in various areas gradually began to disappear [1]. This became more apparent after the emergence of the sub-styles of puppetry introduced by Nartasabda (in the 1960s) and Anom Soeroto (in the 1970s), based on the keraton tradition of Surakarta, and the sub-style of Timbul Hadiprayitna (1960-an), based on the keraton tradition of Yogyakarta, which resulted in pakeliran in the folk tradition becoming even more marginalized. People preferred the style of wayang kulit performance of Nartasaba, Anom Soeroto, and Timbul Hadiprayitna, which followed the keraton tradition, rather than the traditional folk style of performance. These conditions caused dalang who followed the folk style of
pakeliran to take a stance; either to preserve the folk tradition but combine it with the keraton tradition or to change direction entirely and adopt the style of pakeliran in the keraton tradition.

Dalang who have continued to preserve the folk tradition but combined it with the keraton tradition include Wardono and Pitoyo, both from Mojokerto. Their style of pakeliran is East Javanese but includes limbukan and garagara scenes such as are found in pakeliran in the keraton tradition. They even package these two scenes with two elements of kitsch, namely gimmicks and sex-appeal, characterized by the addition of an electronic keyboard and the attractively-dressed casmus pursari singers. One dalang who changed direction and began to perform in the style of the keraton tradition was Enthus Susmana. His pakeliran was originally in Tegalan style but in the 1980s he began to change direction and adopt the traditional style of the Surakarta keraton. In the 1990s, he even started to package his performances with numerous elements of kitsch, including tricks, gimmicks, glamour, sex-appeal, and sensationalism [13].

The change in artistic orientation of pakeliran made by dalang from the folk tradition was for no other reason than to make their performances more attractive to members of the wayang community. They realized that pakeliran in the keraton tradition, especially Surakarta style, had the largest audiences and the widest range of popularity when compared with pakeliran in the folk tradition. They hoped that their new efforts would lead to higher payment than if they continued to preserve the traditional pakeliran style of their ancestors.

IV. CONCLUSION

The change in artistic orientation of pakeliran by dalang from the folk tradition cannot be separated from two factors, namely the desire, on one hand, to gain popularity, while on the other hand earning a higher income.

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