

Dancing in Cirebonese Topèng¹

by Endo Suanda

The term *topèng* in Cirebon refers to a specific type of mask play, as well as to the main artist (dancer) of the play.² Other mask plays, such as *bangbarongan* or *bèngbèrokan* (a "monster" folk play) as well as *wayang wong* (dance drama presenting the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* stories) are never referred to as *topèng*.³ *Topèng* can also mean just "mask," but another word, *kedok*, is more commonly used by the people of Cirebon.

Cirebonese *topèng* exists in both the court and village environments. There is no distinction between court and folk artists, as indeed in the court too, *topèng* is performed by artists that predominantly live and perform in villages. A traditional performance of *topèng* takes place during the day while the *wayang kulit* shadow puppet theatre is performed at night. The practitioners of *topèng* and *wayang kulit* are often very closely related, if not the same. Most are from "artist families," a certain group of families that have been professional artists for generations.⁴

The occasions for *topèng*, or *wayang*, are mostly as entertainment in the celebration of auspicious events such as circumcisions and weddings. However, *topèng* is also performed in the annual village festivals. For an individual family's ceremony, *topèng* will be performed in the front yard of the host who builds a special, temporary stage especially for the performance, while for a communal village ceremony it would be performed in the village square (*alun-alun*), village office building (*balé-désa*), or cemetery. In either case, the audience participates a great deal in directly influencing the performance by supporting, criticizing, and to a certain extent also determining the "improvised" program of the group.

In this article, I will focus on the dance in a *topèng* performance. I will describe briefly the main dances in a "complete" performance followed by a consideration of the way the dance is performed, choreographed, and improvised. I will conclude with a discussion of *topèng* aesthetics. It will be clear from the tone of the discussion that I place myself as an "outsider." This is due to several reasons; most importantly is that since I entered the dance academy in Bandung in 1968 I could no longer return as an "insider." Although I have performed often with the artists mentioned in this article, my way of "doing" and "looking at what we

were doing" is different.

One major difficulty in discussing *topèng* is that each area, each individual, and even each village possess different styles (often several artists from different areas will move to one village). The presentation of the dances, songs, and comical repertoire not only vary from region to region, but also from one performance to the next by the same group. This is based upon the context of the performance, the spontaneous response of the artists to the situation before them, and variation due to improvisation (discussed below). Nevertheless, if we compare all of these styles, we will find a great similarity in their approaches in almost every aspect: movement patterns, dance sequences, musical accompaniment, costuming, and masks. This leads us to believe that all *topèng* styles came from the same root, and that many of the professed genealogies of these artists might very well be true.

Another difficulty we encounter in a discussion of *topèng* is in the terminology. In the *topèng* tradition, and in the traditional arts in general, we find different terms that apply to the same thing, or, conversely, the same term used for different things. This is not just because of an oral tradition, but also because in the performing arts, actions (including the names of movements and musical pieces) generally don't need to be verbalized.⁵ Moreover, artists seldom discuss much about technical terms outside of their performance context. For them, music and dance are to be done, not to be talked about. However, in the 1960s, outside scholars and students (from Bandung, Jakarta, and even abroad) started to do research or study on Cirebonese arts. As usual, they (myself included) asked the names of anything possibly having names. This made the artists much more concerned about names and terminologies than ever before. Artists started to question themselves, trying to remember terms that had been forgotten for years, or to find or make up names for that which had remained nameless. Of course this created some confusion in regard to the terminology and theory of practice, but not in the actual practice itself. Therefore, in any discussion of *topèng*, it is important to state that there are no standardized terms or rules; they vary from village to village, from individual to individual, and even from time to time for the same person. The terms I use in this article are also by no means universal but, unless indicated, almost all of them come from the Cirebon region.

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Let's examine briefly the main dance characters presented in a topèng performance. As I mentioned above, topèng is not always performed in the same order due to the time available and audience interruptions or involvement that affect the overall performance length and emphasis. However, in a "full" or "complete" performance, the following characters would be present: Panji, Pamindo, Rumyang, Patih, Tumenggung, Jinggaanom, and Klana.

Panji

The Panji dance is the most refined of all topèng dances. All of the movements are extraordinarily slow, and could not be categorized as mere audience entertainment. As a matter of fact, the movement of the Panji dance is like no other dance in Cirebon, or in Indonesia, as far as I know. Although it is one of the most difficult dances, the layperson would say that the dance has nothing to do with movement technique. The dance is more likely done for the dancer's inner satisfaction or ceremonial intent. Also, unlike the other dances, the entire Panji dance is performed without any interruption.

The Panji mask is the most refined of all topèng masks. It looks down, with a small nose, narrow (*gabahan*) eyes, and closed mouth (upper teeth connected to the lower lip). The mask is always painted white.

In general, the audience and artists are not concerned with the story or the identity of Panji. Nevertheless, some artists mention his name as Panji Kudawaning Pati. Others, as expressed in the *martawara* (the "announcement" from the narrator), say that he is Arjuna—an example of the frequent mixing of stories from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the Panji legend. It is also interesting to note that in Losari this first dance is called Mindo, since Panji appears later, in the *lakonan* section.

