

When Women are Kings: Cross-Gendered Expression in an All-Female Central Javanese Court Dance-Drama and Its Public Reception

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Abstract

This paper explores the expression of cross-gendered performance in a Javanese traditional dance-drama known as *langendriyan* from the perspectives of performer, movement, costume, and song. It also examines the relation between the circumstances surrounding the genesis of this dance-drama and the expression of cross-gendered performance. Finally, it considers its reception by the artistic community in Surakarta.

Langendriyan is a traditional Javanese dance-drama that was created in the late-19th century and developed at Mangkunegaran, one of two royal palaces in Surakarta, Central Java; it has been performed continually up to the present day. The most distinguishing feature of this dance-drama is that all roles are played by women. Although the cross-gendered performance of the *langendriyan* was validated by its stereotypical and traditionally differentiated “style” of movement and costume, it did not completely follow the “traditional style.” Unlike other traditional Javanese dance forms, in which roles are typecast, in *langendriyan*, beautiful women portray ugly, evil characters. This feature of *langendriyan* symbolically challenges social norms and established hierarchies.

Although the artistry of *langendriyan* has favorably influenced many other forms of the performing arts in Surakarta, its studied disregard for typecasting has often been criticized as being unsuitable and perhaps subversive, especially by the local artistic community, after the Republic of Indonesia achieved independence. This subversion so threatened the local artistic community that *langendriyan*, with its cross-gendered expression, has rarely been seen beyond the confines of Mangkunegaran, where it was originally created. However, a movement has recently begun to rediscover the value of cross-gendered expression in *langendriyan*.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the expression of cross-gendered performance in the Javanese traditional dance-drama known as *langendriyan* from the perspectives of performer, movement, costume, and song, while it examines the relation between the circumstances surrounding the genesis of *langendriyan* and the expression of cross-gendered performance. It also considers the drama’s reception by the artistic community in Surakarta. This paper uses the term “cross-gendered performance” to mean gender crossing by a performer who performs a character of the opposite sex, i.e., a female performing the role of a male character.

Langendriyan was created in the late-19th century and developed at Mangkunegaran, one of two royal palaces in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, and continues to be performed up to the present day. Actually, two forms of *langendriyan* were created almost simultaneously in Yogyakarta and Surakarta, Central Java’s dual capitals at that time, which are only about 60 kilometers apart. The differing circumstances of their origins and formation are, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

In Central Java, there are four royal families, two in Surakarta and two in Yogyakarta. Their palaces were the centers of Javanese culture until the Republic of Indonesia achieved independence in 1945. The palaces competed with each other to create their own styles of arts. Many performing arts such as dance, theatre, *gamelan* music (see below), and shadow puppetry developed and flourished. These art forms did, and still do to some extent, play very important roles in many rituals,

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the education of royal family members, and palace entertainment.

Among these performing arts, *langendriyan* is unique. All the lines of the play are sung in Javanese traditional verse called *tembang*, which is why *langendriyan* was once called Javanese opera. The play's subject matter was taken from the legend of Damarwulan,¹ a heroic tale of East Java in the period of the Majapahit kingdom (from the end of the 13th century to the beginning of the 16th), and it tells of the struggles between the Majapahit kingdom and its vassal state Blambangan. The themes are battle-victory-death, love (romance), and devotion for the king—the center of the world.² The most distinguishing feature of this dance-drama is that all the roles, including a hero and villain, are played by women. In central Javanese courts, it was common for men to play women's roles or men to dance women's dances, but there was no opposite case seen before *langendriyan*.³ *Langendriyan* opened up new roles for female performers in the dance-dramas at the palace and had a significant influence on later dance-dramas and dance pieces.

Although several extensive studies have been made of *langendriyan* by Indonesian researchers (but little yet by foreign researchers, so far as I know) little attention has been given to the expression of cross-gendered performance. Two of the main studies by Indonesian researchers⁴ primarily discuss the history and details of the performances. However, there is no analysis of cross-gendered performance expression and no discussion of why all the performers (dancers)⁵ of *langendriyan* are women. Likewise, there has been no attempt made to discuss the relation between the historical background of *langendriyan* and the expression of cross-gendered performance. The aim of this paper is to explore the points that are missing from the extant research and to examine the influence of this art form on the present-day artistic community in Surakarta. In addition, I believe that this study will add new insights to studies on Javanese performing arts.

There are several studies on gender-crossing in other performing arts. Sociologist Nobutoshi Nakagawa examines the phenomena of male singers singing female songs written in “female language”⁶ and female singers singing male songs written in “male language” in Japanese popular songs.⁷ I take the term “cross-gendered performance” from his paper. Nakagawa defines cross-gendered performance as a cultural convention that involves matching a performer with a character of the opposite sex. He considers that even though the validation of the cross-gendered performance depends on the conservative, tacit understanding of the dichotomy between men and women, the reception by the audience is often characterized by a creative misunderstanding that produces political effects of moving something in regard to the boundary between genders. Christine R. Yano, an American anthropologist, discusses the effect of gender-crossing performance by analyzing the lyrics and singing techniques, costumes, and gestures of the singers in a genre of Japanese popular song called *enka*.⁸ James L. Peacock's study⁹ explores the meaning of transvestite (which reverses categories of sex) and clown (which reverses categories of rank) in contemporary Java. Peacock proposes a scheme in which transvestite and clown, both derived from a classificatory worldview, threaten (and are threatened by) groups with an instrumental worldview, such as revolutionary nationalists and reformist Muslims.

