Traditional Javanese Songs:

The Supporting Aspects of its Existence in the Local Society

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Abstract

This study reveals the supporting aspects that make traditional Javanese songs preserved in the community the splendor of modern Javanese songs. This research applies qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. The research location is in Central Java. The researchers collected the data by observing, interviewing and collecting documents. The researchers validate the data based on triangulation system with interactive analysis. The results find that traditional Javanese songs still exist in its local society due to the strong psychological bonding of the society with their culture. Through traditional Javanese songs, cultural messages can be conveyed beautifully, inspire imagination and impart enjoyable feelings. The implication of the research findings is the significance of traditional Javanese songs to be used as a means to foster the development of the society and the culture concerned.

Keywords: *Traditional Song, Traditional Javanese Song, Local Society, Music, Culture, Indonesia, Java*

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Introduction

Javanese song is the vocal variant of traditional Javanese music which is performed by the Javanese community on their daily life. The songs do not have an accurate historical record. Yet, experts are sure that the songs have become a symbol of artistic expression by the Javanese people. Specifically, Javanese society is part of Indonesia who are still maintain their identity even up to the modern era. In the current life of Javanese society, there are traditional Javanese song and modern Javanese song (Wadiyo et al., 2021). Modern Javanese songs are the new form of traditional Javanese music which has been assimilated with modern pop music industry. Meanwhile, the traditional Javanese song is an art form that is sourced and rooted and has been felt as one's own by the local society. This is usually accepted as an inheritance that is passed from the older generation to the younger generation (Lindsay, 1995).

The characteristic of the form of traditional Javanese songs are that it uses *pelog* and *slendro gamelan* scale. *Gamelan* is Javanese term for traditional Javanese music instrument. The music is different from new/modern music which adapts western music that uses diatonic scales or the frequency (vibration) of the diatonic tones. With regards to the matter, there are still many groups around the world which have traditional local music, both vocal and instrumental. They only have the musical element supported by their own society. It is possible that there are changes of form and function according to local society's demands. Various studies describe that local traditional music exists in various countries around the world. Mukhitdenova (2016) mentions that Kazakh local traditional music is preserved through modern approach, such as popularization and education amongst artist, mass media, TV, and radio. In Africa, African local traditional music is preserved through the school curricula integration. The Africans believe that the music is directly associated with their traditional beliefs and political system within their social experiences. The preservation is important to maintain the beauty of their culture, to help people communicate their emotion within a medium that roots to their community, and to facilitate the local community in strengthening their sense of cultural belonging (Lebaka, 2019; Oikelome, 2021).

There are differences between traditional local music or songs from one community and the others. Each of them has characteristics that specify their respective regions. Hubbard (2017) and Kuzbakova (2013) stated that traditional local music or folk songs are playing an important role for the current community identity. Each culture has specific and unique feature that ignite people's spirituality over centuries reflected in traditions and values. Music and identity have become a research subject for a long time. As a part of culture, people believe that music has as an important aspect for individual and social identity formation. Traditional local music plays an important role to construct the social identity and social memory where the individuals are linked within their social network (Rice, 2007).

Several studies of traditional arts have been conducted whether in Indonesia or in various arts institution around the globe. There are several styles of traditional art in Central Java. Yet, for the traditional music, there are only two of the styles

manage to become the standard, which are Surakarta and Yogyakarta traditional music styles. The traditional Javanese music was born from the dynamic interactions in various contexts, such as Javanese *gamelan* which is originated from the Javanese palace (Arini, Supriadi & Saryanto, 2015). *Gamelan* has been appointed as the main standard over the other Javanese music that are used within the local arts community and as the main teaching material in the formal art education institutions. In addition, gamelan music is still valuable because *gamelan* is primarily used for ceremonial activities in the palace. *Gamelan* then grows to become the pride of the Javanese people.

Currently, Javanese music has been influenced by the worldwide cultural and technological development. Lidskog (2016) finds that Javanese music form has already changed. At the moment, Javanese music has become the background of popular music performance, such as *Campursari* (a crossover of several contemporary Indonesian music genres, mainly between *Langgam Jawa* and *Dangdut),* diatonic and pentatonic musical collaborations, modern *gamelan*, and the contemporary *gamelan*. The changes were marked by the increasing popularity of new forms of Javanese music presented in many social events.