Pamindo

Pamindo, or Mindo, literally means "the second,"⁶ and alludes to the fact that this dance is traditionally the second dance in a complete topèng performance.⁷ The character of the dance is referred to as *lanyap*, which means "light," nimble, joyous, coquettish and arrogant at the same time.⁸ It is a dance that expresses the mood of "youthfulness" or "brightness." The *lanyap* character represents neither a *halusan* (refined) nor a *gagah* ("strong") character to the Cirebonese people. Rather, unlike in Central Javanese dance, the *lanyap* character stands between the two. In terms of movement characteristics as well, there is a big gap between the Panji and Pamindo dances—a difference that is much greater than in dances in other genres, for example, Arjuna and Karna in Cirebonese wayang wong, or *leyepan* and *satria* in the Sundanese *kursus* dance. It is true that the Pamindo topèng dance is more dynamic than the Karna wayang wong dance, but more importantly the Panji dance is by far more "quiet."

The Pamindo dance, indeed, has the richest vocabulary of movements of any of the dances. Some dalang, who feature the Pamindo dance, will display their ability in

dance technique and improvisation. The audience invariably will start to "participate" in the performance by making a response with *tawur* or *sawèr*—the throwing of money or cigarettes to the dancer and musicians—and prolonged interruptions of the comic and musical presentations. This can be the longest section of a topèng performance, often lasting for three or more hours.

The Pamindo masks are generally white, ivory or light yellow, or (rarely) light blue. The masks have hair around the top part, with a decoration bordering it, called *kembang pilis* or *pipilis*. Its nose is most often, but not always, more pointed out than Panji, its mouth is open (i.e. there is a gap between the upper and lower teeth; the lower teeth are almost always painted black while the upper teeth are either painted gold or white).

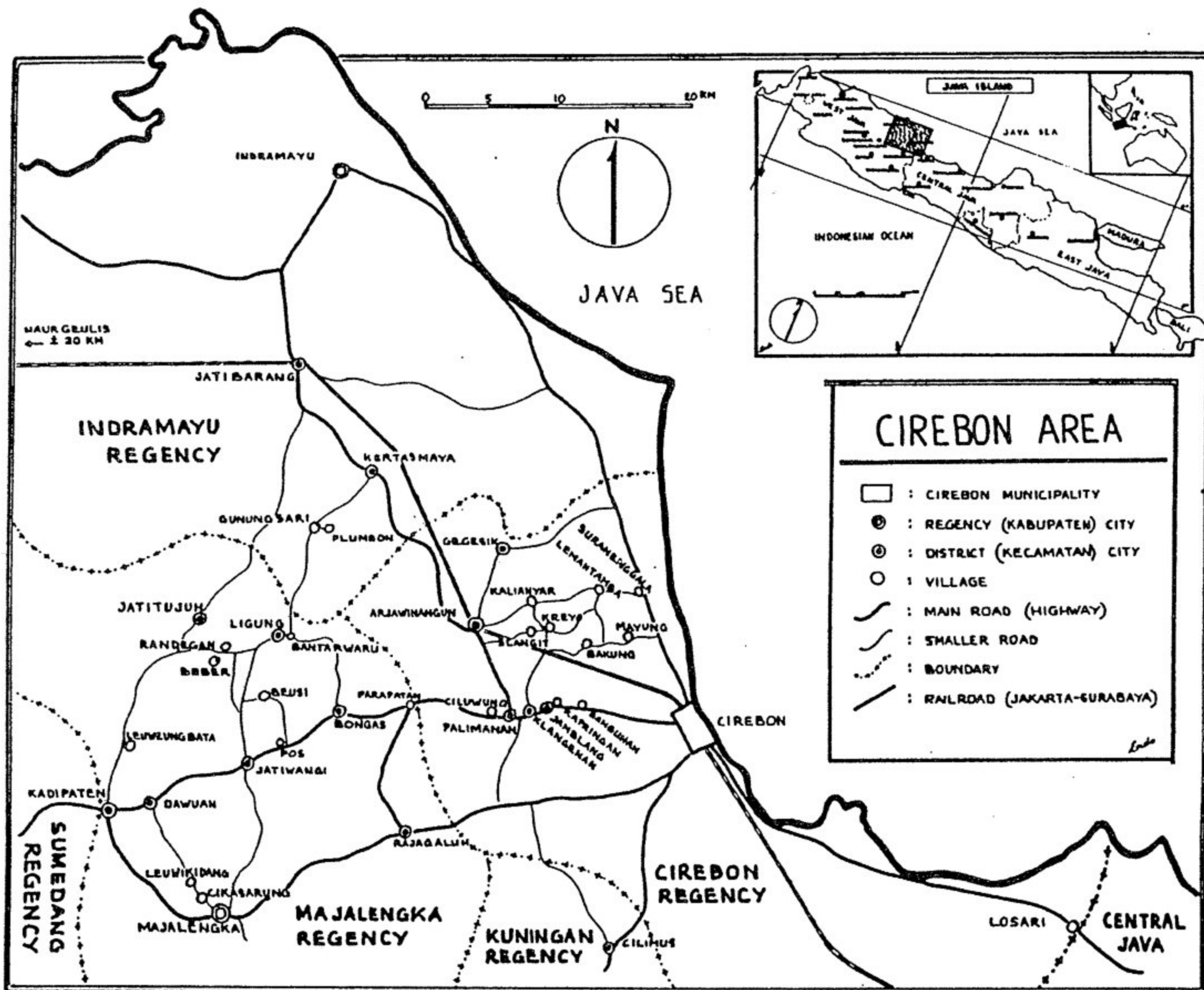
The mask and the dance are also called Samba, a son of Kresna, from the epic, the *Mahabharata*. Although the audience invariably knows who Samba is (since the wayang enjoys a great deal of popularity), the story or episode from the *Mahabharata* is unknown. Hence, the name of Samba in topèng is not related to any particular story.