There are many studies on the Takarazuka Revue (Takarazuka Kagekidan), a Japanese all-female musical theater

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1. The legend of Damarwulan is based on *Pakem Wasana* (*Pakem* is the book that contains the outline of the story. *Wasana* means “the last one.”) It was mainly used for *wayang kelitik* (a puppet play that uses thin wooden puppets). It originated in East Java, but became very popular in Central Java by the 17th century (Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java Vol. I: Synopsis of Javanese Literature 900-1900 A.D.*, The Hague: Martinus Nyhoff, 1967, p. 232). It is also called the episode of Ratu Ayu Kuncanawungu.
 2. All palace artwork was dedicated to the kings who were the center of the world before Indonesian independence.
 3. In Yogyakarta, for example, *bedhaya*, which is a kind of sacred dance performed by nine women, is sometimes danced by men. Also, *wayang wong* (a type of dance-drama) in Surakarta and Yogyakarta was initially performed only by men. Outside the palaces, eastern Javanese popular theater *ludruk* also had female roles performed by male actors.
 4. Mathias Supriyanto, *Langendriyan Mangkunagaran*, Karya Ujian ASKI Surakarta, 1980., and Sri Rochana Widyastutieningrum et al., *Langendriyan Mangkunagaran: Pembentukan dan Perkembangan Bentuk Penayjiannya*, Laporan Penelitian kelompok, STSI Surakarta, 1994.
 5. I specify dancers here because musicians in *langendriyan* can be men.
 6. In Japanese, the speech of women collectively differs from that of men.
 7. Nobutoshi Nakagawa, *Tenshin kasho no kindai: Ryukoka no kurosujendaa pafōmansu wo kangaeru (Modernity in ‘Transsexed Singing’: Examining the Cross-Gendered Performances in Ryukoka)* in Junko Kitagawa, ed., *Narihikoku sei: Nihon no popuraa ongaku to jendaa (Sounding Sexuality: Japanese Popular Music and Gender)*, Keisoshobō, 1999.
 8. Christine R. Yano, *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*, Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge, MA, 2003.
 9. James L. Peacock, *Symbolic Reversal and Social History: The Clown and the Transvestite in Java* in Barbara Babcock, ed., *Reversible World, (Myth, Ritual, and Symbol Series)*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.

troupe. However, a woman who plays male parts, referred to as *otokoyaku* in the Takarazuka Revue, is given a “second gender,” which has distinctive characteristics as the Takarazuka Revue’s *otokoyaku*; there are clear distinctions between male characters performed by women in *langendriyan* and in the Takarazuka Revue. The same thing can be said about a male performer of female roles in kabuki.

There are also many studies on the relation between performing arts and gender. However, a limited number of studies explore cross-gendered performance. Therefore, I believe that this study will shed new light on studies of cross-gendered performance.

2. Expression of Cross-Gendered Performance in *Langendriyan*

To begin with, I will explore the expression of cross-gendered performance in *langendriyan* from the following angles: performers (dancers), movement, costume and makeup, and singing.

2-1. Performers (Dancers)

In the beginning, *langendriyan* was performed by female workers of a *batik* factory and performed while sitting with one knee up to show respect for the king. Because it was performed without dance movements, it is clear that singing ability was highly valued at that time. Shortly afterward, it started to be performed by *abdi dalem* (royal servants) of Mangkunegaran, and the dance movements were added to the play. Accordingly, the ability and quality required to become a performer of *langendriyan* shifted and the manner of choosing a performer for a certain role also changed.

Generally, Javanese traditional dance-dramas¹⁰ are greatly influenced by Javanese shadow puppetry plays,¹¹ and the pattern of distinguishing features of the characters in a play, like temperament (*lageyan*), personality (*watak*), and body shape (*pawakan*), is traditionally established.¹² For example, the hero with refined nature has a thin figure, narrow eyes, a slightly lowered head, a sophisticated and elegant character, and spiritual strength. According to Someya, this kind of person is considered *alus*. *Alus* is achieved by a concentration of power and has the same meaning as sophisticated nature (i.e. soul, or *sukma*), God (*tuhan*), or power of nature (*kodrat alam*). Human beings’ thoughts or actions accompanied by the power of concentration, and the consequences thereof, are all considered *alus*. On the other hand, *kasar*, which is opposite to *alus*, is defined as the lack of those efforts, or remaining in a natural and unrefined state.¹³ The villain, who is considered highly *kasar*, usually has a large body and vulgar character.

In Java, people often liken themselves or others to the characters of shadow puppetry plays. They often express sentiments by saying, “he is

Picture 1: *Langendriyan* performers around 1925



Note: From left, Damarwulan (hero), Dayun (servant of Menakjingga, clown), and Menakjingga. Source: From the collection of Reksa Pustaka Mangkunegaran.

Picture 2: Menakjingga (left) and Damarwulan from the 1980s



Source: Reproduced by Priyanto MN, from the collection of Reksa Pustaka Mangkunegaran.

10. Such as *wayang wong*, which is older than *langendriyan*.

11. In Java, dance-dramas and shadow puppetry plays share the same basic stories, interpretations of characters, and scene development. It is said that the movement of the dancers is also an imitation of the movement of puppets.