From the previous research, many regions from different nations have different traditional local music/songs from one to the others. Then, there is a tendency that the traditional local music or songs develops by assimilating the elements of world music or Western diatonic music. Afterwards, local traditional music or songs tend to disappear, yet some of them are still alive up until now. In Javanese society, traditional Javanese local songs still maintain their original form. However, the modern version has already included the element of Western diatonic music.

This study highlights the gap from the previous research that there has not been any research which focuses on Javanese songs and their use as the media of artistic communication by the Javanese. This research highlights the fact that Javanese song has shifted into a new form that is different or not exactly the same as the original. Both the original and the modern one exists in the society. Although the newer version thrives in the music industry, it does not dispel the original traditional local song. They live side by side in the Javanese community. Hence, this research aims to find out what aspects that make traditional Javanese song still exists within the life of Javanese society.

Research Approaches and Methods
This research employs phenomenological approach. The research method focuses on a particular concern which can answer the research problem. According to Randles (2012), phenomenology refers to our perception upon the appearance of an object, an event, or a condition. By using phenomenological approach, the researchers want to reveal, seek, and collect data about an object, an event, or a condition with regards to the existence of Javanese song within the Javanese society. Art study is relevant to phenomenological approach since it provides a philosophical, sociological, and artistic perspective for the research. Phenomenology is a variant of qualitative research under the umbrella of the interpretive paradigm.

Based on Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), interpretative paradigm is related to a meaning that can be seen from an event experienced by humans, whether objectively or subjectively. In the end, this research highlights the experiences of the research subjects or participants as informants to reveal what aspects that make them still connected to traditional Javanese songs.

Research Focus
This research focuses on finding out what aspects that make traditional Javanese songs still exists in its supporting society.

Data Collection Techniques
The researchers collected the data through interviews, observation, and documentation study. The researchers collected the data based on Lincoln (2005) who theorizes phenomenological approach as a mean to unveil meanings behind a phenomenon. To support the data, this research requires deep information from an interview along with the objective and factual data from observation and documentation study. The obtained data are related to experiences, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of Javanese community and the local supporter of traditional Javanese songs.

The participants are Javanese who were assumed to understand traditional Javanese song due to their background of living in Javanese speaking area. The details of the participants are, 12 participants from the public, 8 personnel of 2 Javanese musical groups/ Javanese *gamelan* music groups, 12 Elementary Students from 3 Elementary Schools, 12 Junior High School students from 3 schools, 3 *gamelan* music teachers in the Javanese society, 3 Elementary School teachers, 3 Junior High School teachers, and 9 people from the public. The researchers determined the number and the background of informants based on their background relevance, personality, and heterogeneity on their support to Javanese song.

The interview aimed to find out the informants' knowledge upon traditional Javanese songs, such as the melody, tones, language used in the lyrics, the message of the song, and the type of Javanese song. Furthermore, the participants were asked regarding the use, popularity, and relevance to the modern industrial world. The researchers explored further to the personal aesthetic experience and what the participants perceive when they were listening to a Javanese song.

Furthermore, the observation stage was done which mainly to see the research participants performed the *gamelan* with their groups. The observers also observed the teaching and learning in the classroom using Javanese songs. The general observation shows that Javanese song is performed for various Javanese art events, too, including parties and celebration amongst Javanese community. Apart from the observation, the researchers gathered relevant documents as a complement to the interview and observation data. The documents from schools are related to the texts of the song used in the learning. Likewise, the text of the song used for practice by groups in the community. In addition, video documentations were also analyzed.

Data Validity Techniques and Data Analysis
This research applied data triangulation to validate the data. The researcher cross-checked the obtained data from observations and documentation studies with the statements of the interviewees. Further, the researchers confirmed the information amongst the informants. Triangulation is important to enhance the reliability of the data. A qualitative researcher seeks to define and interpret unclear phenomena through non-numerical methods of measurement that focus on meaning and insight (Fusch et al., 2018). This is done to see the consistency of what the participants' feelings and thoughts about Traditional Javanese Song. All data were analyzed following the flow of phenomenological studies based on Holroyd (2011).

