



## THE ROLE OF THE PEACOCK DANCE IN STRENGTHENING CULTURAL IDENTITY FROM A FINE ARTS PERSPECTIVE

Yuliyati<sup>1✉</sup>, Indah Silvianingrum<sup>2</sup>, Hendeweh Dorcas Hunpegan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>PGSD Universitas Muria Kudus, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Language, Arts and Social Science Education, Lagos State University, Nigeria

✉[202333235@std.umk.ac.id](mailto:202333235@std.umk.ac.id)

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### Abstract

Merak Dance is a traditional dance from West Java that has deep cultural meaning. First created by Rd. Tjetje Somantri in 1955, this dance was then perfected by Irawati Durban Ardjo in 1965 to introduce Indonesian art to the international scene. This article examines how the Merak dance can strengthen Indonesia's cultural identity, focusing on the relationship between dance and visual arts. This study aims to reveal how visual elements such as costumes, colors, and movements in the Merak dance play a role in preserving and strengthening the nation's cultural identity. The method used is a qualitative narrative research that examines the relationship between dance and visual arts and their impact on the preservation of cultural heritage. The results of the study show that the Merak dance, with its distinctive costumes, colors, and movements, contains deep symbolism that can inspire works of art. In addition, the relationship between dance and visual arts can motivate the younger generation to appreciate and maintain cultural traditions more. In conclusion, the Merak dance plays an important role in strengthening Indonesia's cultural identity and serves as an effective medium for preserving and developing cultural values amidst the development of the modern era.

**Keywords:** *West Java Peacock Dance, Visual Forms of Costumes, Estetic*

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional dance is a form of performing arts that is passed down from generation to generation in a particular society or community (Aziz, 2021). This dance has strong cultural and symbolic values and is closely related to traditional customs, rituals, or ceremonies. Traditional dance movements and styles generally reflect the life of the community, beliefs,

and cultural beauty of the area (Wardani et al., 2023). Each region in Indonesia has various types of traditional dances that are influenced by the social, cultural, and historical background of its people (Sukihana & Kurniawan, 2018).

Traditional Indonesian dance has very deep roots in Indonesian culture and history (Mikaresti & Mansyur, 2022). This dance has existed since the kingdom era, and is used in various contexts such as

traditional ceremonies, religious rituals, entertainment performances, and state events. Many traditional dances that have developed in Indonesia have close ties to mythology, folklore, or depictions of community life, such as the Merak Dance from West Java. Several traditional dances were created by dance artists in the 20th century, aiming to introduce and preserve traditional culture.

The people of West Java are known as a religious community, thanks to their rich cultural heritage and high traditional values. One example of a famous culture is the Merak Dance. The Merak Dance is one of the most popular traditional dances in Indonesia, especially originating from West Java. This dance is not only famous in its area of origin, but also throughout Indonesia and even abroad since around 1955. Apart from being a performance, the Merak Dance also reflects the richness of the culture and identity of the community. With beautiful movements, colorful costumes, and deep meanings, this dance is a powerful means of expressing aesthetic and cultural values. The Merak Dance was created in 1955 by artist Raden Tjetje Somantri, and was later developed by Irawati Durban Ardjo in 1965. Although there are significant differences between Tjetje's and Irawati's versions of the Merak Dance, both in terms of costume and movement, Irawati still takes inspiration from Tjetje's work (Kartiyani, 2018)

The dances by R. Tjetje Soemantri have made a major contribution to the development of performing dance in West Java. Tjetje Somantri's work is an important milestone in the history of the development of female dance, which was previously dominated by male dance. The characteristics of her dance style make it unique and distinguish it from others. The style in art shows complexity that reflects synthesis, so that there is a correlation and consistency (Simbolon, 2017).

The Merak Dance, created by Irawati Durban, is highly commendable for its role not only in preserving and conserving the

new creative dance from R. Tjetje Soemantri which has enriched the Sundanese dance genre, but also in developing it to be more elegant, dynamic, attractive, and beautiful (Mulyani, 2014).