However, from the scattered *atur-atur* ("words" in narration or speech) of the *bodor* (clown), there is the suggestion that at one time a story related to the character of Pamindo existed. In this version, Pamindo is R. Kudapanulih, a brother of the Bawarna princess (Galuh Chandrakirana?), who is busy preparing wedding attire for his sister's marriage. In a comedic scene, he and his *panakawan* (Central Javanese: *punakawan*; clown servants played by the *bodor*) talk about various parts of the costumes and other attributes.

Rumyang

The Rumyang dance was not popular as an "independent" dance piece until about 1970, at which time the Ramayana dance drama project of the West Java government started to do research on Cirebonese dance. This research was repeated, more intensively and extensively, in 1971. Most people in Cirebon, artists included, were not even familiar with this dance until that time. Topèng artists from the areas of Palimanan, Suranenggala, Bantarwaru, Bongas, and Beber said that the Rumyang dance used to be performed at the end of a performance, after the Klana dance, if they still had time.⁹

I myself have never seen it performed that way, but, in topèng performances I witnessed in Losari in 1977 and 1984, the Rumyang scene was performed after the Klana dance at the start of the story. Groups from Slangit village, in particular, present the Rumyang dance after the Pamindo dance and differentiate it accordingly. On the contrary, Mutinah, the oldest dalang-topèng in Gegesik village, no longer recognizes the Rumyang dance as a distinct dance. If we compare the Rumyang dance from Slangit with the last part of the Pamindo dance from other areas, there are many similarities. First of all its musical accompaniment is exactly the same composition, *lagu Rumyang*—the only one of the



topèng dance names to come from the name of the music. (It is more common to name the lagu after the name of the dances, such as *lagu Manji*—for Panji, *lagu Mindo*, and *lagu Tumenggungan*.) More importantly, the principal choreography is composed of the same structure and type of movements; the only difference is in the style of the movements, just as this differs in all other dances. Another distinguishing aspect of this dance, unlike others, is that the Rumyang (of Slangit) does not have a section in the beginning of the dance where all the main characters appear without wearing a mask. Thus, it is more likely that the Rumyang dance performed after the Pamindo dance is perhaps a new development; the Pamindo mask is merely replaced by the Rumyang mask at the point in the music where *lagu Rumyang* begins. The occurrence of the Rumyang dance after the Klana dance, as it is still performed by groups in Losari, functions as the prelude to the presentation of a specific story. In this case the “Rumyang” dance has a different name according to the story presented.

Interestingly, the masks used for either style of Rumyang are basically the same. They have an open mouth, “open” smile, curved-shaped nose, and kembang pilis like the Pamindo mask. The main difference between the Pamindo and Rumyang masks is that the latter does not have hair and is painted pink (in various degrees).

The character of the dance is very similar to the Pamindo dance. There are many interchangeable phrases of movement with slightly different tempo and dynamics. Although it is a lanyap character, the expression of the dance in general is considered calmer than Pamindo.

Patih

From 1970 onward I encountered only four Cirebonese artists (except in Losari)¹⁰ who differentiated the Patih and Tumenggung dances. All others maintained that the two dances were essentially the same. However, in 1977 I saw Dewi’s group (from the village of Losari) perform the Patih dance in the manner described to me by those four artists.



Topèng characters, Slamgit village, Cirebon.

Also, in a recording session in 1978 I saw Mutinah perform the Patih dance accompanied by the stick drumming style in contrast to the hand drumming style that usually accompanies the Tumenggung dance.

The masks for the two dances are also different. Like the Panji mask, the Patih mask has only the upper teeth showing (closed upon the lower lip) whereas the Tumenggung mask has the upper teeth showing in an open-mouth expression (like Pamindo and Rummyang). Thus, the Patih and Tumenggung dances in a sense contrast with the Rummyang and Pamindo dances—in Slamgit the Pamindo dance has become two dances, while everywhere, but Losari, the Patih and the Tumenggung dances have been condensed into one.

Compared to the two dances described previously, the Patih dance, and the Tumenggung and Jinggaanom dances to be described below, display more similarities with the *tayub* and *kursus* dances.¹¹ Indeed the Patih dance, in the section before the mask is worn, is often mixed or even replaced with *kursus* dance, since both styles of dance are accompanied by the same structure of music—the simplest and most common form, *rèngong*. The dancer can easily mix other movement styles and improvisation since the musical structure is not as complicated as in other dances. Many topèng dancers told me that the Patih or Tumenggung dance is more “enjoyable” to perform since “you can go anywhere.”

The other interesting feature of the Patih or, for those who don’t distinguish them, the Tumenggung dance is the very distinctive costume. The dancer wears a collar (*kelambi kerah*) underneath a topèng shirt and bow tie, and a *bendo* or *iket* hat with a *pèci* (visor) on it instead of the *topèng sobrah*.¹² In Gegesik, however, (at least for Mutinah) and perhaps in

several other places in the past, the Patih dancer still wears the regular topèng costume and changes to this special costume for the Tumenggung dance only.