The initial stage of this phenomenological research was looking at the phenomena experienced by the research subject. The researchers paid close attention to what the transcribed interview and validated that with observational data and documentation studies. The second stage was the horizontalization. The researcher identified important statements from the transcription that are relevant to the topic that the researchers do not make any judgments about. The third is the cluster of meaning. The stage refers to the classification of informants' statements into meaning units. Here, the researchers wrote about what the informants experienced as research subjects and how it affected them differently as individuals. The researchers assessed all feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and expectations of the subjects or research informants about the phenomenon. The fourth stage is the essential description, where the researchers constructed a comprehensive description of the meaning and essence of the subjects' experiences.

Research Findings and Discussion

After conducting data collection and analysis, the aspects that influence the existence of traditional Javanese songs in the supporting community were found, namely the aspect of musicality of traditional Javanese songs as well as aspect of symbolic significance and functional aspects of traditional Javanese songs.

The Musicality Aspect of Traditional Javanese Songs

There are two types of Javanese song, i.e. the traditional Javanese song and the New or Modern Javanese song. The differences between the traditional Javanese song and the new/ modern Javanese song are described in the figure 1.

Javanese Traditional Song	**New/ Modern Javanese Song**
Each type of original traditional Javanese song other than *dolanan* song has its own standard form.	The new traditional Javanese song does not have a standard form.
The tones use *gamelan pelog* and *slendro* music tones.	The tones use diatonic music tone.
Lyrics are in the form of poetry with specific rules on the rhymes and line composition.	Lyrics are not always in the form of poetry and even if it is a form of poetry, it has no specific rules on rhymes and line.
The songs' message is related to behavioral guidance and knowledge cultivation.	The songs' message is mostly about romance.
The song develops within the local culture society.	The song develops within the popular culture industry.

Figure 1. The comparison of characteristics between the traditional Javanese song and the new/ modern Javanese song.

Based on the research findings, what is seen as a traditional Javanese song has at least 4 (four) forms of traditional Javanese song, namely the *Gedhe* song, the *Tengahan* song, the *Cilik* song or *Macapat* and the *Dolanan* song. The *Gedhe* song and the *Tengahan* song are not quite popular in the society anymore. What is more widely known by the general public is the *Cilik* song commonly known as *Macapat* and the *Dolanan* song. The results of observations and documentation studies show that almost all of the research participants stated that the *Cilik* song or *Macapat* and the *Dolanan* song are known in the society and taught in public schools. This does not mean that the *Gedhe* and *Tengahan* songs are unknown. The results showed that the research participants knew *Gedhe* and *Tengahan* songs because both are often heard when it played or sung in traditional ceremonies and rituals such as during wedding ceremonies, wayang kulit (shadow puppet) performance, and other sacred Javanese traditions. Furthermore, the documentation study shows the differences between the *Gedhe* song, the *Tengahan* song, the *Cilik* song or *Macapat*, and the *Dolanan* song as shown in figure 2.

The *Gedhe* Song	The *Tengahan* Song	The *Cilik* Song (Macapat)	The *Dolanan* Song
Using old Javanese language	Using new Javanese language	Using more popular Javanese language (relatively known to everyone)	Using children's language in everyday life
Each stanza contains 4 lines	Each stanza does not exceed 8 lines	In the form of traditional Javanese poetry	In the form of free-style poetry
Bounding by a *guru lagu* (vocal sound at the end of the line or called rhyme)	Not bound by sound endings	The number of rows is determined. Depending on the type of *macapat*, there are 11 types of *macapat*	The number of lines per song is not specified
The number of syllables in one line and another is the same	The number of syllables in line one and the other is not the same	The number of syllables is determined on the basis of the type of *macapat*	The number of syllable per line is not specified

Figure 2. Comparison of the *Gedhe*, *Tengahan*, *Cilik* (or *Macapat)* and the *Dolanan* songs.

Further related to the musical aspect, traditional Javanese song uses *pelog* and *slendro* scale. The scales of the *pelog* are 1 (ji), 2 (ro), 3 (lu), 4 (pat), mo (mo), 6 (nem), and 7 (pi). *Slendro* scales are 1 (ji), 2 (ro), 3 (lu), 5 (mo), 6 (nem). Modern Javanese songs change both *pelog* and *slendro* tones into diatonic tones. The intervals used on the diatonic scales are much different from the pentatonic scales, both *pelog* and *slendro* (Setyawan, 2017; Wadiyo, et al., 2019).

