

**Traditional Dance in Malang:  
Its Changes, Existence, Challenges and Continuity  
in the Globalization Era**

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**Abstract**

There is such as a big worry that the globalization will negatively affect the existence of the traditional dance as a part of the performing arts. In this case, the traditional dance faces some challenges to survive in this globalization era. This phenomenon happens in Malang – East Java, Indonesia. As an educator, an artist as well as an art practitioner, we are challenged to reveal this phenomenon into a small research study. In line with this, this study aims to investigate the changes, existence, challenges, and continuity of traditional Malang dance – in this case ‘Malang Mask Dance’ (or locally called as ‘Tari Topeng Malang’) – in this globalization era. This is a qualitative study where a descriptive method is used. Participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and literatures studies were used to gather the data. The result of

the study showed that Malang Mask Dance still exist; moreover, it has received a good response from the people and gained popularity. It happens because of some reasons. First, the existence of the traditional dance still has manifest functions such as a vow ritual, a breadwinner, an entertainment, and as a form of social solidarity. Besides, the generation process is well-managed. In addition to these two, the traditional dance is being preserved in the many schools which flourish not only in the level of elementary and secondary school where the traditional dance becomes one of the elective subjects, but also within the government scope which also supervises art and dance academies.

**Keywords:** Malang dance, Change, Existence, Challenge, Continuity

## Introduction

Traditional dances in Indonesia reflect the country's diversity of ethnicities and cultures. There are more than 700 ethnic groups in Indonesia. Traditional dances have long lived in the midst of public life in accordance with its ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own dances; hence, the total number of dance in Indonesia is more than 3,000 Indonesian original dances. Every dance is unique and different from one region to another. Traditional dances in Indonesia have been born, lived and grown with the society in which this dance exists. Several of traditional dances such as Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese, Minangkabau, Palembang, Aceh, and many other traditional dances are old dances, yet they also living and dynamic dances. Certain traditional dances might be centuries old, while some others might be created less than a decade ago. The creation of the new dance choreography with the frame of respected traditional dance and discipline is still possible to do. As a result, there are some newly-created dances or they are known as contemporary dances. Thus, the Indonesian dances can be divided into two types – traditional dance and contemporary dance. The contemporary dance could be the rediscovery and the revival of lost traditions or a new interpretation, inspiration, and exploration of traditional dances.

In regard to Javanese dance performance; it is really extravagant and beautiful performing art that shows high-class quality. The beautiful dance, the elegant performers, the colorful dresses, the magical gamelan music, and the stage create a perfect combination. Among the traditional dances in Indonesia, traditional Malang dance is very popular dance in Java since it has its own characteristics that are different from that of other cities in Java. One of the well-known dances is 'Malang Mask Dance' (or locally called as 'Tari Topeng Malang'). It is one of the art performances that have been living within the society in Malang, East Java. This dance refers to the presence of *dalang* who

is a performer and mastermind of the story and the artists who wear a mask in their performances. The word *topeng* (mask) comes from the word '*tup*', which means 'closed' (*Ensiklopedia Tri Indonesia*, 1986). However, 'topeng' dances are not always used to mention a performance in which a mask is used. For example, a performance that uses a mask like *Wayang Wong* (puppet people) in Yogyakarta and Bali is not called '*topeng*'. In contrast, there is a performance that does not use a mask like in Betawi, but it is called as '*topeng Betawi*'. It means that the term '*topeng*' is sometimes defined narrowly, but it can be defined broadly as well.

Regarding to Malang Mask Dance, there are some dances that do not use the mask as well, namely: *Beskalan Putri*, *Beskalan Putra*, *Bedayan*, *Sekar Sari*, *Kebar Malang*, *Senggot Tengger dance*, etc. These dances are usually performed before the *Wayang Topeng* or Mask Puppet drama begins. Malang Mask Dance is a cultural icon that reflects the character of Malang that generally tells folktales or fragments of stories on various things, especially Panji stories as there are many inspirational values in it. However, along with times, there are many people state that Malang Mask Dance's existence is decreasing because of the modernization; that is why, we - as young generations, art practitioners, and artists in Malang - have the responsibility to maintain the existence of Malang Mask Dance and build the pride of Malang Mask Dance in the society.