Tumenggung and Jinggaanom

The scene portraying Tumenggung and Jinggaanom is the only dance that has a clearly definable story. Tumenggung Magangdiraja is sent by the King of Bawarna to capture the giant Jinggaanom.¹³ Jinggaanom is of Chinese descent, and is also a regent (sometimes called Tumenggung Jinggaanom) of Jongjola.¹⁴ Since he feels that he is able to manage and to develop the country by himself, he wants to be fully independent.¹⁵ This infuriates the King who sends Tumenggung Magangdiraja to attack him. In their meeting, Jinggaanom argues that Jongjola is indeed its own country despite generations of rule under Bawarna.

The style of the Tumenggung dance is similar to the Patih dance. The dancer wears a costume with a collar, bow-tie and visor as described above,¹⁶ and is accompanied by the hand drumming technique. The Tumenggung mask, however, for those who still distinguish it from the Patih mask, is quite distinct. The overall shape is very close to the Patih mask, but its mouth is open and wider like the Rummyang mask, yet larger. I have seen only two Tumenggung masks with topèng groups since most don’t differentiate between Patih and Tumenggung. One was painted white and had a moustache made of human hair, with both ends loose and untied so it spread out naturally (*jebresan*), unlike the Patih mask moustache that is almost perfectly round. The other mask was painted dark orange and didn’t have a moustache since it was no longer in use. Kandeg’s style of Tumenggung masks, however, has a neat moustache made of leather with a coma-shaped end pointed upwards.

The Jinggaanom character, on the other hand, is rather ambiguous. First, in all areas, except Losari, Jinggaanom is danced by the bodor as a comical character. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the dance, when the dancer has no mask on, we often can’t tell whether the clown is dancing an interlude, a comic scene, or a portrayal of Jinggaanom. Secondly, the Jinggaanom mask is a giant mask with big bulging eyes, a short, round nose, a wide open mouth with big teeth, and a thick, real-hair moustache often spread out in all directions. It is comparable to a *buta alas* (forest giant) in the wayang story, as opposed to a *buta pangkat* (dignitary giant) or *buta raja* (king giant). At the same time, the bodor also wears a bodor costume and headdress so that Jinggaanom doesn’t look at all like a chief or regent (*tumenggung*) of a region. However, in Losari, Jinggaanom is not played by the bodor but by another dancer in the troupe who wears a costume more befitting a chief—a *bendo* headdress, *krodong* and *sodèr* scarfs (almost like the dress of a *dalang topèng*), on top of his everyday dress. Moreover, the Losari style Jinggaanom is accompanied by a clown servant played by the bodor.

In all styles the Jinggaanom and Tumenggung fight

is a very comical affair. In the first instance, where the bodor plays both figures, the alternation between the clown and Jinggananom is quite unique; besides the comical scene he often transforms his partners (dalang and narrator) into their own "real-life" figures.¹⁷ The bodor usually invokes this "transformation" when he feels that the scene was not fair (for example, when Tumenggung's words were too rough or hit too closely to home, or when Tumenggung actually hurt himself physically during the fight). The bodor will open his mask to protest and often complain to the audience as well. Of course, at the end of the scene Tumenggung wins the battle.¹⁸

Klana

The Klana dance is the most dynamic of all topèng dances. It is the most "strong," (*gagah*) of the dances and is even considered coarse, wild, or rude. Considering the progression of the characters in a topèng performance that begins with the refined character of Panji, it seems logical that the Klana dance indeed was "designed" to be the last. The dance is also called Rahwana—the evil figure of the Ramayana epic, often pronounced Ruana or Rewana—since both stories share similar attributes; a greedy king falls in love with a beautiful princess and wife of the hero (Panji in the case of the Klana dance, and Rama in the case of the Rahwana dance). Of course, Klana never gets what he wants and eventually loses in battle. So from this perspective, and because of the course nature of the character, no one would choose to be Klana or Rahwana. However, the Klana dance remains most people's favorite scene. It is one of the most spectacular and popular dances in all styles of topèng, not just in Cirebon, but throughout Java.

In topèng performances in Cirebon today, the Klana dance is usually performed for somewhere between forty-five minutes to two hours. However, the dancer will never stop if the audience is still enthusiastically watching and continues to *tawur* (throw money or cigarettes to the dancer). The popularity of the Klana dance varies from one region to another, but it is generally the highlight of a performance; many people come only to watch this section. In the area of Gunungsari in the region of Indramayu, people approach the stage during the Klana dance and, making a vow for their little children, will ask the dalang to bestow a mantra upon the child or even dance while carrying the child.¹⁹

The Klana mask also has the most variable *wanda* (moods): *barong*, big and wild, *golèk*, small but fierce, *wringut*, mad and frightening, and *dodos*, big, wild, but rather "stupid" looking. These *wanda* are seldom known by the general audience, but most dancers seriously consider the mood of their masks. All Klana masks, however, have big open eyes (not as big as Jinggananom, but bigger than Tumenggung), a very long, forward-pointing nose, an open mouth with no lower teeth, a round-ended mustache made of real hair, and a *jamang* (head ornament, headdress) across its forehead.

