

# Archipelago Dance: Indonesia's Wonderful Cultural Asset

Endang Caturwati  
{[endang.caturwati@gmail.com](mailto:endang.caturwati@gmail.com)}

Istitutut Seni Budaya Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

**Abstract.** Indonesia is known worldwide as a country rich in Arts & Culture, particularly its captivating and unique dances, also known as Tari Nusantara. The diverse range of Nusantara dances makes it an enticing subject for researchers to delve deeper into the process of Cultural Transformation, which involves openness among the Indonesian society in accepting the presence of foreign cultures through the processes of Inculturation and Acculturation. Over time, Nusantara dances have undergone evolution in four different artistic eras, which are still evident today in their form, style, makeup, costumes, props, dance movements, and accompanying music. These four eras are: (1) Prehistoric-themed Dances; (2) Hindu-Buddhist-themed Dances; (3) Chinese-themed Dances; and (4) Islamic-themed Dances. Tari Nusantara is a wonderful cultural asset that contributes to the social capital and national pride of Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Archipelago Dance; Indonesia Wonderful; Cultural Aset

## 1 Introduction

Indonesia is known worldwide as a country rich in its culture, often referred to as the archipelago or Nusantara. The name Nusantara is derived from the words "nusa" meaning island, and "antara" meaning between, which connects the islands [1]. Therefore, Nusantara is a country consisting of islands. Certainly, among these islands, there are beautiful seas, stunning coral reefs, and scenic landscapes that inspire artists to create works of art, especially in the realm of dance. As a result, the dance is more commonly known as Nusantara dance rather than Indonesian dance. The multitude of islands in Indonesia contributes to the diversity of dance, each with its unique characteristics. Moreover, with the influence of foreign cultures from countries in direct contact with the Nusantara communities, a cultural assimilation occurs, giving rise to beautiful dance creations. Some dances exhibit a unique form inspired by foreign cultures blended with the original regional dance art, while others clearly retain the traces of their inspirational sources.

These dances are deeply rooted in local communities, each possessing distinct characteristics and embodying their own set of values. They contribute to the creation of regional identities and serve as valuable cultural assets that are passed down as community traditions, performed at specific events. With the vast number of regions in Indonesia, each exhibiting unique customs and norms, a wide array of dances has emerged. These dances are a result of individual artistic expressions as well as collaborative efforts, showcasing diverse movements and costumes. This rich repertoire of Indonesian dances, created by the nation's

people, reflects the incredible diversity of ethnicities and cultures within Indonesia. It represents the cultural wealth of the nation and serves as a testament to its vibrant tapestry of traditions.

## 2 Result and Discussion

The Performing Arts in Indonesian archipelago are incredibly diverse, with each region developing its unique dance forms over time. These dances have gone through four distinct eras of evolution, and their influence can still be seen today in terms of makeup, clothing, properties, dance movements, and musical accompaniment. Let's take a closer look at each era as seen in figure 1:

(1) Dances with Prehistoric Patterns; (2) Dances with Hindu-Buddhist Pattern; (3) Dances with Chinese Pattern, and (4) Dances with Islamic Pattern.

### Dance Arts in Nusantara



Instilling virtuous values: The process of character change

- The diversity of dance arts in the archipelago creates different arts in each region.
- Over time, the dances in the archipelago have evolved.



There are 4 eras of the art of dance:

- Prehistoric Dance
- Hindu-Buddhist Dance,
- Chinese Style Dance,
- Islamic Dance.

**Fig. 1.** Four Eras of Dance in Indonesia

### 2.1 Dances with Prehistoric Patterns

The development of dance in the Indonesian region can be traced back to a time before foreign influences. Even before encountering outside cultures, the diverse ethnic groups in the archipelago had already established their own unique dance arts. These dances served personal and communal expressions, fulfilling various purposes and functions. Ritualistic, entertainment, and other practical functions were all encompassed within these dances. Today, these dances continue to evolve and thrive, remaining an integral part of various events associated with the life cycle such as births, marriages, deaths, and healing ceremonies. These dances can be categorized as part of the primitive or prehistoric dance group that emerged during a period when there were no established kingdoms, spanning from 20,000 BC to 400 AD. They are

characterized by their role in prayer ceremonies and the incorporation of movements inspired by the environment and animal behavior. The dances reflect the mutual relationship between humans and nature, as humans have a deep interest in preserving the natural environment while nature continually evolves and seeks self-improvement [2].

