



The Past and present; story of Barong Bangkung

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ABSTRACT

On *Manis Galungan*, the day after Balinese commemorated the triumph of *Dharma* against *Adharma*, A group of festively gamelan chimes in accompanying *Barong Bangkung*, to perform a ritual to ward off negative energy and plague in the village through *Ngelawang*. *Barong Bangkung* is an art of dance staged in groups. It consists of approximately twelve people. The dancers are usually boys aged 12-17 years old. Balinese is a *cosmocentric* society, where they believe *Bangkung* or *Sow*, as a manifestation of Lord Shiva in protecting the earth. In its development, the art

of *Barong Bangkung*, as well as *Ngelawang*, develop not only limited to the art of sacred dance, but also as the performing art. The society conducts *Ngelawang* by using *Barong Bangkung* or another holy figure as an expression to worship The God Almighty. As a performing art, the artist does not present a temple's relic, but a custom-made *Barong Bangkung*. Usually, the apprentices of the Local school of art seize the opportunity to show their abilities in dance by doing 'Ngelawang' on a tourist's site. Besides to practice their skills, some make it a way to earn some money.

Keyword: Barong Bangkung, Ngelawang, Ritual, Performing art

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INTRODUCTION

On *Manis Galungan*, the day after Balinese commemorated the triumph of *Dharma* against *Adharma*, it is time for her to show up!. A group of festively gamelan chimes in accompanying its adventure, to visit every corner of the village as well as the neighborhood. It does visit the house one by one, then continue to perform a mythical, terrific yet entertaining dance, a symbol of duty. She is a blessing in disguise. Her responsibilities are to protect people, condemn the evil spirit, and ward off plague in the village. She will always be waited, primarily by children. When local shout *Citah!! citah!! citah!!*, it is without hesitation, will start to chase, tease and play with them. In return, the local children will loyally accompany her until it finishes its journey on the day. She is a mythological creature, a four-legged beast with black fur and a wild boar resemblance face. Its name is *Barong Bangkung*.

Barong Bangkung is an art of dance staged in groups. It consists of approximately twelve people. The dancers are usually boys aged 12-17 years old; however, occasionally adult take part in the performance as well. Two dancers are assigned to wear the *Barong Bangkung* costume and become a central figure in the show. The other two act as the companion. They may play as monkeys, *Celuluk*, *Rangda* or other goblin figures. The rest of the team serve as gamelan instrument player to accompany the dance. The distinguishing feature of this art

is the musical instrument they use; *Gending* or *Beleganjur*. It is intended to cheer all citizens with joy and spirit in celebrating the victory of *Dharma* (goodness) against *Adharma* (evil) by the meaning of *Galungan* and *Kuningan* days.²

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

According to Kartodirdjo as cited by Seramasara, as a *cosmocentric* societies, the community considers humanity and ancient phenomenon as a reduction of natural events. Thus, humans are subject to nature. Nature plays an essential role in determining the human's life. Hence they worship nature by various rituals, and the performing art is one of the media to worship.³ The embodiment of animals 'Bangkung' or *Sow*, is regarded as the manifestation of Lord Shiva. The society parades the beast in the form of *Barong* to the five corners of the village,⁴ as a way to worship the creator.

Historically, when we take a look back into the past, the concepts of *barong* are originated from the Chinese *Barong* 'Lion' that appeared in the Tang dynasty. It appeared around the 7th century until the 10th century. At that time, the *barong* was a substitute for the lion show, which staged on circus; they traveled from one to other place and followed festivals to raise funds. Then, by Balinese associated with Buddhas, similar concepts are adapted for religious ceremonies.⁵ As time goes by, the shape of *barong* experienced significant developments.

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Figure 1 A mythological creature, a four-legged animal with black hair and a wild boar resemblance face. Its name is Barong Bangkung¹

There are several traditional types of Barong known by Balinese. The form of barong strongly influenced by the region and its custom. There are Barong *Ket* or Barong *Keket*, Barong *Landung*, Barong *Macan* (Tiger), Barong *Kedingkling*, Barong *Gajah* (Elephant), Barong *Asu* (Dog), Barong *Brutuk* and Barong *Bangkung*.