Figure 1: Peacock Dance

Source

<https://images.app.goo.gl/W2KbpTrRyPkeZnM79>

The peacock, with its beautiful feathers, is the inspiration for the Peacock Dance. The beauty of the male peacock is clearly visible when it spreads its tail feathers. Many people in Indonesia mistakenly assume that this dance depicts the life of the female peacock, when in fact it is the male who shows off the beauty of his tail. The male performs movements that resemble a gentle dance to show his charm, so that the female is attracted and willing to mate. This movement is the inspiration for the creation of the Peacock Dance, which reflects elegance and attractiveness as its characteristics. In the Peacock Dance, the gentle and dynamic movements depict the behavior of the peacock when attracting the attention of its partner with its charming tail. Through this movement, the dancer not only expresses physical beauty but also creates a narrative rich in symbolism.

Merak Dance as a representation of Sundanese cultural identity through the perspective of fine arts and aesthetics of movement and he examined how visual elements (costumes, make-up, and properties) and movements in Merak Dance play a role in strengthening and

maintaining Sundanese cultural identity (Wardani et al., 2023). The research conducted by (Hidayah, F., & Alif, A. (2020) entitled *The Role of Merak Dance in Preserving Sundanese Culture in the Modern Era: A Qualitative Analysis*, namely how Merak Dance remains relevant in the modern era and its role in introducing and preserving Sundanese culture. This article uses a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of society and dancers on the existence of the dance in contemporary life (Hidayah, F., & Alif, A. 2020).

The presence of dance in human life can have different functions depending on their respective needs. In the past, the Merak Dance was a welcoming dance for state guests of honor or important guests at that time. However, as time goes by, the Merak Dance can be performed at various events, such as wedding ceremonies, art performances, festivals, receiving distinguished guests, and so on.

This study aims to examine the role of the Merak Dance in strengthening Sundanese cultural identity and explore the visual and aesthetic elements contained in this dance, including the movements, costumes, and accompanying gamelan music. Through this study, it is hoped that readers can understand more deeply the meaning, aesthetic value, and symbolism contained in the Merak Dance.

In addition, this article is expected to contribute to the preservation of the Merak Dance as part of Indonesia's cultural identity and encourage efforts to maintain its sustainability amidst the flow of globalization.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative narrative method to examine the role of the peacock dance in strengthening Indonesian cultural identity, especially through the perspective of fine arts. The qualitative narrative method is an approach that can identify data in depth through individuals or groups to find out the object being studied.

Through this approach, researchers can collect rich narratives from various sources, including dancers, artists, and communities involved in or influenced by the Peacock Dance. This method is suitable because performing arts and fine arts often involve deep personal experiences and social contexts.

This study uses a qualitative method in narrative form designed to explore the role of the Merak Dance as a cultural expression that strengthens the identity of the Sundanese people through the perspective of fine arts (Alfanado, 2022). With the aim of understanding how this dance functions not only as entertainment, but also as a medium for cultural identity. By following several steps including as shown in Figure 2:

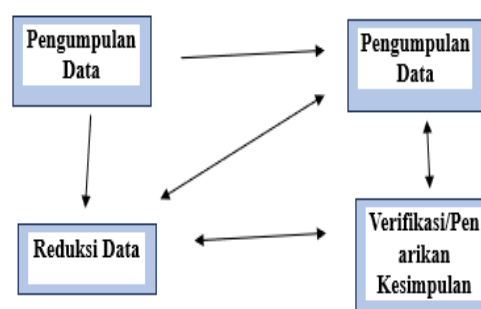


Figure 2: Research Data Analysis Model

The narrative qualitative research method is used because it is appropriate because to find out in-depth information about the peacock dance, this dance also has a strong and distinctive dance instrument, that is why this peacock dance is the object of writing. The results of the study show that the Peacock Dance has a number of important roles. First, it functions as a strong cultural representation, reflecting the values of the Sundanese people. Through every movement and costume, the Peacock Dance conveys a narrative rich in tradition and history. Participants expressed how proud they felt when performing this dance, feeling connected to their ancestors (Rizkiyani & Sari, 2022).