12. Rustopo, ed., *Gendhon Humardani: Pemikiran dan Kritisnya*, Surakarta, STSI Press, 1991, p. 21.

13. Yoshimichi Someya, *Alus to Kasar: Gendai Jawa bunmei no kōzō to dōtai (Alus and Kasar - Structure and Dynamics of Modern Javanese Civilization)*, Daiichi Shobō Press, Tokyo, 1993, pp. 335-338.

just like Janaka”¹⁴ or “she has a character like Srikanthi.”¹⁵ Consequently, for dance-dramas, a performer who has a temperament or character that resembles a certain role is usually chosen. I, myself, was often chosen to dance a certain character because of my temperament and appearance. Suyati Tarwo Sumosutargio, a principal dance teacher at Mangkunegaran and a former performer of *langendriyan*, also mentioned in an interview that she was not allowed to play the role of Menakjingga (the villain, king of Blambangan) by Mangkunegara VII (the head of Mangkunegaran, 1916–1944). It was felt that her temperament was not strong enough.¹⁶ Indeed, I see a similar tendency from the pictures taken around 1925, the videos shot in the mid-1980s, and recent *langendriyan* performances. To be more precise, the appearance of *langendriyan* performers follows the traditional expression of the roles.

2-2. Movement

In terms of movement, in Javanese traditional dance, there is a certain style for each character. There are three major styles, which are the *putri* (female) style for female characters, the *putra alus* (refined male) style for refined (*alus*) male characters, and the *putra gagah* (rough male) style for rough (*kasar*) male characters; each style has an established position and way of moving. Interestingly, the female demon roles, which have highly *kasar* characters, are danced in the rough male style and usually performed by male performers in Javanese traditional dance-drama such as *wayang wong*. Some roles performed in the female style have some degree of *kasar*-ness, but they are never highly *kasar* and lean more toward *alus*-ness. There are no highly *kasar* female characters in the female style.

The differences in the styles can be clearly seen in the height of the arms, the width between the feet, and the quality of the movement. For example, in the basic standing position called *tanjak*, arms are higher and the width between feet is wider for a rough male character than a refined one. The chin is lifted higher for an arrogant character as well. The movement is also faster and sometimes even rather sudden for a rough character, whereas it is smooth like flowing water for a refined character. In addition to that, depending on the characters and the plays, these styles can be divided into even smaller categories and each category has a distinct way of moving. For example, characters in dance-drama *wayang wong* in Yogyakarta can be classified into 21 categories.¹⁷ Accordingly, it is possible for an audience to understand the character from the movement, and not from the gender of the performer. This explains why women are able to play male characters.

If that is the case, is there any difference in expression between male characters acted by men and male characters acted by women in *langendriyan*? If we look carefully, there is a slight but definite difference, especially in the rough male style. As regards the position of the body, there is not much difference. How-

Picture 3: Menakjingga (left, danced in the rough male style) and Damarwulan (right, danced in the refined male style)



Notes: We can clearly see the difference between the two styles' body positions; the difference in costumes is also very evident in this picture.

Source: Taken by Priyanto MN on December 22, 2007 at Taman Budaya Surakarta.

Picture 4: Anjasmara (left, danced in the female style) and Damarwulan (right, danced in the refined male style)



Source: Taken by Priyanto MN on December 22, 2007 at Taman Budaya Surakarta.

14. One of the Javanese names for Arjuna from the Indian epic the Mahabharata.

15. Janaka's second wife.

16. From an interview with Suyati Tarwo Sumosutargio on July 19, 2008.

17. Soedarsono, *Wayang wong - The State Ritual Dance Drama in The Court of Yogyakarta*, Gadjah Mada University Press, Yogyakarta, 1984, p. 225.

ever, when they actually move, the impression given to an audience is very different, especially since the width of movement, side to side, in the stomach area, is very different. For this reason, when a woman plays a rough male character, she is often criticized for the inappropriateness of the character's expression.

However, in my view, the important point in *langendriyan* is that the expression of the rough male character need not be as strong as when acted by a male performer. I myself studied the rough and villainous king, Menakjingga, and my teacher often warned me not to dance so vigorously. Even though the positions of arms and legs were in the rough male style, I was required to move in a relatively refined way. In *langendriyan*, the expression required for a rough male character is not as strong as a traditional expression, but rather importance is attached to keeping the elegance and beauty of the woman performer. This is a distinguishing feature of the aesthetic expression of cross-gendered performance.

2-3. Costume and Makeup

Picture 5: Makeup for the villainous male character, Menakjingga, in *langendriyan* at Mangkunegaran



Source: Reproduced by Priyanto MN, from the collection of Umi Hartono.

The costumes for *langendriyan* are stylized and very gorgeous. Basically, the design is taken from the shadow puppet play, meaning that it follows the traditional expression of the character. For example, the color red is mostly used for characters with a rough and sharp temperament, and blue and green are often used for the refined characters. The pattern of the *kain*, which is a *batik* cloth wrapped around the lower body like a skirt, is also larger for a rough character. The headdresses are also particular to most of the characters. The style of costumes is one of the tools used to help an audience understand the characters in the play.

From a cross-gender perspective, a notable point is the makeup, especially, for rough, villainous male characters. Usually, in traditional Javanese dance, villainous male characters are made up by applying red color to the whole face to express roughness. However, for villainous male characters in *langendriyan*, basically, the makeup for a beautiful woman is used, and only the eyebrows are drawn slightly thick and sharp. Thus, we can see that the performers of rough characters in *langendriyan* are not trying to become completely masculinized, but rather are acting as women, whereas acting like men is not so important. On this point, there is a linkage between the makeup and the movement.

Picture 6: Menakjingga (center) and Damarwulan (left) performed by male performers



Source: Taken by the author.

Picture 7: Common makeup and costume for villainous male character performed by a male dancer



Source: Taken by the author.