They also maintain their belief in animism and dynamism, and choose to live in remote and secluded areas, far from urban areas and unaffected by external influences. Among them are the Nias and Mentawai tribes in Sumatra, the Dayak, Punan, and Iban tribes in Kalimantan, the Baduy and Naga tribes in Java, the Minahasa and Toraja tribes in Sulawesi, and the Kombai, Dani, Asmat, and Amungme tribes in the Maluku Islands and Papua.

Indonesia, a country known for its diverse ethnicities, cultures, and traditions, not only showcases this diversity through its cuisine but also through its rich values. The traditional dances of various tribes have evolved over generations, becoming beautiful and unique traditions that are deeply ingrained in the local culture.

Dances with Prehistoric Patterns, including:

(1) In the Dayak Tribe, Kalimantan Island is known as Giring-giring Dance, Hudok Dance, and Monon Dayak dance; (2) In the Batak Tribe, North Sumatra Island is known as Tortor dance; (3) In Mentawai Island, it is known as Turuk Uliat Bilou, Turuk Pokpok, and Turuk Uliat Manyang dance. Dance or Turuk (Mentawai language), commonly used for ritual ceremonies of treatment, peace and joy [3]. The motives of the movement usually imitate the movements of the animals they hunt (inland communities still practice animal hunting habits) [4].

## **2.2 Dances with Hindu-Buddhist Patterns**

The early Hindu-Buddhist influences in Nusantara, as evidenced by various literary sources, can be traced back to the 5th century AD during the reign of the Kutai and Tarumanagara kingdoms. The impact of Hindu-Buddhist culture on Indonesia was extensive, encompassing not only the construction of temples and residential structures, but also the realms of culture and dance. In contrast to prehistoric dances that primarily drew inspiration from natural elements and animals, such as rain, ocean waves, and bird movements, Hindu-Buddhist dance forms exhibited distinct characteristics. These dances underwent rapid progression during this era, marked by increased standardization and adherence to established benchmarks. The dance movements were influenced by the "Natya Sastra," a prominent dance treatise authored by Bharata Muni, which encompassed 64 mudra hand movements. Such developments in dance during the Hindu-Buddhist period significantly shaped the artistic expressions and cultural landscape of Indonesia.

In addition to hand gestures, which serve as a source of inspiration for dance masters, particularly in ritual ceremonies and dances that impart virtuous values such as Srimpi Dance, Bedoyo Dance, and Wayang Wong, there were also dance forms that emerged within the palace settings, such as the Surakarta Palace and Jogjakarta Palace. The Bedoyo Ketawang Dance, performed by nine female dancers, is symbolic of a perfect individual who can maintain balance in all nine aspects of their being. This dance is predominantly showcased at the Kraton Surakarta and Jogjakarta, and holds significance in highlighting the importance of physical and spiritual well-being. Similarly, the Serimpi Dance, performed by four dancers, serves as a war dance, illustrating the need for women to protect themselves and their children as the future of the nation, by combatting potential threats from various directions [5]. The Serimpi dance often incorporates the use of a kris, a traditional dagger, which is tucked into the front belt. During this era, dance movements were meticulously organized, and performances took on functional purposes. Dance works garnered attention and support from monarchs and nobles, thereby

acquiring high artistic value and becoming recognized as traditional dance forms. The themes of these dance works began to diversify, with many drawing inspirations from the narratives of Mahabarata, Ramayana, and Ceritera Panji.