Community involvement in practice

and performance creates a sense of togetherness and collective identity. Dancers and audiences feel a strong social bond, where each individual contributes to maintaining this living tradition. Merak Dance also serves as an educational tool. Many trainers share the importance of teaching cultural values to the younger generation. By learning this dance, children not only learn the movements, but also understand the deeper meaning of their culture. In this way, it is hoped that readers can better appreciate the complexity and beauty of the interaction between visual arts and dance (Wibowo & Hidayat, 2022).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Process of Making the West Java Peacock Dance

Merak Dance is a traditional dance originating from West Java, Indonesia. This dance depicts the beauty and elegance of the peacock, and reflects local culture. The process of creating the Merak Dance involves several important stages, starting from the basic concept and idea, development, to training and performance.

The process of creating the Merak Dance begins with a basic idea that is usually inspired by the beauty of the peacock. Choreographers and dance artists design a concept that includes appropriate movements, costumes, and music. In this stage, it is important to understand the characteristics of the peacock, such as color, wing movements, and graceful attitudes (Rendica & Nuriawati, 2022).

Once the concept is established, the next step is to create the choreography. The choreography of the Merak Dance combines various movements that imitate the movements of the peacock, such as opening and closing the wings, spinning, and stepping gracefully. These movements are arranged in such a way that they are harmonious with the rhythm of the accompanying gamelan music (Hidayat, 2020).

Music is an important element in the Merak Dance. Usually, the music used is gamelan, which consists of musical instruments such as gongs, drums, and saron. The process of selecting and arranging music is carried out simultaneously with choreography. This aims to ensure that the dancer's movements are in sync with the rhythm of the music, creating a beautiful unity. After all the elements are ready, the next stage is practice. Dancers are trained to master the movements and understand the characters they must play. Practice is carried out routinely, and the choreographer often evaluates to ensure that each movement is performed perfectly.

This process also involves practicing together with musicians so that the dancers and music can collaborate well. The harmony between music and movement in the Merak Dance not only enhances its aesthetic appeal but also reinforces the expression of the dance's narrative and emotional nuances. The gamelan's dynamic tempo and tonal variations serve as cues for changes in expression, energy, and gesture, guiding the dancer through scenes that symbolize the elegance and grace of a peacock.

This musical-dance coordination requires a high level of sensitivity from both dancers and musicians, fostering a deep mutual understanding that is cultivated through continuous joint rehearsals.

After going through various stages, the Merak Dance is ready to be performed. This performance is not only performed indoors, but is also often performed in cultural events, festivals, or traditional ceremonies (Hartanto, 2023). The Merak Dance performance is always accompanied by a lively atmosphere, where dancers and musicians collaborate to present an amazing work of art (Ni Luh et al., 2022). The wide range of performance settings for the Merak Dance demonstrates its adaptability and cultural significance within various social contexts. Whether

performed on a formal stage or in an open public space, the dance consistently captivates audiences with its vibrant costumes, dynamic movements, and harmonious music. Its presence in festivals and ceremonies also serves as a medium for cultural preservation, fostering appreciation among younger generations and introducing local traditions to broader communities, including international audiences. This widespread exposure highlights the Merak Dance as not just a performance, but a living cultural heritage.

Analysis of Visual Beauty in the Merak Dance as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Analysis of Visual Beauty in the Merak Dance

Elements	Visual	Aesthetic
Shape	Dynamic resembling a peacock.	Gives a graceful and elegant impression.
Ornament	Peacock feather motif, geometric, sequins.	Strengthen the character and beauty of the costume.
Material	Satin, tile, sequins, synthetic fur.	Adds shine and luxury to the costume.
Color	Dominated by green, blue, and gold.	Symbolizes the beauty and elegance of the peacock.

### Costumes and Visual Aesthetics in the Merak Dance

The Merak Dance has several important parts, namely, make-up, movements, and costumes. All of these parts have a very big effect on the Merak Dance performance (Hidayat, 2020). If one of these parts is forgotten or not done

optimally, the impression displayed by the dancer will not be conveyed perfectly, and what the audience gets will not be well received. Irawati was not alone in making the Merak Dance costume, she was assisted by several people close to her, one of whom was Drs. Barli Sasmitawinata. Barli is a Viatikara costume designer who collaborates with Irawati to depict the costumes in Irawati's concept of thought. In addition to Barli, Irawati was also assisted by Mrs. Kusumah who has been her own sister-in-law since 1963.