2-4. Song

Songs that are used as dialogues in *langendriyan* plays are traditional verses, which have a close relation to melodies called *tembang*.¹⁸ They are sung, not by singers sitting with musicians, but by the performers (dancers) who are assigned roles, to the accompaniment of *gamelan*.¹⁹ Let us consider the melodies. The following is an example of *tembang*,²⁰ which is in the form of a dialogue between the hero of this story, Damarwulan (a male role), and his wife Anjasmara (a female role). The background to this *tembang* is as follows. After successfully defeating and taking the head of Menakjingga, Damarwulan was on his way back to the palace of the Majapahit kingdom when he was waylaid by Seta and Kunitir, the brothers of Anjasmara, who were jealous of him. They killed Damarwulan and robbed him of the head of Menakjingga. Fortunately, Damarwulan was resuscitated by his grandfather, Tunggul Manik, who had supernatural powers, and went back to his house. The *tembang* below is sung when Damarwulan explains to Anjasmara what happened on the way back home. The lines with numbers indicate melody lines and verses are written beneath them.

Damarwulan	2̇ 2̇ 2̇ 2̇, 2̇ 2̇ 2̇ 3̇2̇1̇ 6̇.5
	Dhuh dhuh ni - mas da - sar nya - ta
	2 3̇5 5 5 6̇ 1̇, 5 1̇6̇.5
	sun men - tas ne - mah - i pa - ti
	1̇ 6̇5 3̇ 2̇ 2̇ 2̇1̇, 2̇ 3̇.2
	a - mar - ga di - ka - ni - a - ya
	2 2 2 2 3̇ 5̇6̇, 3̇2̇ 1̇6̇.5
	mring ka - dang - i - ra ke - ka - lih
	1̇2̇ 2̇ 2̇ 2̇ 2̇, 2̇ 3̇.23̇5
	dyan Sé - ta lan Ku - mi - tir
	1̇ 1̇ 1̇6̇5 6̇.53̇56̇1̇, 5 5 5̇6̇5 3̇.2.3̇2̇1̇
	kang a - pus kra - ma ma - ring sun
Anjasmara	1 1 1 1 1 1, 3̇2̇.1̇ 6̇.5
	Dhuh Ja - gad dé - wa ba - tha - ra
	2 2 2 2 3̇ 5̇.6̇, 3̇2̇.1̇ 6̇.5
	bé - njang yèn prap - tènng ngar - sa Ji
	1̇ 2̇ 3̇2̇.1̇ 6̇.5, 1̇ 1̇ 1̇6̇56̇ 6̇, 6̇1̇ 5 5̇.6̇5 3̇.2
	sun we - lèh - na si ke - pa - rat ka - ro pi - san

18. *Tembang* refers to both the verse itself and the melody that goes with it. *Tembang* is always sung, never just read. The standard forms are divided into three types: *tembang gede*, *tembang macapat*, and *tembang tengahan*. *Tembang macapat* is used for *langendriyan*.

19. *Gamelan* is a set of instruments, such as bronze metallophones and gongs, xylophones, drums, bamboo flutes, and strings that are bowed and plucked, each with a distinct construction and tuned to stay together. Tuning varies with each set. Instruments from different *gamelan* are generally not interchangeable.

20. This is a verse in the *Sinom* form of *tembang macapat* and sung in the musical form of *palaran* (named *Palaran Sinom Logondhang minir*).

Verse	Translation
Damarwulan:	
<i>Dhuh dhuh nimas²¹ dasar nyata; sun mentas nemahi pati, amarga dikaniaya mring kadangira kekalih, dyan Séta lan Kumitir kang apus krama maring sun</i>	Oh, my wife, it is true I just died because [I] was tortured by your two brothers, <i>raden</i> (nobles) Seta and Kumitir, who tricked me.
Anjasmara:	
<i>Dhuh jagad déwa bathara, béjjang²² yèn praptèng ngarsa Ji²³ sun welèhna si keparat karo pisan</i>	Oh, God, the ruler of the world, Next time when [I] arrive in front of the Queen, I will reveal the wicked act of those two evil persons.

The numbers indicate the pitch. One “octave” consists of numbers 1 (lower pitch) through 6 (higher pitch). The numbers with no dot above or underneath are in the middle register. The numbers with a dot above or below are one octave higher or lower, respectively. The numbers with a diagonal line are a halftone lower than that number.

As shown by the musical score above, when we listen to the melodies of the song used in *langendriyan*, we can hear the male role and the female role singing in the same vocal range. In other words, it is hard to determine whether characters are male or female by listening only to the song. The point is that, from the aspect of song, there is not much differentiation between male characters and female characters in *langendriyan*.

3. Circumstances of *Langendriyan*'s Genesis

In this chapter, I will examine the circumstances surrounding the genesis of *langendriyan* to explore the reason(s) why all the roles are played by women and the purpose behind this unique dance-drama's creation.