Dance Structure

As I mentioned previously, there are relatively few standardized terms for the various styles of topèng performance. Consequently, it is difficult to talk about technical aspects. Nonetheless, in practice there are general rules or patterns, seldom verbalized, that are followed by everyone. For example, the terms "right" and "wrong" as well as "good" and "bad" are applied frequently when referring to the dance.

I will not describe the details of the dance patterns, but only the parts related to the following discussion on improvisation. Dance structure patterns are shared by all topèng artists throughout the Cirebon region. Although their details and terminologies may vary, the basic characteristics of these patterns are as follows:²⁰

Each dance can be divided into sections according to the "rhythm" of the gamelan; for example, *dodoan* (slow), *tengahan* (medium slow), *kering* (medium fast), and *deder* (fast). The order of performing these sections is always from slow to fast—never the reverse.²¹

In each section there are sequences of movements called *jogèdan* (lit. "dance"), denoted by names such as *jangkung-ilo*, *klépat*, *ngongkrak*, *kènyut*, *incek* and many others. These *jogèdan* are almost always repetitive movements and consist of symmetrical choreography of left and right movement phrases.²²

Sequences of movements, or *alihan*, serve as transitions between the *jogèdan*.²³ These *alihan* can be rather long or very short, but two *alihan* are never performed in a row nor repeated. Thus, they are never symmetrical (i.e. there are no left and right designs).

Besides sharing certain forms or gestures, both *jogèdan* and *alihan* have particular functions in relation to the gamelan structure (i.e., the beats, melody, or gong cycle). It is always possible to shorten or lengthen the *jogèdan* (i.e. to repeat a *jogèdan* for as long as necessary) as long as the following *alihan* occurs in its proper place. Likewise, the order of *jogèdan* in each section is flexible, and traditionally dancers never try to make this order the same.²⁴

Improvisation

Practically speaking, we can define improvisation in topèng to mean that performers set the order and determine the duration of *jogèdan* and *alihan* spontaneously while dancing. However, there is much more involved than that. Perhaps a more appropriate question might be: what does improvisation mean to the dancers, and how do they prepare for it?

The term "improvisation" does not actually exist either in Indonesian or in the regional languages, so its use may be somewhat inappropriate. However, in the urban areas and among intellectuals and scholars, this term has come into popular use in both Indonesian and the regional languages (*improvisasi* or *impropisasi*). Other terms that do exist in Cirebonese related to the idea of improvisation are *jogèdan*, *sekarang*, and *kembangan*.



Topeng Pamindo, Slangit village, Cirebon.

Jogèdan is often used to mean improvisation; probably because, quite simply, the jogèdan are always improvised, and never fixed choreography. Criticizing a dancer by saying that they do not have jogèdan (*langka jogèdané*), means that the dancer does not have an extensive vocabulary of movements, are not creative in improvising, or do not have many *kembangan*.²⁵ Another word for *kembangan*, in wide-spread use the last few decades, is *parèasi* or *prèasi*, from the Dutch *variatie* (variation).

Another word close in meaning to "improvisation" is *saka*. Commonly used by Sundanese speaking people and some Cirebonese, *saka* is a prefix meaning "whatever. . ." For example, *sakainget* means "whatever is remembered," *sakapanggih* means "whatever is found," and *sakarep* means "whatever is wished for or desired." However, unlike the terms for improvisation mentioned above, *saka* often has a disrespectful meaning. The terms *igel saka* (*saka* dance) and *lagu saka* (*saka* song) can mean "a rambling dance or song," with a negative connotation—a concept of improvisation that may be defined as "not trying to remember."

I want to emphasize that there is an aspect of "forgetting" (from the word *saka*) in improvisation, in contrast to the aspect of "remembering" defined above.²⁶ "Setting the order" or "choosing the patterns" could be seen as a selective practice—as an effort to find the best pattern for a given moment from a dancer's existing vocabulary of jogèdan or alihan. For this kind of activity a dancer needs some time to consider or think (i.e. to remember as many patterns as possible). In improvising, however, "choosing" is

less likely to be the case since the dancer doesn't have much time to select. Indeed, most dancers don't seem to try to remember (consciously) his or her vocabulary of patterns. Rather the dancer concentrates on the surrounding (e.g. audience, music, etc.) or even meditates (to possess the spirit of the dance or of the ancestors). The choice that the dancer makes is considered a gift from divine inspiration—or more commonly personal expression—rather than the result of a selective effort. Nevertheless, both aspects of remembering and forgetting exist in improvisation in varying degrees. Which one is the stronger aspect of improvisation is hard to say, and varies from one dancer to another. However, it seems the more accomplished the dancer, the less remembering is involved—a natural phenomenon found in almost every type of activity.

Modality

Of course to be able to improvise, the dancer must know the vocabulary of patterns very well. Knowing the movements is not a function of the mind alone, but of the body as well. Muscles have to recognize and feel the movements without need of conscious direction. Since the movement patterns are closely related to the music of the gamelan, knowing the musical patterns is perhaps as important as knowing the dance. Musical patterns do not exist solely in the mind of the dancer, but are physically internalized. The dancer Diah of Bantarwaru village told me that since she was about seventy she had been having trouble with her ears, but often could not refuse people's requests for her to perform, especially when it was for a spiritual ceremony. When she danced, she could hear only a little of the sound of the drums, *kecrek* (metal plates), and only rarely the *kebluk* (a punctuating instrument similar to, but pitched lower than, the Central Javanese *kethuk*). She said, "Kapokoh lagué wis ana ning jero kéné iki li, bisané isun jogèd kuh!" (It's just because the melody is already in here [pointing to her heart] that I am still able to dance.)