This visual aesthetic creates a profound experience for the audience, evoking a sense of awe and pride in the cultural heritage. Fine arts play an important role in enriching the visual experience of the peacock dance. The brightly colored and ornate costumes create a visual appeal created by R. Tjetje Somantri in 1955 and displayed at the Asia Africa Conference event. In addition, the use of color, shape, and texture in costumes and dance movements provides a new dimension that strengthens the cultural narrative. These elements are a source of inspiration for artists, who often interpret and reflect elements of the peacock dance in their artwork. The following are the parts of the peacock dance costume, including:

#### Siger (Crown)

The siger or crown worn by the dancer has a shape that resembles a peacock's head, equipped with a crest on the top similar to a peacock's crest. This siger is equipped with a mute that extends under its beak, so that when dancing, there are moving parts. The shape of the siger in the Merak Dance is not flat, but curved like a peacock's feathers, which adds to the aesthetic appeal. The material used to make the siger is cowhide that is carved and painted in gold. In addition, the siger is also decorated with sequins of various colors, such as green, white, and gold.

The design of the siger not only serves as a decorative element but also functions



as a symbolic representation of the peacock's majesty and elegance, which is central to the Merak Dance. Every detail on the siger from the curved crest to the shimmering sequins enhances the illusion of a living peacock when the dancer moves gracefully. The choice of colors and reflective materials is intentional, aiming to catch the stage lights and draw the audience's attention to the dancer's head movements, which play a crucial role in conveying emotion and character. This thoughtful integration of form and function underscores the artistic craftsmanship involved in traditional Indonesian dance costumes.



Figure 3: Siger (Crown) of the Peacock Dance

<https://images.app.goo.gl/g9tLNcnBhgxyHBF56>

### Shoulder Strain

The shoulder strap has a straight line strap that functions to tie the dancer's arms. On the front, the shoulder strap is designed to resemble a peacock, with a shape consisting of curved lines and decorative elements. The shape of the peacock on the shoulder strap is made simpler so that it is not too complicated. The material used is cowhide that is shaped according to needs. The colors used include dark green, light green, white, yellow, and golden yellow.



Figure 4: Shoulder Strain

<https://images.app.goo.gl/M1Zvoi7zTeoMNTTrM8>

### Tube Top

Straight and curved lines become one in the shape of the kemben. The shape of the kemben follows the shape of the dancer's body from the top of the chest to the waist. The basic material for making kemben is black velvet, the color black itself has the meaning of sturdiness, uprightness, and strength. The use of kemben or the middle part of the body is the strongest part compared to the hands or feet. In addition to black, kemben has a golden color found in the form of a peacock feather motif that is neatly arranged on the kemben. The arrangement of peacock feathers has a large shape at the ends of the kemben and narrows in the middle or stomach. This arrangement aims to make the kemben make the dancer's body look slimmer when dancing (Rosilawati et al., 2023).



Figure 5: Kemben and its dancers

<https://images.app.goo.gl/d78grb7baUQ29pL76>

### Tail

The tail shape of the Peacock dance costume is basically a semicircle consisting of curved lines, straight lines, and very decorative wavy lines. The tail on the

costume is a representation of the beauty of the Peacock's tail. The tail of the Peacock Dance costume consists of an arrangement of Peacock tail motifs. The basic color of the tail is light green which means prosperity and coolness, then added with Peacock tail feather accents which have red, blue, dark green, yellow colors like Peacock tail feathers. The use of the tail, the back is placed on the dancer's back so as not to interfere with the dance movements. The length of the tail reaches the ankles, so that it is more effective when dancing and not trampled on. At the end of the tail of the costume is given a small rope to make it easier for the dancer to spread his tail.



Figure 6: Peacock Dance Tail

<https://images.app.goo.gl/wR6Dc62fgyBiw8Lc6>

### Kacih

Kacih or commonly called apok is a costume that aims to cover the chest of the dancer. The shape of the kacih consists of curved lines that form a circle and is used from front to back. The basic material of the kacih is the same as the basic material of the belt and kemben, namely velvet. Kacih has a black base color like a kemben and belt which means sturdy, upright, and strong.



