

# Comparison of Physical Form of Sundanese Rebab and Javanese Rebab

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**Abstract.** Rebab as a string instrument has an important position in the gamelan which functions as a musical instrument pamurba song that still consistently maintains its existence in conventional music. Sundanese Rebab and Javanese Rebab are physically similar in terms of form, material, manufacturing process, and function in karawitan performances. This paper aims to find out the differences between Sundanese and Javanese rebab in terms of physical form (anatomy) or organology between the two. The form that has undergone some modifications does not eliminate the distinctive sound of Sundanese and Javanese rebabs. The creativity created by the rebab craftsman determines the extent of his imagination. The similar shape does not mean that it produces similar sound.

**Keywords:** Sundanese Rebab, Javanese Rebab, Physical Form, Stringed Instrument

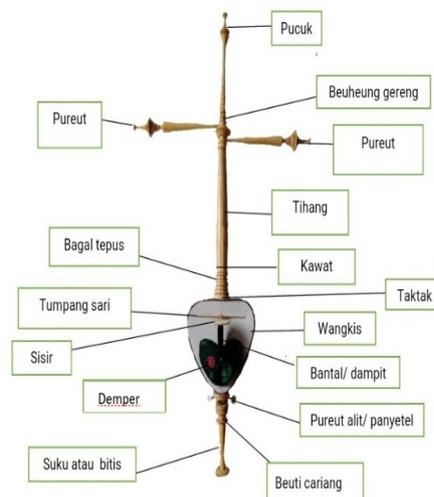
## 1 Introduction

Rebab is a musical instrument made of wood with a string stretched from top to bottom and then pulled back up [1,2]. Rebab functionally consists of two syllables from Javanese language, namely Re and Bab. Re which means back/repeat/change, and Bab means problem/problem/part/circumstance. So in essence, rebab is defined as a change of problem, a change of part, or a change of state [3]. As for Rebab in terms of terminology, it did not originate from Indonesia, its emergence occurred along with the arrival of Islam through trade routes [4]. Islam that entered Indonesia brought a strong influence on Middle Eastern and Turkish music culture, such as rebab and sarunai, which later became the main instruments in Javanese Gamelan [5]. Rebab or rababah (Arabic), which is the first bow instrument invented by the ancestors of medieval European rebecs and in the 10th century became a popular musical instrument in Arabia [6]. Javanese rebab traditionally consists of slendro barrel rebab named rebab ponhang, while for pelog barrel named rebab byur. Unlike the Sundanese rebab which does not have a naming term for the shape of the rebab, the Javanese Rebab has a naming term which is divided into two types, namely Baladewa and Kresna [7]. While in the salendro barrel gamelan game, Sundanese rebab can play many tunings (multilaras) and various surupan, four types of tunings are saléndro, pélog, madenda, and degung [8,9]. In this regard, an interesting phenomenon occurs when the gamelan Salendro tone, vocals and rebab are often modulated into madenda or degung scales [10]. Meanwhile, the presence of madenda (sorog) as a modulation of melody (rebab and vocal) in gamelan salendro and wayang golek purwa is an old phenomenon, meaning that it has existed around the 19th century [11]. Therefore, it provides

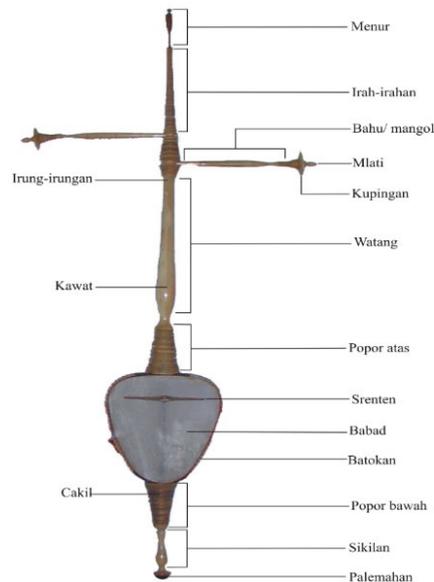
musical innovation as a form of how tradition responds to and is transformed by social change resulting in cultural creativity [12].