It makes sense that when something is deeply known remembering it can be accomplished without trying. No doubt it takes much time to achieve this, but, once achieved, it is never forgotten. For example, after spending nine years with her husband in Sumatra where she could neither see topèng nor hear gamelan at all, the dancer Sawitri was able to get up on stage and dance upon returning to her home village of Losari. She recalled later that she felt a little stiff at the beginning but was sure that she could do it.

Besides a strong commitment to the achievement of physical skill and technical ability, topèng dancers also must have a strong spiritual conviction. Family genealogies and the invocation of spirits are still intrinsically important aspects of Javanese society. Many artists, especially *dalang wayang* and *dalang topèng*, regularly practice fasting and meditation, even when they no longer do physical practice.²⁷ On the one hand they believe themselves to be fully experienced and knowledgeable, but, on the other, they believe in the

concept of being spiritually "empty" or "clean."

This concept of "emptiness" seems to be very much related to the concept of "forgetting" discussed above. "Fasting," one dancer said, "is simply emptying your body." When the body is empty it is easier to put something in it. On the other hand, if the body is full, nothing can be added. Emptying, in this sense, has the same meaning as "cleansing." The beneficial spirits the dancers wish to invoke, "like" a "clean" body.²⁸ To be empty is to be strong since the spirits invoked will help more than just physical ability.²⁹

To be empty also means to be relaxed. Instead of fixing the mind beforehand, the dancers allow themselves to be sensitive to the time, space, and "vibes," of a performance. Surrendering to the spirit guides the dancer (i.e. making his or her physical body passively "forget" the pattern). This belief in divine inspiration that comes at the very moment the dancer has to perform might be termed improvisation in our society.³⁰

Aesthetics and Emotion

The aesthetic concepts involved in dancing are not only tied to improvisation, but to all aspects of movement. In this final section, I will discuss the dancer's evaluation of other dancers; what kind of dancers are considered to be good, and what kind are not? This is one of the most difficult areas to describe since no dancer ever discussed it clearly with me.

Words often used to criticize or praise a dancer are: *bisa* (to be able), *bener* (right, proper), *prigel* (suitable), *énak* (nice), *bagus* (good, beautiful), and *pinter* (clever). The following are sentences I often heard.³¹

"Bener sih bener, mung durung prigel/énak/bagus." (Their dance is right, but it is not yet suitable/nice/good.)

"Ari bisané sih (u)wis, mung durung prigel/énak/bagus." (They are already able to dance, but not yet suitable/nice/good.)

"Prigelé sih prigel, mung kurang pinter." (Their dance is suitable, but not clever enough.)

"Ari jogèdané sih énak, mung mengkangan-mengknonon bae, langka pariasiné." (Their dancing is nice, but like that again and again with no variation.)

"Ari kuen sih pinter jogèdé." (That person is a clever dancer.)

"Jogèdané bagus/énak temenan, kaya-kaya langka kembaré." (Their dance is very good and without match.)

Even though the terms are sometimes ambiguous, there are basically three different levels of dancers. First, there are those dancers who are considered "bisa" or "bener." Probably they are already able to improvise in a simple way or for an easy part since most dancers start to improvise from the early stages of their studies. However, although they execute the pattern correctly, they do not yet have good control or feeling of movement. The second level of dancers are those who are considered to be "prigel," "énak," or "bagus." These dancers have nice looking

movement and good feeling, but they are not yet creative enough in improvising nor possess an extensive vocabulary of movements. The last level of dancers are those who are referred to as expert (*pinter*) in their knowledge of patterns, dance styles, and improvisation.³²

From the above description it is clear that improvisation is expected of all performers and is very highly valued. Improvisation, indeed, is the most exciting part of the dance. The dancer creates new experiences by spontaneously interpreting the traditional vocabulary, and, in addition, they have more chances to express themselves. The musicians, and especially the drummer, will also be involved in the excitement and lively interaction created. They will have to focus close attention upon the dancer in order to follow the spontaneous choreography. However, although it is through improvisation that a dancer gets a chance to show their ability and creativity, the dance has to be in balance and both look and feel right.

Of all the topèng dancers interviewed only Dasih spoke of the role of emotion in dancing. Speaking in Sundanese she said, "Ari ngibing tèh kudu siga anu geregeteun; geregeteun di dieu yeuh. . . ngarah anu lalajo oge milu geregeteun."³³ (When you dance you should be emotional and full of intensity; emotional here. . . [circling her fingers around her heart] so the audience will also be emotional.) Here we see two concepts illustrated; the first is that Dasih is fully aware that she expresses her emotion through movement for her satisfaction,³⁴ and the second is that the emotion she expresses will affect the mood of the audience by either satisfying or charming them. Hence, the patterns that "spring out" from the dancers when they are improvising are not the result of choosing, rather, a spontaneous decision as part of their expression.