Dances with Hindu-Buddhist Patterns, including:

(1) In Jogjakarta, Bedoyo Ketawang Dance, Srimpi Dance, Menak Golek Dance, Daayung Sulung Golek Dance, Lawung Dance, Wayang Wong; (2) in Solo, Bedoyo Ketawang, Gambyong Dance, Karonsih Dance, (3) in Bali, Legong Kraton Dance, Panembromo Dance, Weaving Dance.

### **2.3 Dances with Chinese Patterns**

The presence of the Chinese community in Indonesia since the 7th century [6], has exerted a significant influence on the country, extending beyond trade to encompass cultural aspects. Chinese cultural influence has played a prominent role in shaping Indonesian culture. One enduring manifestation of this influence can be observed in the realms of makeup, costumes, and props, including fans, handkerchiefs, and masks. The impact of Chinese culture remains prevalent to this day. In nearly all coastal regions of Sumatra, Java, Bali, and Kalimantan, Chinese residents have established themselves as traders and have disseminated their cultural practices.

As a result of the influence of Chinese culture, a distinctive form of dance art has emerged in Indonesia, incorporating elements from both cultures. Each region in Indonesia has developed its own unique dance works, which bear the imprint of these two cultural influences. This can be observed in various aspects, such as the costumes, props, and makeup. For instance, in terms of makeup, the influence of Chinese culture can be seen in the use of 'paes' painting, characterized by black markings on the forehead and front of the lobe, as seen in dances like Bedoyo Dance and Pakarena Dance. Additionally, the combination of vibrant colors in the costumes and the incorporation of mask props, fans, and headdresses, such as the Tekes in the Cirebon Mask Dance and Baris Dance, further exemplify the fusion of Chinese and Indonesian cultural elements.

Chinese-Patterned Dances, including:

(1) In the Betawi area (Jakarta), including Blantek Dance, Ronggeng Nyai Dance, Topeng Putri, and Barongsay; (2) In the Cirebon area, Bedaya Rimbe Dance, Sekar Keputren Dance; Cirebon Mask Dance; (3) in Bali Area, Barong Dance, Baris Dance, and Legong Kraton Dance; (4) In Ponorogo: Reyog Ponorogo; (5) in Makasar Tari Pakarena.

The Chinese-patterned dance that is still being performed at the Yogya Palace, one of which is the Golek Menak dance from Jogjakarta. Golek Menak Dance is one of the dances performed at the Jogjakarta Palace to welcome important guests or state guests from other countries.

### **2.4 Dances with Islamic Patterns**

The arrival of the Arabs in Indonesia, along with the dissemination of Hinduism-Buddhism and Chinese trade, significantly influenced the spread of Islam in the region. Traders, both from outside Indonesia and within the country, played a pivotal role in this process. These merchants would conduct their business in trading centers located along the coastal areas of Indonesia, with Melaka serving as a prominent transit hub. Additionally, cities surrounding Melaka, including Perlak and Samudra Pasai, attracted traders who would often reside in these areas for extended periods, awaiting favorable seasonal winds for their voyages.

During this waiting period, a cultural exchange took place among traders from various nations and the local residents. They engaged in activities to familiarize themselves with each other's customs, culture, and religion. This interaction even led to assimilation through intermarriage. The traders primarily hailed from Arabia, Persia, and Gujarat, and were predominantly Muslims [7].