Langendriyan was created by R.M.H. Tandakusuma (R.M.H stands for Raden Mas Harya, a royal title). This name is embedded in the first verse of *Langendrija Mandraswara*,²⁴ which is the following text for a *langendriyan* play written by R.M.H. Tandakusuma. If you connect the first sound of each line (underlined), you can see the name Raden Mas Harya Tandakusuma.²⁵

<i><u>R</u>ading candra angèsti dumadi (1811), <u>d</u>ènira mrih sarkara ginita, <u>m</u>asang lelangen sedyané. <u>H</u>ardaning tyas kayungyun, <u>y</u>ayah kadya nggayuh wiyati. <u>T</u>on-tonen kandhanira, <u>d</u>adaring para nung, <u>k</u>umaraning nungsa Jawa, <u>s</u>umawana winahyu wahyèng pamardi, <u>m</u>aladi kata dinya.²⁷</i>	[In year] 1811 ²⁶ (1881 C.E.), [I] intend to compose [<i>tembang</i>] dhandhanggula [I] have a wish to create [a form of] entertainment. [I] really wish crazily from the [bottom of my] heart. [This wish is] as if reaching to the sky. Feel [all] the words [in this <i>tembang</i>] The work by extraordinary people [It is] fragrance of the island of Java also [this <i>tembang</i>] is blessed by God and formed through the effort [of the extraordinary people] [I] really wish [this] work (<i>tembang</i>) is more brilliant [than others].
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21. The word *nimas* is used to address a woman who is adored and loved which I translated as wife. A spouse – either wife or husband – in Javanese is addressed as *garwa*.

22. The word *béjjang* means sometime or someday in the future.

23. The word *Ji* can mean king or queen.

24. R.M.H Tandakusuma, *Langendrija Mandraswara*, Balai Pustaka, Batavia Centrum, 1939.

25. In Javanese, *a* in any final, open syllable, and in any penultimate open syllable which precedes a final, open syllable in *a*, is pronounced *aw* as in “law” in English. Also, *o* in closed syllables is pronounced *aw* as well. The name Tandakusuma is originally from two words, *tanda* and *kusuma*. Therefore, underlined *Ton* in the verse has a same pronunciation with Tan for Tandakusuma.

26. This is a Javanese year. This part is expressed in a kind of chronogram called *sengkalan* in Javanese.

27. Tandakusuma, Note 24, p. 5.

R.M.H. Tandakusuma was a son-in-law of Mangkunegara IV (reign 1853–1881), who was the ruler of Mangkunegaran at the time of the creation of *langendriyan*. Tandakusuma was also of the blood royal himself. He was a great-grandson of Mangkunegara I, the founder and the first king of Mangkunegaran.²⁸ No written document giving a detailed history of his life has ever been discovered (as far as I know). However, several documents show that he played a pivotal role in the artistic scene of Mangkunegaran. He was conversant with *gamelan* music and stories of *wayang* (traditional theater dramas, including shadow puppetry), a creator of stories for *wayang*,²⁹ a dance specialist who taught both female and male style dances to members of the royal family and to aristocrats in Mangkunegaran,³⁰ and a very famous *topeng* (mask) dancer.³¹ Despite his high social status, he also traveled around Java and was very familiar with dance and drama among the common people. This fact seems closely connected to the genesis of *langendriyan*.

Langendriyan was started among the common people in Surakarta. The story goes as follows. At the village of Kadiporo, a German (or German Indonesian) man named Godlieb owned a *batik* factory called Godlieban. There were many young women from the countryside living in the factory's dormitory and working in the factory. They had a habit of singing *tembang macapat* (Javanese traditional verse in the *macapat* form) while creating *batik*. Listening to those young women singing, Godlieb felt a desire to create a new form of entertainment, and asked Tandakusuma for help. Tandakusuma trained the women workers in the *batik* factory and made a script of *tembang* called *Langendriyan Mandraswara*³² in 1881.³³ Later, this work by Tandakusuma was performed in front of Mangkunegara IV at the palace.

Even though *langendriyan* began among the common people, it was later accepted into Mangkunegaran³⁴ and developed into a notable palace art. This occurred because the kings of Mangkunegaran were close to the common people.³⁵ Even after *langendriyan* entered into Mangkunegaran, the common people were able to enjoy *langendriyan* performances, which was impossible at the other palaces.³⁶ Hence, we could also say that Mangkunegaran had a distinctive character of openness and freedom from conservative traditions.

The beginning of *langendriyan* was also closely connected to the complex political situation in Central Java at that time. By the beginning of the 19th century, the Mataram kingdom that ruled the area was divided four ways under the Dutch East India Company.³⁷ As a result, there were four royal palaces in a relatively small area, two in Surakarta and two in Yogyakarta, as mentioned. Mangkunegaran was one of these royal palaces in Surakarta. The royal families of each of these palaces lost political power and focused instead on culture. They competed with each

28. Sumohatmoko, *Pratelan Para Darah Dalem Suwargi Kangjeng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Aria Mangkunagara I hing Surakarta Hadiningrat jilid I*, Surakarta, Rekso Pustaka Mangkunegaran, 1936, p. 7, 9, and 151.

29. Pigeaud, Note 1, p. 260.

30. Sumohatmoko, *Serat Babad Ila-Ila*, Surakarta 1913, p. 199. (This book was transliterated from Javanese letters into the Roman alphabet by Suroso in 1984. Suroso, *Serat Babad Ila-Ila*, Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Proyek Pengembangan Perpustakaan Jawa Tengah, Semarang, 1984); also, K.G.P.A.A. Prangwadana VII, *Patokan Beksan Mangkunagaran (Beksan Tayungan)*, Surakarta. (Prangwadana VII was the name of Mangkunegara VII between 1916 and 1924. Therefore, we can deduce that this document was written during that time. The number assigned to this document in Rekso Pustaka, the library of Mangkunegaran, is G149.)

31. I Made Bandem & Sal Murgiyanto, *Teater Daerah Indonesia*, Penerbit Kanisius, Yogyakarta, 1996, p. 127.

32. *Langen* means happiness, pleasure, or comfort, and *driyan* is the word *driya* (or *drija*), meaning heart. *Mandaraswara* means beautiful voices.