In summary, improvisation in topèng dancing is highly valued, and regarded as the personal "expression," as well as the personal authority of the artist. This personal expression, however, does not stand alone; it is tied to almost every element of the performance. The topèng dance is not a free improvisation, rather it is a structured improvisation with definite rules, a definite vocabulary of movements and styles, and definite musical structures. On the one hand, the musicians follow the dancer's improvisational movements (the good dancer will provide much excitement for the musicians) but, on the other hand, a dancer will always improvise according to the musical framework. In other words, music and dance become an inseparable unit with the same importance for both dancers and musicians. In addition, the audience is also a very important aspect in supporting the dance-music integrity. The audience is not only necessary for witnessing or admiring a good performance, but is directly involved in forming the aesthetic expression—perhaps comparable to the audience at a rock concert: you need the right audience to have a good performance. ▀

Notes

1. Part of this article, including the map, is taken from my Master's thesis "Cirebonese topèng in its social context," Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, 1983; the material is based on data collected during my research in Cirebon, on and off, from 1971 to 1979. Firstly, I would like to hereby acknowledge the significant help of my advisor, Mark Slobin, who gave me valuable ideas, direction, and editorial advice in the completion of that project. Secondly, I would like to thank my wife, Marjie, who has always helped to correct my work since I first started writing in English. Part of this article was also delivered as a paper at the "Mini-Conference: Masks, Puppets, and Performing Objects," at Porter College, University of California at Santa Cruz, November 13, 1988. Some new ideas, added to this article, were inspired by that discussion.

2. The orthography for the regional languages, Cirebonese and Sundanese, is based upon the Indonesian spelling system. However, I differentiate between two "e's." The first (e) is pronounced like the *e* in "mitten," the second (è) as in "set." In addition, there are two consonants in Cirebonese that are not found in the Indonesian language—light "d" and heavy "t"—which are the same as in Central Javanese. I do not distinguish between them, as the difference in Cirebonese pronunciation is not as clear as in Central Java, especially in those areas of more Sundanese influence. Another unique vowel is the Sundanese "eu," pronounced almost like "eu" in the French *bleu*. [Note: To maintain editorial consistency all Javanese terms are rendered in accordance with the orthography employed by Elinor Horne in her *Javanese-English Dictionary*. A differentiation is made between three "e's." The first (e) is pronounced like the *e* in "mitten," the second (è) as in "set," and the last (é) like the *a* in "date." -ED] KD

3. The same phenomenon occurs in Central Java, East Java, and Bali, where the mask drama called "topèng" is only one particular type of mask play.

4. The artists believe that they are descendants of Pangeran Panggung, the son of Sunan Kalijaga and one of the *wali sanga* (nine Islamic saints) of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

5. When the male dancers from the audience in the social dance *tayuban* want to ask for a certain melody (*lagu*) they do so by calling it out by name. However, in a topèng performance, with the exception of the clown, the dancers do not announce the name of the music or dance piece. Instead, the leading musician will perform the introduction of the piece and immediately, or soon thereafter, the other musicians will know what piece to play—even if they don't know the name of the piece. This is not the same for wayang kulit properties where almost every single item has a unique name; for example, the "bamboo nails" used to secure the cloth shadow screen to the banana trunk, are referred to as *placek*, and the "rope" used to tie the screen to the bamboo trunk, is referred to as *pluntur*.

6. *Mindo* and *pamindo* are derived from the word *pindo*.

Mindo means "to do a second (time)," and *pamindo* means "the person who does mindo." The phrase that often appears in the dialogue of wayang kulit and topèng: *ora kapindo gawé* (low Javanese) or *mboten kapingkalih damel* (high Javanese), literally means, "not to have a second chance," or in other words, "yes."

7. Today, topèng groups rarely perform the Panji dance, so the Pamindo dance becomes the first presentation. In the Losari area, even the oldest, most traditional group calls the first dance *Mindo*. Interestingly, the first part of this group's Pamindo dance is similar to the Panji dance elsewhere in the Cirebon region.

8. The word *lanyap* is not commonly used in daily conversation. However, I heard it employed once or twice with the implied meanings "arrogant" or "brave," with rather negative connotations.

9. The traditional topèng performance is more likely to commence at 8:00 AM and last until 5:00 PM.

10. These artists were Kandeg, Mutinah, Carnita, and Bodong (of Mayung, not Krèyo).

11. Both the *tayub* and *kursus* dances are found all over West Java. The *kursus* dance was derived from topèng (more specifically the *Patih* and/or *Tumenggung* dances) and *tayub* dances.

12. This type of headdress is commonly found in many genre of folk performance in Central Java (such as *kuda képang*), and in the West Javanese rod puppet forms *wayang cepak* and *wayang mènak*.

13. In one of the versions, *Tumenggung Magangdiraja* is betrothed to the princess of Bawarna (although the name of the princess is never mentioned). However, this is never mentioned in performance and generally he is known just as a *tumenggung* (regent).

14. The name *Jongjola* could be a corruption of *Jenggala*, the kingdom in the Panji cycle of stories. However, the story and the figure of *Jinggananom* is not related at all to the kingdom of *Jenggala*.

15. The content of the dialogue may possibly hint at propaganda surrounding the Indonesian war of independence. *Jinggananom* says, "This is my own people, my own country; we don't need to be colonized!" However, if this is true, it is interesting to note that *Jinggananom* is on the "left" side, the side usually associated with ogres and giants. Yet in this interpretation he represents the artists and people of Indonesia.