Accordingly, the Malang Mask Dance is interesting to be investigated further. Regarding to such notion, the researcher is interested to review it, and the writing will focus on the changes, existence, challenges and the continuity of Malang dance in facing the globalization era. The researcher's motivation to discuss this problem is due to a sense of concern about the condition of Malang Mask Dance; even though the performance has been raised back, up to this point, it has not really existed in the society. There is a huge



dynamic elements such as Javanese, Madurese and Balinese music (Purwa, 2010). As mentioned by Karimun in Bende magazine (2003), the characteristic of Malang Mask Dance relies on the movements of the dance that is ‘*patah-patah*’ or step by step movement. This characteristic is known as Malangan style. According to Nurhan (2008), Malang Mask Dance has six characters, namely: *Klono*, *Bapang*, *Asmoro Bangun*, *Sekartaji*, *Gunung Sari* and *Ragil Kuning*. *Klono* is described as the nature of greedy and arrogant, *Bapang* is the nature of wise character, *Asmoro Bangun* as an epitome of beauty, *Sekartaji* is symbol of purity, while *Gunung Sari* and *Ragil Kuning* are the symbol of the human kindness.

Different from the era of Kanjuruhan Kingdom with the king of Gajayana, a mask made of stones or gold is used for rituals. However, as the time goes by, masks are made of wood. The function of the dance also changes; it is now used to welcome the special guests and open official ceremony. Nonetheless, in the Singasari Kingdom, the function of the mask dance remains the same that is for rituals. The story of the dance itself takes place till Majapahit kingdom.

In relation to the development of Malang Mask Dance, the main function of the dance is as a means of entertainment which tells about *Panji* stories. Most artists create beautiful form of performing art – in this case dance – for the purpose of pleasure, either for themselves or others. As stated by Hadi (2000), most common people associated with performing art have the core meaning of none other than ‘pleasure’. Consequently, Malang Mask Dance is long awaited by the society since it provides entertainment or pleasure for the artists, for the society, as well as for the playgoers.

As an entertainment, Malang Mask Dance is human nature. It can be seen from the figures shown in Malang Mask Dance, which use various symbols of expressions, such as crying, laughing, sad, shy, etc. In addition to the use of

the expression, colors of the mask have a deep meaning. The white color means pure, green symbolizes prosperity, yellow means clean, while red shows the feeling of anger and cunning. The other symbols that also have a meaning come from the shape of nose which is long and also there are eye basket or big eyes (Sudarsono, 1974).

Some other changes are done in relation to the duration of the dance performance. Since Malang Mask Dance origins from ‘*Wayang Topeng Malang*’ or ‘*Malang Mask Puppet*’ with the duration of the performance needs more than 5 hours; then, the duration of the performance is reduced to avoid the boredom of the people, and to fulfill the need of the society. Therefore, the long dances from the Mask Puppet are separated into some dances with the shorter duration.

## B. The Existence of Traditional Dance in Malang, East Java

Based on the results of the observation and interview to the subjects of the study done by the researchers, the performing art of Malang Mask Dance still exists. It is proved from good responses from the society, making it gained popularity. It happens because of some reasons. First, the existence of the Malang Mask Dance still has manifest functions, such as a vow ritual, a breadwinner, an entertainment and as a form of social solidarity. Second, the generation process is well-managed. The existence of Malang Mask Dance is inseparable from the systematic endeavor shown by the senior artists and junior artists. Take for example, currently the young and the most popular Malang artist, Handoyo, cannot be separated from the previous generation. Handoyo’s father named ‘Taslan’ who is a famous artist in Malang. He created many new Malang Mask Dances and he is a Malang Mask Dance teacher. He also teaches the art of mask making. Moreover, Taslan’s father or Handoyo’s grandfather is the maestro of Malang Mask Dance. In short, it can

be said that the re-generation is well-succeeded.

Other ways to re-generation is by offering the curriculum system or local curriculum as the identity of each region. Traditional dances is, then, being preserved in all schools which flourish not only in the level of elementary and secondary school where the traditional dance becoming one of the elective subjects to be chosen as an extracurricular lesson, but also within the government scope that also supervises art and dance academies.

Another support given by the government to keep the existence of Malang Mask Dance is by providing art teachers an annual training to improve their ability in Malangan Mask Dances, both in new dances and in old dances. In addition, the government also fully supports the existence of Malang Mask Dance through department of education and culture by giving more attention as well as assisting the artists' community by building the dance studio to facilitate them to practice or create new traditional dances and giving a set of 'gamelan' or traditional music instrument needed by the artists. Besides, government also conducts Malang Mask Dance competitions that are done regularly for the students in all level from primary school level to university level to motivate students to learn Malang Mask Dance.

Government also gives a special gratitude to appreciate the artists' work, such as giving the appreciation to 'Mbah Karimun', one of the maestros of Malang Mask Dance. The President awarded him as a maestro of art conservationist Malangan in 2008. In supporting the existence of Malang dances, it is also done by private companies such as CSR. They assist the artists by giving financial support, training, helping as well as developing the dance costumes, etc.