Temperley & Tan (2012) also find some differences between pentatonic and diatonic music. Those differences are: (1) pentatonic music was developed in Asia and parts of Eastern Europe, while diatonic music emerged and developed in the West and currently is spreading throughout the world. (2) The pentatonic scale is based on horizontal movement (overtone series) while the scale in diatonic is based on vertical movement (overtone series). (3) The pentatonic scale is produced in cyclic, while the diatonic scale is produced in a single divisive system. (4) The pentatonic scale is produced from an instrument designed to produce melodic tones. Meanwhile, the diatonic scale is produced from instruments designed to produce melodic and harmonious tones.

Gamelan music in diatonic music tones feels very different for those who are still sensitive to pelog or slendro. That is because the tone vibrations and intervals of

pelog and *slendro* is very different with the diatonic music. Many Javanese song studies show that the Javanese notation began to shift into Western diatonic musical tones. Usually, diatonic scales are used for modern Javanese songs, one of which is *Campursari* modern Javanese music. *Campursari* Javanese music, even though the frequency of the notes is western music, the scales used are still *pelog* and *slendro* scales. Which is why Supanggah (2003) saw that *Campursari* Javanese music violates the standard rules that exist in Javanese *karawitan/gamelan* art. In Javanese music *Campursari*, the art only pursues people's tastes for industrial purposes.

Moreover, the results of the study found that traditional Javanese song supporters in general do not recognize certain scales, but rather to pay attention to the message of the song. A poetic lyrical song tends to be Javanese people's favorites. As widely known, Javanese song is a poetry that is sung (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The traditional Javanese song uses beautiful rhymes as its lyrics. This beautiful rhyme is an art that attracts listeners if it is sung. Here, art exists to fulfill human's aesthetic needs. Art is used to communicate, preserve, and connect knowledge. Art is also used as human's guidance to behave and act (Lachapelle, Murray, & Neim, 2003). As is done by the Javanese people, they do art, in addition to fulfilling the need for aesthetic expression, it is also done to communicate, convey knowledge, and preserve culture that is considered good. Based on interviews and field studies, it was found that the language factor for communicating is one of the main factors for the recognition of Javanese songs by the supporting society. This is understandable because to be able to understand the meaning implied in the lyrics of the song, it takes language that can be interpreted by the listener. Seen from figure 2, according to the language aspect, the *Gedhe* song uses ancient Javanese, the *Tengahan* song uses new/modern Javanese language, the *Cilik* song or *Macapat* uses more poular language, and the *Dolanan* song uses children's language in everyday life. Finally, the *Macapat* and *Dolanan* song becomes the most known songs by the Javanese society currently, because it uses simpler language, communicative and is still used today so that its meaning is easy to understand. It is line with Deci & Ryan (2010) who argued that simple language matters to make sure a successful communication.

Aspect of Symbolic Significance and Function of Traditional Javanese Song

Apart from the aspect of musicality and the lyrical language used, in this section it is presented how the traditional Javanese song is seen as a symbol of expression, function, and meaning. It is obvious that the art of this traditional Javanese song is an expressive symbol. In this context, traditional Javanese song is an expressive symbol used by the supporting community to express their culture. In a form of a lyrical song, the product contains an aesthetic message. In this regard, the listener uses them not only as a tool for individual artistic expression, but also as an expression of social value. In short, Javanese people use the song as a medium of aesthetic communication. In this case, they take advantage with the Javanese song as a symbolic mean to communicate artistically.

Symbols are deeply felt and understood by the people who are from the symbol's culture (Wallach & Clinton, 2019). In communication, humans use symbols. Each

of which has its own function for the people to act based on their understanding. Symbols can be formed from beliefs. Cognitive symbols signify science. Symbols can also be the media to express feelings (Perlovsky, 2010).