16. So, in this respect, *Tumenggung* symbolizes "the non-Javanese" character, as opposed to *Jinggananom* who wears the clown or "villager" type of costume. However, here we see the problematic situation. Which one represents the Javanese people? *Tumenggung*, on the right, or good, but at the same time colonial side wearing foreign costume; or *Jinggananom* on the left, or bad, but colonized side wearing a village costume?

17. In the dialogue, *Jinggananom* speaks by himself with one hand holding the mask in front of his face, but *Tumenggung* is spoken by a narrator (like the *dalang* in

wayang) while the dancer mimes the narration.

18. This story of Tumenggung and Jinggaanom, one informant said, used to be continued with the Aki-aki ("old men") scene: Kyai Subakrama (Tumenggung's father) on the right side, and Babah Sentingpraya (Jinggaanom's father) from the left. This time, however, Sentingpraya (played by the bodor) wins over Subakrama (played by the dalang). I have never seen this scene myself, but the Aki-aki dance is still performed separately by certain groups, although very rarely. However, the action of Sentingpraya taking revenge against Subakrama is a very common concept in the wayang.

19. When a child is sick, for example, the parents make a vow that whenever that child recovers they will have him or her dance with the dalang topèng. Also quite frequently mothers will bring a sick child to the stage to be cured by the dalang topèng.

20. Consequently, certain terminologies I use here might not have the same meaning, or even be totally unknown to certain artists. It is also important to mention here, that this particular analysis is not from interviews, but rather from observation (i.e. watching a lot of performances, and, of course, from my own practical experience). It was difficult to interview artists about technical aspects. I frequently found that what they said was totally different than what they actually did.

21. The Tumenggung dance sometimes begins with the fast section as an introduction. The Pamindo dance has a more complicated order. In Slangit style, for example, the complete Pamindo dance would start from dodoan *Gaya-gaya*, kering *Gaya-gaya*, deder *Gaya-gaya*, *Kembang Sungsang* (dodoan), dodoan *Rumyang*, kering *Rumyang*, deder *Banyu-banyu* (*Rumyang*), kering *Banyu-banyu*, and ends with deder *Banyu-banyu*. In Ggesik, the order of the Klana dance often goes: dodoan, kering, deder, kering, deder.

22. Surprisingly, my awareness of this symmetric-asymmetric dichotomy arose just recently, from a question posed by Lou Harrison after my talk in Santa Cruz (see note 1).

23. This literally means "transition." This is not a common term, however, I use it here only to make the discussion clearer. Most dancers refer to these sections as *koma* (comma).

24. The first and last jogèdan in a section are usually fixed by each dancer as a cue to the drummer.

25. *Kembangan* comes from the word *kembang* which means "flower." Likewise, *sekar* comes from *sekar*, or "flower" in high level Cirebonese and Javanese. In this context they both mean "embellishment," "ornamentation," or "variation."

26. My realization of this concept was inspired by a discussion with John Pemberton in Ithaca, New York, in October of 1981. One of his points was that in Surakarta there are many gamelan musicians who like to drink before playing.

27. The Javanese attitude in general is that from an early age children are taught to be *prihatin* (solicitous, or

"willing to fast or meditate") in order to become smarter or to receive God's blessing, instead of being taught to eat well to grow up big and strong. In Sundanese the expression, *kuru cileuh kentel peujit* (having skinny "sleep in the corner of the eyes" and thick intestines), and in Javanese *cegah dahar lawan guling* (avoid eating and the bolster [pillow]) both mean "eat and sleep less."

28. When I began studying dance with Dasih I had to be *tawajuh*, that is given a bath by my teacher with a bowl of water and flowers while she recited mantras. The sarong that I wore in that bathing had to be given away to her; perhaps as a symbol of the "dirt" that was taken out of my body.

29. In 1958, I was in a wayang kulit group with a dalang from Leuweungbata named Raniti. During one of the months, we had about twenty performances, day and night, and twice there were six performances in a row. During this time Raniti was fasting *ngetan* (eating nothing but a little saucer of sticky rice each day) for forty days.

30. In the wayang group it is also quite common that the dalang wayang does not decide what story he will present until he sits before the screen, underneath the wayang lamp, and lets his ancestral spirits decide.

31. This critique is usually addressed to dancers of the same area—including students and young dalang as well as more senior artists. I am not including comments of dancers addressed to dancers from different areas since they generally can not appreciate other dance styles. The best dancer from the southern Cirebon area, for example, would perhaps not even be considered by those from the north, and vice versa.

32. There are additional categories besides these three that also come from the comments. For example the comment, "Jogèdan apa kuené, beli ngalor beli ngidul." (What sort of dance is that, neither to the north nor to the south), is made when a dance "is just rambling." When a dancer fools around too much and mixes styles, others may comment that, "éman-éman, pepetané prigel temenan; jogèdané, ngamprak-ngamprak sakarep isun." (It is a pity, the movement is very nice but the dance goes everywhere, wherever he feels like it).

33. *Geregeteun* in this sense means being emotional and full of intensity in both madness and love.

34. I believe that every dancer does, yet no one else ever expressed it verbally.