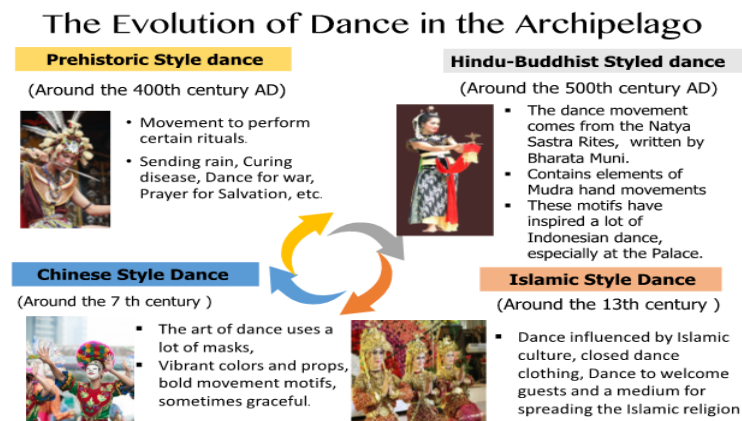
At this time various Islamic dances emerged, primarily used for the propagation of Islam. In the Aceh region of Sumatra, the Saman Dance became well-known, while in certain Malay tribes, the Pasambahan dance was performed to welcome guests during important events. In Cirebon, the Mask Dance emerged as a means to spread Islam, with different masks symbolizing the development of human character, ranging from the negative aspects represented by the red-colored Klana Mask Dance, to the pinnacle of goodness embodied by the white mask of the Panji Mask Dance. These dances not only utilized props and symbolic colors and shapes, such as wide eyes representing a calmer worldview, but also incorporated body gestures that exuded a sense of tranquility.

In Anthropology, Mary Douglas analyzes the body, proposing that it is a model capable of adapting to any system that restrains it. These restraints can serve to stabilize both physical and linguistic bonds for humans. The body is recognized as a complex structure, with its various parts and their interrelations revealing the origins of symbols for other intricate structures [8].

When individuals learn the Cirebon Mask dance, they are not only acquiring knowledge of the physical movements and expressions that accompany the music, but they are also absorbing numerous values. These values encompass the ability to adhere to set standards, perseverance in practice, the cultivation of aesthetic sensibilities, self-assurance, concentration, empathy, ethical behavior, and an appreciation for beauty (aesthetics).

Islamic Dances, among others:

(1) In Aceh, Saman Dance, Seudati Dance, Ratéb Meuseukat Dance, Guel Dance, Rapa'i Geleng Dance, Bines Dance; (2) in Padang: Pasambahan Dance, Piring Dance, Indang Dance, Umbrella Dance, Lilin Dance; (3) in Cirebon Klana Mask Dance, Tumenggung Mask Dance, Rumiang Mask Dance, Pamindo Mask Dance, and Panji Mask Dance.



**Fig. 2. The Evolution of Dance in The Archipelago**

### 3 Conclusion

The Nusantara Dance, developed in Indonesia over an extended period, not only showcases uniqueness and distinct characteristics but also embodies beauty. It imparts a philosophy of life and instills virtuous values through the symbolic expressions of masks, props used, and dance movements. The Nusantara Dance has a rich history closely intertwined with the lives of the communities that support it. The values conveyed through this dance extend beyond its graceful movements, encompassing aspects such as makeup, attire, and the accessories worn, making it a precious, distinctive, and invaluable heritage of cultural transmission.

### References

- [1] Statistics Indonesia, *Statistik Indonesia 2022*. Jakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022.
- [2] M. F. Royyani, "Upacara seren taun di Cigugur, Kabupaten Kuningan, Jawa Barat: Tradisi sebagai basis pelestarian lingkungan," *Jurnal Biologi Indonesia*, vol. 4, no. 5, pp. 399–415, 2008.
- [3] A. Febriano, "Turuk Laggai: Harmoni Alam Dalam Sebuah Tarian." Available: <http://www.pakmono.com/2014/12/pengertian-tari-tradisional-dari-para.html>. [Accessed: Dec. 28, 2023].
- [4] H. D. Putri, "Turuk Laggai pada Masyarakat Kepulauan Mentawai," *Gesture: Jurnal Seni Tari*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2012, doi: 10.24114/senitari.v1i2.871.
- [5] E. Caturwati, *Seni dan Ketahanan Budaya*. Bandung: Suanan Ambu Press, 2022.
- [6] A. Dahana, "Early Activities of the Chinese Community in Indonesia," *Jurnal Wacana*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 54–72, 2000.
- [7] H. A. Amin, *Seratus Tokoh dalam Sejarah Islam*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 1998.
- [8] A. Synnott, *Tubuh Sosial: Simbolisme, Diri, dan Masyarakat*. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2003.