33. Sajid, R.M., *Babad Sala*, Rekso Pustoko Perpustakaan Istana Mangkunagaran, Surakarta, 1984, pp. 111-113. (The author was born in 1912 and died in 1988); also, R M T. Tarwo Sumosutargio, *Langendriyan Mandraswara dari Pura Mangkunegaran: Riwayat dan Perkembangannya*, Surakarta, 1985, p. 3. (Material for seminar held at Taman Bedaya Yogyakarta, in March 1985). Also, see Kandar, *Idhe Demokratis Kang Sinamun ing Langendriyan in Mekar Sari*, August 4, 1993, p. 16. The history of *langendriyan* is mentioned in Sumohatmoko, *Serat Babad Ila-Ila*, Surakarta 1913. I had almost the same information from several informants I interviewed in Mangkunegaran.

34. Sajid, Note 33.

35. Regarding the affinity of the kings of Mangkunegaran for the common people, see, Zainuddin Fananie, *Restrukturisasi Budaya Jawa: Perspektif KGPA MN I*, Muhammadiyah University Press, Surakarta, 1994, pp. 144-145. See also W.E. Soetomo Siswokatono, *Sri Mangkunagara IV: sebagai Penguasa dan Pujangga*, Semarang, 2006, p. 126.

36. Wahyu Santoso Prabowo et al., *Sejarah Tari—Jejak Langkah Tari di Pura Mangkunagaran*, Surakarta, ISI press, 2007, p. 109.

37. The Mataram kingdom was first divided into two: the Yogyakarta Sultanate, under Mangkubumi (the Sultan family), and the Surakarta, under Pakubuwana (the Kasunanan family); from these, the Mangkunegara family in Surakarta branched out in 1757 and the Pakualam family in Yogyakarta branched out in 1813.

other, aiming to reconstruct the “ideal type of old Javanese culture”³⁸—destroyed by the continuous warfare experienced for about 300 years in eastern and Central Java, after the collapse of the Majapahit kingdom—based on their knowledge of the Majapahit kingdom. As a result, artistic activities thrived and each palace started to develop a distinct style of dance, music, puppetry, literature, and even clothing.³⁹ The creation of the new dance-drama *langendriyan* was greatly affected by this political situation. It was very important for the royal family to establish its own art and culture to show its vassals and the people in its territory that it was the legitimate successor of the Mataram kingdom. At almost the same time, in Yogyakarta, a different style of *langendriyan* using the same story, the legend of Damarwulan, was created.⁴⁰ Further, in the Kasunanan palace of Surakarta, a new dance-drama was created by Prince Prabu Wijaya, using the story derived from the story of Menak Amir Hamza.⁴¹ In contrast to *langendriyan* in Mangkunegaran, all the roles were played by male performers in the latter two styles. Consequently, we can say that Mangkunegaran accepted the new drama with all the roles played by female performers and developed it into their own dance-drama to differentiate it from the others.

However, the question remains: Why was this all-female dance-drama developed in Mangkunegaran, and not in any other palaces? I propose that it was because of women’s social status in Mangkunegaran. In Mangkunegaran, women enjoyed relative equality with men. They were given jobs according to their ability rather than societal conventions, which would have been unlikely in other palaces. They were selected as soldiers, clerks for the palace, delegates to different palaces, dancers, and musicians. In Mangkunegaran society, women held important positions related to politics, defense, the economy, and culture.⁴² Thus, there was enough social precedent for an all-female dance-drama to develop. Before *langendriyan* was created, dance-dramas (such as *wayang wong*) were mainly for men to perform at the palaces in Central Java.

There were still several other factors related to the genesis of *langendriyan*. The first one was that the economy of Mangkunegaran began to prosper in the second half of the 19th century from the profits of coffee, sugar, spice, and rice cultivation.⁴³ The other was that the Mangkunegaran government was restructured in 1867 and one section, named *Langenpraja*, specialized in managing artistic activities in the palace.⁴⁴ This section had the performers called *teledek*, who were women, sing and dance. By having *Langenpraja* and *teledek* as part of its organization, and having enough financial strength to support artistic activities, Mangkunegaran had the foundation to receive *langendriyan* from the common people and develop it into significant local art form.

Thus, we could say the genesis of *langendriyan* was precipitated by a mixture of political and economic factors, the state of art and culture in the palace, the status of women, and Mangkunegaran’s tradition of being close to the common people.

In addition, there is one more important factor, that is, the position of Mangkunegaran in Javanese society at that time. The Mangkunegara family⁴⁵ became an independent royal family in 1757 after a sixteen-year battle by Mas Said (who later became Mangkunegara I). Mas Said’s father, K.P.A. Mangkunegara, was in fact, the Crown Prince of Mataram kingdom. However, he became entangled in a plot at the palace and was exiled to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), then later to Cape Colony by the Dutch when Mas Said was two years old. Even though Mas Said grew up in adverse

38. Kenji Tsuchiya, Yogyakarta—Chubu Jawa ni okeru <miyako> no seiritsu to tenkai (Yogyakarta: The Birth and Growth of the Kraton in Central Java), *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu (Southeast Asian Studies)* 21-1, 1983, p. 22.

39. Tsuchiya, Note 38, pp. 20-23.

40. Poerwanto RS, Langendriyan Gagrag Surakarta Lan Ngayogyakarta, *Panjebar Semangat no.24* (June 14, 1986), p. 31; see also, Widyastutieningrum et al., Note 4, pp. 13-15.