The other reason regarding the existence of Malang Mask Dance which still survives nowadays is also because there are many artist communities formed and there is a great commitment and dedication from the artists

themselves. Take for example; there are numbers of senior artists of Malang Mask Dance who keep doing their works though it is not profitable. Besides, they have routine activities, such as teaching Malang Mask Dance, musical training and mask making. Furthermore, most of them are still willing to share their knowledge and experiences for free to all people who want to learn Malang dance. They also have a chance to regularly perform whether in the national and international seminar or other events as an opening and closing ceremony done in school, university, etc. This opportunity can be regarded as an appreciation to the performing art - Malang Mask Dance - to show their existence.

The existence and the continuity of Malang Mask Dance also cannot be separated with the role of mass media – newspaper, magazine, radio and television. Mass media has a big role in promoting and introducing Malang Mask Dance to the society both inside and outside Malang as well as to the world. Besides, social media such as Facebook, YouTube and many more also have the role in introducing the Malang Mask Dance to the world. All of them help to strengthen the existence of Malang Mask Dance.

### C. The Challenges of Traditional Dance in Malang, East Java

In facing the globalization era, the main problem faced by the traditional performing art in Malang due to its development which is slow. It happens because a number of reasons. The first reason is due to both factors, external and internal factors. From the external factor, it is because there are many alternatives of entertainment which is cheaper and more diverse. While the internal factor lies on the long duration of Malang Mask dance, which is often boring for some audiences. However, this problem can be solved by lessen the duration of the performances.

The next challenge refers to the school that is still oriented on cognitive knowledge rather than psychomotor and affective domain. Therefore, most of the students prefer to take a private lesson than practice dancing or other art activities. Another challenge is how to avoid the influence of foreign or western culture to young people. Nowadays, young people or teenagers prefer to adopt the foreign culture such as K-Pop from Korea than Malang Mask Dance. Many of teenagers are proud of themselves when they can imitate the foreign culture. It happens also because of the influence of television which shows extensive of foreign culture. Moreover, with the rapid development of technology, young people prefer to spend their time in front of their laptop, cellphone and multimedia since they provide variety of games and other fun applications that make them lazy to come to art studio to practice dancing. In addition, young people think that joining traditional dance is '*kuno*' or ancient.

#### D. The Continuity of Traditional Dance in Malang, East Java

Performing art as a cultural product of society exists because it is needed by the people. Culture and society is a unity that cannot be separated. Equally, it happens to the performing art and the society. In its life, performing art depends on its people, how the society makes use of it and how people preserve it (Yanuartuti, 2014). Thus, the continuity of performing art – Malang Mask Dance – have always been associated with its function and changes since the society and time always changes which, then, influence the Malang Mask Dance.

In line with the explanation above, based on the result of the observation and interview, the researcher is optimistic that the continuity of Malang Mask Dance will be greatly stable. The results of the study showed that the continuity of Malang Mask Dance have been influenced by several factors. The

main factors in relation to the life and the continuity of Malang Mask Dance are the artists or performers, its supporters, and the development of the art itself.

Other factors that affect the continuity of Malang Mask Dance are the society and the observers of the arts. Furthermore, it will be steady since there is a high support and clear guidance from both central and local governments such as improving the facilities and properties for art performances, establishing art and mask galleries which is widely spread out in the capital city of Malang as well as out of Malang regency, promoting Malang Mask Dance to the world and many others. In short, it shows that there is a big opportunity that Malang Mask Dance can survive and remain.

### Conclusion

Malang Mask Dance is one of the art performances that still exist. It is proved from good responses from the society, making it gained popularity in Malang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. There are some factors that influence the existence of Malang Mask Dance, like it has manifest functions which are different from the functions of Malang Mask Dance in the past. In other words, the functions itself are changing – it is as a vow ritual, a breadwinner, an entertainment and as a form of social solidarity. Besides, the generation process is well-managed. It is proved that government includes the Malang Mask Dance to be preserved in schools level ranging from elementary and secondary school where the traditional dance becomes one of the elective subjects in the form of extracurricular lesson and the government also supervises art and dance academies.

However, in the globalization era, the development of Malang Mask Dance has a big problem due to its development which is still slow. The problems come from both external (there are many alternatives of

entertainment which is cheaper and more diverse) and internal factors (the long duration of the performances). When it is solved and got a big support from the government, the society as well as art practitioners, without any doubt, then, the existence and the continuity of Malang Mask dance will be greatly stable in the globalization era.

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