What is in traditional Javanese songs cannot be separated from what is stated by Lotman (2019) and Perlovsky (2010). In the Javanese community as supporters, Javanese songs are symbols of expression that are used as social interaction or communication, it also used as guidelines for attitude and action in capturing knowledge and to express feelings. A concrete example was mentioned by some informants who claimed that they use traditional Javanese songs to understand what one must know how to behave and have a good attitude in doing an action by following the song lyrics as written in figure 3 which is *Macapat* type *Sinom*.

Nulada laku utama	Imitate good behavior
Tumrap wong tanah Jawi	for a Javanese
Wong agung ing ngeksi ganda	like the King of Mataram
Panembahan Senapati	Panembahan Senapati
Kepati amarsudi	always trying to
Sudaning hawa lan nepsi	control his desire
Pinepsu tapabrata	always struggle
Tanapi ing siyang ratri	day and night
Amemangun karyenak tyas ing sasama	to be useful for others

Figure 3. The example of *Macapat* type *Sinom*.

The meaning of the song is that it is a must for everyone to behave well. In connection with the song from figure 3, as a Javanese, it is necessary to imitate a respected figure, namely the king of Mataram, he is Panembahan Senopati. He always tried hard to always do the best for his people to be useful for others. Sometimes, personal desires must be sacrificed for the benefit of the people. Panembahan Senopati here as a symbol of a good ruler for the Javanese who pay attention to the fate of their people. From this song, it can be shown how a song's message can convey an artistic symbol. Artistic symbols are also called presentational symbols. This is a type of symbols which meaning does not necessarily depend on the rule of elements, but it often comes from direct intuition. Artistic symbols are complete constructions that cannot be broken down into their elements. Yet, they are the whole sign (Bates, 2012). In addition to figure 3, the artistic symbol reflected from the song is the commendable attitude of a leader. That can be understood, because basically, symbol formation is the abstraction of conceptualized thing and given a special sign. A symbol, as the wide extend of a sign, has the power to form a concept of something or an idea it is marking. Thus, it is proven that the symbol has a meaning derived from an object. Artistic symbols are symbols of feelings or rather symbols that manifest the total abstraction of human's experience. Therefore, art's meaning does not exist to be understood, but rather to be lived, whether art is enjoyable, touching a feeling, arising imagination, or embodying cultural values.

On the occasion of appreciating traditional Javanese songs in general, research participants stated that the feelings that arise when appreciating songs are

touched, the feeling of déjà vu, as well as becoming emotional after listening to a traditional Javanese song. Presumably, those are the main reasons why Javanese songs are still being supported by the local society. Research participants stated that when they listen to songs, they feel that there is a past memory that is implied in the memory. In relation to that, according to what was conveyed by Van den Scott (2014), music affects human long-term memory systems. Those systems are episodic memory which recalls specific events. It is semantic memory which is a network that associates the human concept and knowledge to the world, and the procedural memory as it has the ability to learn skills. Participants realized that the message which is conveyed in the song is valuable and enjoyable. In this context, the feelings and perceptions of the song came naturally after listening/ singing the song without any force or suppression. The message enters the mind along with the melody. This supports the theory of arts origin that when enjoying arts, people do not only embrace their level of intact cognition, but they also show a flexible level of appreciation (Fingerhut & Prinz, 2018). Asides, art supporters exhibit their aesthetic insight based on their moral acceptance and reasoning. Indirectly, symbolic arts contain an invitation to the audience to understand the appealing values expressed by the artist.

Communicated art emerges charm due to the sensibility that touches of the human's aesthetic dimension (Menninghaus, et al, 2019; Omigie, et al, 2019; Skov & Nadal, 2019). In this study, it was also found that there are three main functions of traditional Javanese song for the supporting society. First, traditional Javanese song meets its supporters' aesthetic needs on what is thought, known, and felt. Second, traditional Javanese song has a symbolic system, which is a system that organizes humans' perception and expression. The traditional Javanese song implies a form of shared appreciation among the community groups that support it. The third function is to bond the listener with their socio-cultural norms and values. Knell and Taylor (2011) mention that arts exist in the community not merely because art fulfills a relative measure of beauty, but also because arts convey cultural messages beautifully. The success in conveying messages depends on the community's ability to grasp it. Moreover, as long as art is conveying its beautiful message, it will continue to be integrated within the cultural values and social norms of its supporting community. Thus, it can be stated that, traditional Javanese song still has the relatability with the supporting society and that also influences the society's psychological aspect according to the tendency of song preference. According to Greasley and Lamont (2011) human's psychological aspect will influence their song's choice. As Bericat (2016) said, people's emotional experience identifies the specific characteristics of the music/song that they preferred. People will engage with the music that they feel meaningful and touch their personal and social cultures. As a symbol system, art also functions to organize the perception of the humans involved in it (Csikszentmihaly, 2014). In other words, arranging expressions or aesthetic feelings associated with all expressions of various human feelings or emotions.