41. The legend of Islamic hero Amir Hamza. Amir Hamza was an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. This legend is widely known in the Islamic areas of Southeast Asia, and by the 16th century, it was known in Central Java (Pigeaud, Note 1, pp. 212-213 and p. 252.)

42. Hilmiyah Darmawan Pontjowolo, R. Ay., *Peranan Wanita Mangkunagaran Dari Masa ke Masa* (Surakarta, 1993), p. 4.

43. R. M. Mr. A. K. Pringgogidgo, *Geschiedenis der Ondernemingen van het Mangkoenagorische Rijk (The History of Enterprises of the Mangkunagaran Kingdom)*, ‘S-Gravenhage (The Hague): Martinus Nijhoff, 1950, p. 45; also, Siswokatono, Note 35, p. 173.

44. Siswokatono, Note 35, p. 146. See also Harmanto, *130 tahun Langen Praja Mangkunagaran*, 1997, pp. 2-3. (The number assigned to this document in Reksa Pustaka, the library of Mangkunegaran, is 2038).

45. The head of Mangkunegaran is Mangkunegara (pronounced “Mangkunegoro”). Mangkunegaran means the “place of Mangkunegara.” At present, the head of Mangkunegaran is Mangkunegara IX.

circumstances, he still had the pride of a legitimate successor to the Mataram throne.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, when he was allowed to have an independent royal family, after sixteen years of the fierce battle, he received much less land than the two other larger kingdoms.⁴⁷ In addition, the Mangkunegara family was not permitted to practice the Mataram ritual of succession, which includes a sacred dance, one of the symbols or treasures of the king of Mataram. According to Siswokatono, during the reign of Mangkunegara IV, which coincided with the creation of *langendriyan*, the establishment of Mangkunegaran's own styles of art was one means of strengthening its social position in order to make it more equal to that of other, larger Javanese kingdoms.⁴⁸ We can, therefore, conclude that *langendriyan* was created and developed with the political motivation of changing the status of Mangkunegaran in Javanese society.

4. The Effect of Cross-Gendered Performance and Its Relation to the Circumstances Surrounding *Langendriyan's* Genesis

As mentioned earlier, generally, in Javanese traditional dance, the feature of each character is traditionally established from shadow puppetry plays. The characters are expressed by stereotypical and differentiated styles of movement and costume. These styles can be considered a reflection of Javanese traditional concepts of the differences between man and woman, of mental habits, and of fixed notions regarding socially acceptable ideas. Even though the cross-gendered performance of *langendriyan* is validated because of the traditional style, it does not totally follow the style but instead uses ambiguity.

Then, what is the effect of cross-gendered performances in *langendriyan* on the audience? I believe that the well-categorized, differentiated, and systematized cosmology of Javanese society is confused by these performances. Not only the style of movement and makeup, but also the Javanese worldview, is sent into upheaval.

There is an important aspect of the Javanese worldview which holds that "in the world, there is always conflict between good and evil and by keeping the balance between them, this world can exist. The forces of evil are as important as the forces of good and they cannot be lost."⁴⁹ Put simply, the balance between good and evil is important. This is deeply reflected in traditional Javanese dramas, and the conflicts and battles between good and evil are often taken as source material. Usually, the good is symbolized by *alus* characters and the evil is symbolized by *kasar* characters in dance-dramas. In addition, women, especially beautiful ones, are usually considered *alus* and good.⁵⁰ As mentioned earlier, the roles of highly *kasar* female demon are danced in the rough male style and usually performed by male performers, and there is no highly *kasar* female character danced in the female style. Thus, it appears that usually in Javanese traditional dance-drama (such as *wayang wong*), the female is considered always *alus* (refined), even though some female characters are somewhat *kasar*, but never highly *kasar*, because a highly *kasar* female is never acceptable. This can be considered a reflection of Javanese traditional concepts of the differences between man and woman. Nevertheless, in *langendriyan*, an ugly, villainous (*kasar*) character, represented by the ugly, evil king of Blambangan, Menakjingga, is played by a beautiful woman. This means a woman shows *kasar*-ness and evilness, qualities that are not considered inherent in women. In other words, there is a reversal or inversion of the traditionally established image of men and women. By having a beautiful woman play an ugly, evil king, the ugliness and evilness of the character are less emphasized, and the scene becomes peculiar and unpredictable. It gives the audience an interesting and different image from what they are accustomed to, and it can stimulate

46. See Wahyu Santoso Prabowo, *Bedhaya Anglirmendhung: Monumen perjuangan Mangkunagara I, 1757-1988*, Tesis S-2, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, 1990, p. 54. Mas Said very much respected Sultan Agung, the legendary king of Mataram who reigned during the period 1613~1645, and he tried to follow his teachings as a successor to the Mataram kingdom.

47. The Kasunanan family in Surakarta and the Sultan family in Yogyakarta had much larger territories than the Mangkunegara family.

48. Siswokatono, Note 35, pp. 246-247.

49. From the interview with Wahyu Santoso Prabowo, a famous choreographer, researcher of Javanese traditional dance, and dance teacher at Institute Seni Indonesia (ISI) Surakarta, on September 3, 2008. This worldview is reflected in the dance movement called *sembahan laras*, which is used at the beginning and end of a dance.

50. Not all the beautiful female roles in dance drama are good, but most of them are. Also, even though some female roles have some evilness, they are never highly *kasar*.

creativity. This gender with ambiguous boundaries that can be called the “third gender,” which is a mixture of man and woman, yet neither man nor woman, appears here as well.