Figure 7: Kacih Peacock Dance

<https://images.app.goo.gl/okhigjhUMM>

### [8evnvF9](#)

### Shawl and Sinjang

The shawl has straight lines that form a rectangle. The basic shape of the shawl is like a sinjang but unlike the sinjang, the shawl is folded lengthwise so that it has piles of fabric that will widen when pulled by the dancer. The color of the shawl is a gradation of dark green at the ends of the shawl and light green in the middle. Green means fertility and coolness. The sinjang cloth is part of the Merak Dance costume which is shaped like a skirt.

Sinjang consists of straight lines that form a rectangle, with the front having small ruffles. This design is commonly used in classic Sundanese and Javanese clothing, including bridal wear, with the aim of keeping the wearer's steps looking graceful and ethical. The colors chosen for the sinjang are light green and dark green, which symbolize fertility and coolness, and reflect the dominant color of the peacock's tail feathers. The sinjang is decorated with a peacock feather motif that is neatly arranged and elongated, similar to that on the peacock's tail. The aesthetic elements in this section can be seen from the peacock tail feather motif which uses shiny threads in golden yellow, red, green, and blue, made very neatly.



Figure 8: Shawl and Sinjang of the Merak Dance

<https://images.app.goo.gl/ipbfDn2S89j3B2Zu8>

### Philosophy of the techniques used in the Peacock Dance

The elegant and graceful

movements of the peacock dance also have deep meaning. Each movement is created with the aim of expressing emotions and stories. For example, the movement of opening the arms wide symbolizes welcoming and friendliness, while the movement of turning the body depicts joy and enthusiasm. The harmony between movement and music creates a harmonious visual and auditory experience, making the audience feel the depth of the performance. By understanding the visual elements and meaning contained in the peacock dance, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be obtained regarding the interaction between dance and fine arts and its impact on cultural preservation. The harmony between movement and music creates a harmonious visual and auditory experience, making the audience feel the depth of the performance. By understanding the visual elements and meaning contained in the peacock dance, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be obtained regarding the interaction between dance and fine arts and its impact on cultural preservation.

### **Development of the Preservation of the Merak Dance Art**

The Merak Dance was first introduced in the 1950s by Raden Tjetje Soemantri, a dance artist from Cianjur. This dance was inspired by the graceful and colorful movements of the peacock. Over time, the Merak Dance has undergone a number of changes in terms of choreography and costumes in order to adapt to the times.

In West Java, many art schools and cultural institutions provide Merak Dance training programs. Through this education, the younger generation is taught to understand and master dance movements and the cultural values contained therein. Merak Dance is often performed in various art festivals, both at the local, national, and international levels. These performances provide an

opportunity for dancers to demonstrate their skills while introducing this art to the wider community. In addition, there are many art communities that focus on preserving Merak Dance. These organizations play an important role in organizing performances, workshops, and activities aimed at preserving and promoting this dance.

With various efforts made, it is hoped that the Merak Dance can continue to be preserved and developed despite changing times. This is important not only for cultural preservation, but also as part of the nation's identity.

### **CONCLUSION**

Merak Dance is a type of dance (performance). This dance represents the beauty of the peacock bird. The first person to create the Merak Dance was Rd. Tjetje Somantri in 1955. Then the Merak Dance Irawati Durban Ardjo recreated in 1965 with the aim of Peacock Dance has a significant role in strengthening Indonesian culture. Through the symbolism contained in the movements and costumes, the peacock dance is not only an art form, but also an effective medium for conveying deeper cultural meanings. Through rich visual elements, this dance not only creates beauty, but also provides deep meaning for the community. The interaction between dance and fine arts creates space for artists to interpret and preserve culture, while arts education helps the younger generation to recognize and appreciate their cultural heritage. Thus, the peacock dance is not only a beautiful art form, but also an important means of strengthening sustainable cultural identity. The interaction between dance and fine arts enriches the cultural experience of the community, while arts education helps ensure that this cultural heritage remains alive and thriving. Therefore, it is important for the community and the younger generation to continue to preserve and develop the peacock dance in a



modern context, so that Indonesia's cultural identity remains strong and relevant.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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