The function and task of Javanese rebab in karawitan (gending rebab) as pamurba lagu (song leader), while for gender and xylophone music as song ornaments [7]. Likewise, in Sundanese rebab is known as lulugu lagu [13]. Such as merean, marengan, and muntutan are terms often used in Sundanese karawitan [14]. Pamurba is a repetition of parts of each kenongan or goongan of the song presented, especially street songs [15]. In Javanese Rebab, everything is very much bound by its context. Not only in pathetan presentation, but in a gendhing, to adjust the laya (tempo) which is much faster than in klenengan presentation, usually wiledan rebaban tends to be more "simplified" (do not want to bother over verbiage) [16]. Therefore, rebab is known as a tool to sweeten the basic melody of a work or song [17]. Besides having similar functions, Javanese and Sundanese rebabs also have similarities in terms of physical form or organology. The existence of Javanese influence to Sunda causes the similarity. In addition, the complexity and reputation of rebab craftsmen are very difficult to find, and rarely most rebabs are not necessarily able to make rebabs, and vice versa. Because rebab makers and craftsmen are very rare. In previous studies, it was also found that rebab craftsmen and rebab players are different [18,19,20]. The function of Sundanese rebab as pamurba song and song accompaniment, has its own uniqueness organologically, such as Sundanese and Javanese rebabs which have similarities in terms of shape but different in terms of anatomy [21].

#### 4 Result and Discussion



**Fig. 1.** Parts of Sundanese Rebab[21].



**Fig. 2.** Parts of Javanese Rebab[26].

The body shape varies with many ornate carvings, as in Central Java for a simple 2-string model the average body is made of half coconut shell (Javanese: bathok). More sophisticated versions (common for new/contemporary music) have a metal sound box and the front may be half-covered with beaten copper, and half with cowhide. The shape of the Javanese rebab is usually small with a round body. From the very top it has a head/crown (Javanese: menur), then on the left and right there are like ears (Javanese: kupingan) which function as tuning strings. It has a long neck (Javanese: watang). At the lower end of the watang is attached to the front of a sheepskin membrane (Javanese: Babad). It has two strings mounted from the ear to the bottom of the babad called cakil. The circular carved part is called popor (top and bottom). The foot part is called sikilan. The strings used are usually made of brass wire which is supported by a small support (srenten) so that it forms the capital letter H in the position of being put to sleep [22]. This instrument is played in an upright position according to the sitting position of the rebab player and rests on the floor. The bow (Javanese: kosok) is usually more curved than the violin. The bow can use horsetail strands or pineapple leaf fibers, but nowadays it generally uses plastic imitation fibers (nylon).

The shape of Sundanese rebab is usually heart-shaped (love), or in Sundanese terms, wangkis ngadaun seureuh (like betel leaf) [23,24]. But in the present context, Sundanese rebabs have various forms. But the existence of the heart shape (love) is still maintained until now. From the top, it has a head/crown called pucuk, then the left and right are like ears called pureut, which functions as a tuning string. But then the pureut was moved down, the pureut is now used only as a visual aesthetic whose shape can be modified according to taste. Therefore, the artist's capital not only has creative ideas but also has a good and deep cultural understanding where local wisdom will be explored as a source of creation [25].

## 5 Conclusion

Many new-made rebabs are the development of various aspects that take into account: sound color, tone range, tone agility, sound volume amplification, more luxurious physical appearance, and others. Sundanese Rebab has thick and big tihang or watang compared to Javanese Rebab which has thin and small watang. Javanese rebab material is made of wood, bamboo, or animal horn. Javanese Rebab has a round shape and Sundanese Rebab resembles betel leaf. When viewed from the design of the Sundanese rebab already has a development and innovation in its manufacture can also produce a wider variety. For example, the shape of pureut (ear) has many variations of motifs such as kujang, swan, flower, trident, and so on. Meanwhile, the Javanese rebab still holds the conventional values.

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