A reversal phenomenon such as cross-gendered performance can release inhibitions. Further, by creative denial of the ordinary state in which a male character has to be manly, the play can challenge fixed notions, stimulate and insert some tension into mental habits, and invoke a sort of confusion that makes the audience rethink traditional concepts.

In other words, in the performance of *langendriyan*, the fixed image of character, which is expressed by traditionally established styles of movement and costume, is inverted and reversed by cross-gendered expressions between performer and performed character. Further, fixed social ideas, associated with styles, are inverted and reversed at the same time. As mentioned earlier, for Mangkunegaran, the establishment of its own art styles, including the creation of this new dance-drama, was one means of strengthening its social position. Therefore, I argue that the creation, development, and performance of *langendriyan* symbolically demonstrate Mangkunegaran’s intent of reversing or inverting the well-systematized cosmology of the Javanese. In other words, this feature of *langendriyan*, in which an ugly and evil king is performed by a beautiful woman, symbolically challenges social norms and established hierarchies.

5. Influence on the Local Community

In Central Java, after the Republic of Indonesia was established in 1945, the territories of all royal families became properties of the Republic. The royal families⁵¹ lost most of their economic resources and could not retain their position as patrons of the arts. After many court artists left the courts, *langendriyan* was rarely performed in Mangkunegaran. However, many court dance pieces and dance-dramas started being performed outside the palaces⁵² and have been adapted to the present-day society. Indeed, many new dance pieces have been created outside the palaces. The question is, then, what kind of influence did this dance-drama have on the local community, especially the artistic community in Surakarta, after losing its original function?

After the 1970s, *langendriyan* started to be performed outside the palace by performers with no connection to the palace. Mainly, it was included in the curriculum of the art high school⁵³ and the art college⁵⁴ in Surakarta.⁵⁵ However, outside the palace, the performance by women of rough, evil male characters was not accepted. More than that, it was criticized, especially by the local artistic community, for being unsuitable and, perhaps, subversive. This subversion so threatened the local artistic community that *langendriyan* with its cross-gendered expression has rarely been seen beyond the confines of Mangkunegaran, where it was originally created. Moreover, recently, realistic expressions in Javanese traditional dance have increased.

On the other hand, the artistry of *langendriyan* has had a favorable influence on many other performing arts in Surakarta. Although rough and evil male characters played by women were not accepted outside Mangkunegaran, refined male characters in *wayang wong* and other dance pieces started to be performed by women. Such performances are very popular now. Because women performing men’s roles could be seen only in Surakarta, not in Yogyakarta,⁵⁶ we can say that *langendriyan* laid the foundation for such performances to be accepted. On top of that, *wayang wong* started to use *langendriyan* style *tembang* for romance or battle scenes, and many new dance pieces

51. All four royal families still exist.

52. Most of court dance pieces and court dance-dramas were only performed in the palaces of four royal families in Java before the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia.

53. An art high school called SMKI (Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia) in Surakarta started to include *langendriyan* in its regular curriculum in 1976 because the official guidelines for teaching were revised in 1974 and all the students at SMKI’s all over Indonesia were required to perform some form of opera for their final year.

54. The art college is called ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia) Surakarta.

55. Widyastutieningrum et al., Note 4, pp. 152-157 and 209-210.

56. There is no all-female dance drama in Yogyakarta.

were created influenced by *langendriyan*.

Langendriyan is thus considered a symbol of the emancipation of women and a means to widen women's expression. *Langendriyan* of Mangkunegaran was performed for the first time in 15 years on December 22, 2007 at Taman Budaya Surakarta to celebrate "Mother's Day" (*Hari Ibu*).⁵⁷ It was supervised by Irawati Kusumorasri, one of the members of Mangkunegaran's royal family. *Langendriyan* provided women with the opportunity to become the center of Javanese dance-drama, which had been dominated by men, and to move outside the framework of traditional Javanese concepts by allowing them to play characters like an ugly, evil king and a hero. Women in Mangkunegaran are still very proud of this art form, which is not enslaved to the traditional concepts that are still deeply entrenched in the artistic community in Surakarta.⁵⁸

6. Conclusion

In present-day Javanese society, because of the effects of globalization, the decline of the traditional arts is a matter of concern. However, there is a trend to reevaluate local values and cultural heritage, which is reaching its peak. Many old dance pieces of the palaces have recently been rediscovered and reconstructed. In addition, many young artists trained in the traditional form of dance have been creating contemporary dance pieces based on the movement or expression of traditional dance. Therefore, it is likely that the importance of the expression of cross-gendered performance in *langendriyan* will soon be rediscovered. Free-spirited expression in *langendriyan* may move people to rethink old traditions, stimulate society, and become one of the guides to new cultural creation in Javanese society. From that point of view, I would like to closely examine the reception, new interpretation, and creative development of *langendriyan* in years to come.

Editor's Note

This paper is based on and revised from the Japanese paper written by the author,⁵⁹ and some new historical information has been added.

57. From an article Irawati pentaskan '*Langendriyan Mangkunegaran*' in the newspaper *Kompas* dated December 21, 2007. I also saw this performance and interviewed Irawati Kusumorasri myself.

58. From the interview with Suyati Tarwo Sumosutargio on July 19, 2008, and Umi Hartono on July 12, 2008. Both are teachers of the traditional dance in Mangkunegaran.

59. Kaori Okado, Gyakuten no imeji: Jawa buyo rungunduriyan niokeru kurosu jendado pafomansu (Image of Reversal: Cross-gendered Performance in the Javanese Dance Drama *Langendriyan*), *Studies in Urban Cultures* 12, 2010, pp. 33-49.