Balinese believe Barong as a mythical creature, a representation of God, to protect the universe from Goddess Durga's wrath. In Bali, there are some versions of legend that mentioned the origin of the Barong. One famous folktale said that it all started a long time ago when Lord Shiva (Bhatara Guru) cursed Dewi Uma into a ferocious demon named Durga Dewi and banished her to the earth. Driven by her anger, Dewi Durga meditated, channeling all her might to create countless plagues to make every living thing on the planet perish as vengeance. The Trinity gods or well known as *Tri Murthi*; Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu, and Lord Shiva, knew about Durga's intention. To defend the world from catastrophe, they descended to the earth and transformed their appearances. Lord Brahma transformed into *Topeng Bang*; Lord Vishnu shifted as *Telek*, then lord Shiva shapeshifted as Barong. By using these forms, the gods fought Durga Dewi, restored the universe and saved all beings. Therefore, according to the story, Balinese sought to mimic and recreate *Topeng Bang*, *Telek*, and Barong as a representation of gods, then started practicing *Nyolahang* as well as *Ngelawang* to protect their area from plagues or evil spirits.⁶ Another mythology considers Barong as *Banaspati Raja*, the guardian angel. Despite different background stories about barong, all the tales describe Barong as the four-



Figure 2 Balinese believe Barong as a mythical creature, a representation of God, to protect the universe from Goddess Durga's wrath⁷

legged beast that resembles lion in shape.

NGELAWANG IN THE PAST

Barong Bangkung is a type of barong that commonly used in *Ngelawang*. The term *Ngelawang* comes from the word *Lawang* which means door, then gets nasalization (N-) which morph into *Nge-* then becomes *Ngelawang*. Its definition is 'to visit entry' (the prefix in Balinese is the same as the prefix in Indonesian).² Two dancers will be wearing a barong costume. The costume is made from durable yet elastic woven bamboo framework. Then, the frame covered by using a black robe or dark colored velvet fabric. Ornaments such as a crown, hairs, bell are added to emphasize its majestic figure. One dancer will be assigned to act as the barong's head, and the other one, on duty to dance the back of the barong. They must have good coordination, to make the Bangkung's character and gesture as a whole, natural move.

Initially, *ngelawang* is a sacred ritual activity which some refers to it as a magical rite. It is categorized as a *Tari Wali* or holy dance performance



Figure 3 Religious concepts support this tradition, and society holds it with confidence⁸



Figure 4 As Tari Balih Balihan or Performing art, ngelawang is a performance that is serious yet may be enjoyed at ease.¹²

based on its religious purpose.⁹ Religious concepts support this tradition, and society holds it with confidence. Ngelawang means wandering the environment. The people will carry the sacred objects, or better known by the term *tapakan*, such as Barong, Rangda or other types of the relic, out of temples. The locals will carry the *tapakan* on a particular day; then they would take a tour around the *Banjar* area or the village. It is a representation of giving unseen protection (Niskala) to all the people who live in the region. In fact, people are eagerly waiting for their *tapakan* to visit their environment. The community would welcome his lord with a

reverent. Sometimes, when the hair of the *tapakan* accidentally falls off, commonly *barong*, Residents will race to gather the scattered fur. The inhabitants believed that the scattered hairs are both a talisman and a gift from the creator to heal all the diseases they suffered.

NGELAWANG NOWADAYS

In its journey, the art of Barong Bangkung, as well as ngelawang, develop not only limited to the art of sacred dance, but also as the performing art. The artist uses a custom-made Barong Bangkung not a relic from the temple. In some tourist areas, we may see the appearance of Barong Bangkung, staged in the form of street performance. The dancers are none other than students of Art schools nearby. They take advantage of the moment to train their confidence and skills in dancing, to get used appearing in public. Dance practice in the crowd will make them familiar with the spectator; thus, someday, they would be able to perform it well as service (*Ngayah*) during religious ceremonies. Some of them also do it to fill their spare time after school,¹⁰ or to look for extra pocket money.¹¹

As a *Tari Balih Balihan* or Performing art, ngelawang is a performance that is serious yet may be experienced at ease. The audience does not have to sit stiffly in their place. They may squat, stand, touch or even being involved together while enjoying the outdoors with the artist. There is almost no distance between the artist and the audience, all melting and merging. The presence of performing arts does not bind by place, space and time.¹³

CONCLUSIONS

As a piece of cultural art, Barong Bangkung gradually developed from time to time. At first, it serves as Tari Wali (Sacred, Ritual dance), however, nowadays, it also acts as Tari Balih Balihan (Performing art). It is staged starting from Manis Galungan until Kuningan Day or on a specific day based on the ceremony of the village's temple. Musical instruments 'Beleganjur' accompanies the performance of Barong Bangkung to visit the neighborhood. The purposes of the art as a ritual to protect the village from negative energy and plague. Also, it serves as a commemoration of the victory of Dharma against Adharma.

As a cosmocentric society, Balinese believe Bangkung or Sow, as a manifestation of Lord Shiva in protecting the earth. The social conduct ngelawang by using Barong Bangkung as an expression to worship The God Almighty. When it is staged as performing art, the artist does not play a temple's relic, but a custom-made Barong

Bangkok. Apprentices of the Local school of art seize the opportunity to present their abilities in dance by doing 'Ngelawang' on tourist's site. Besides to practice their skills, some make it a way to earn some extra money.

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