Art is also a system of delivering aesthetic meaning altogether in a structure related to all kinds of human feelings or emotions. The emotions themselves have

been transmitted historically since people's childhood in both between generations. As an effort to support this situation, Traditional Javanese Songs are included in the school curriculum by the government. The song is taught for the students, started from Elementary School (Primary level) to the Senior High School (Advanced level) as one of the compulsory subjects. The presented materials only cover the introduction to the traditional Javanese songs. The comprehensive curriculum of traditional Javanese songs is only taught in a Vocational School that specializes in Javanese art as well as in the Javanese language and Javanese arts study program at the university level. The reason for teaching traditional Javanese songs to formal schools is as an effort to preserve traditional arts that are considered good. The implied and explicit contents (messages) of traditional Javanese songs are mainly related to the inculcation of knowledge and behavior conveyed are pleasing and beautiful messages using Javanese art idioms.

Javanese art idiom as a symbol that represents knowledge and moral messages wrapped in a traditional art, one of which is in the form of traditional Javanese songs. Objects that people see and experience are processed into a series of symbols that human can understand (Kull, 2015). Symbols, including expressive symbols, are stored as meanings, among others, in the form of various ideas, abstractions, convictions, considerations, desires, beliefs, and certain experiences that are understandable and shared. This is why art can be considered a system of symbols (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2012; Leman et al, 2018). Art exists, develops, and is standardized in and through the social traditions of a society. Along with other cultural elements, arts also serve to sustain and maintain social collectiveness. Art belongs to society collectively. The supporters of arts are the individual members of the community where it belongs. In empirical reality, art is considered as a way of life for the members of its society. Individuals build their artistic knowledge, which is parallel to their cultural knowledge, by perceiving arts. Thus, art knowledge is the knowledge that individuals have about their arts and other arts they experienced and they fond of (Candy, 2014).

Since humans have various needs, both in quality and quantity, form and type, as well as life experiences and concerns, it is possible to find different behaviors or responses from one individual to another, even in the same group. These differences have prompted humans to perceive, formulate, or find alternatives in solving the problems they face (Longmore & Worrell, 2007). In the case of traditional Javanese songs, there is a clear difference between social preference of the society to traditional Javanese song and modern Javanese song. Modern Javanese song was developed in the form of industrial music by the wider community. The song is solely produced for entertainment purposes, with romantic lyrics adapted to market tastes or needs. As an example, modern Javanese songs emerged in the forms of Campursari and Campursari dangdut as the popular modern Javanese song. The reason why traditional Javanese songs are maintained as preferable options is because it still ties the emotion amongst the Javanese community. The song brings back collective memories and experiences for the listeners. According to Younes and Klein (2014), traditional songs provide a means to strengthen identity and collective experience of the society.

Conclusion

The aspect that makes the traditional Javanese songs still exist is the relatability of the Javanese society to their traditional song. Relatability affects the feeling of Javanese's people to feel attach with their culture and influence their aesthetic tastes. This relatability aspect eventually fulfils the Javanese society' artistic expression which is inseparable from their life personally, socially and culturally. The relatability aspect of traditional Javanese song also affects people's personally. The contents of the song is relevant to the Javanese society life as it is useful as the media to express feelings, thoughts, and to understand life. Apart of relatability, traditional Javanese songs affect people's psychology as it helps them to communicate their aesthetic domain in Javanese context. The psychological aspect also aids people in expressing their aesthetics based on the socio-cultural norms and values of the society. In line with that, it seems, policies from educational institutions that require local songs to be preserved in schools, and also for fostering traditional arts in this community is considered very important. In this way, the aesthetic values and meaning of traditional arts are always attached to the soul of the supporting society.

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