Analysis of the Movement Structure of Opak Abang Dance as Cultural Identity of Pasigitan Village, Kendal

Hasna'ul Belva Ardelia
Faculty of Languages and Arts, Semarang State University, Indonesia
hasna@students.unnes.ac.id.

Naila Shinta
Faculty of Languages and Arts, Semarang State University, Indonesi
shintanaila93@students.unnes.ac.id.

Erva Mutiara
Faculty of Languages and Arts, Semarang State University, Indonesia
ervamutiara30@students.unnes.ac.id.

Rahma Alifa Khusna
Faculty of Languages and Arts, Semarang State University, Indonesia
rahmaalifa@students.unnes.ac.id.

Abstract

Opak Abang Dance is a traditional performing art unique to Pasigitan Village, Kendal Regency, Central Java, rich in historical value and cultural function. This study aims to analyze the movement structure and interrelationships among movement elements in Opak Abang Dance as an expression of the community's cultural identity. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with textual and choreographic approaches. Data were collected through field observation of performances and rehearsals, in-depth interviews with master artists, dancers, and cultural practitioners, and visual documentation including video recordings and photographic archives. Findings reveal that the movement structure of Opak Abang Dance comprises three hierarchical levels: movement patterns (micro), movement phrases (meso), and performance sections or choreographic structure (macro). The interrelationships among core dance elements—space, time, and energy—are systematically organized, forming a distinctive rhythm that reflects the straightforward, communicative, and agrarian character of the Pasigitan community. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that these movement patterns function not only as aesthetic components but also as a medium for representing collective identity, transmitting traditional knowledge, and strengthening social capital within the village. This study contributes to the documentation and preservation of Opak Abang Dance as intangible cultural heritage.
Keywords: *Opak Abang Dance, Movement Structure, Dance Elements, Cultural Identity, Pasigitan Village, Kendal.*

Corresponding Author:
Hasna'ul Belva Ardelia
Faculty of Languages and Arts, Semarang State University, Indonesia
hasna@students.unnes.ac.id.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional performing arts at the local level are not merely a form of visual entertainment, but a dynamic vessel that preserves a community's collective memory and identity. In Pasigitan Village, Boja Subdistrict, Kendal Regency, Central Java, the Opak Abang Dance stands as one of the region's most valuable intangible cultural heritages. The connection between Pasigitan Village and the Opak Abang Dance is not a coincidental one, but rather a symbiotic and historical bond. Etymologically, the term "Opak Abang" is rooted in the acronym for kethoprak and terbang (rebana), reflecting a fusion of folk drama and traditional rural Islamic musical accompaniment. For the residents of Pasigitan, this art form was born, grew, and became a tradition as an inherent part of social rituals ranging from post-harvest celebrations and community events to spaces for communal solidarity. As a folk art deeply rooted in this environment, every movement in Opak Abang embodies the rhythm of the community's life: an agrarian community known for its straightforward, open-hearted nature and strong spirit of togetherness.

Theoretically, dance movement can be understood as a structured form of body language. In the study of choreography, movement is not a series of random gestures, but rather a planned system shaped by the interaction of three basic elements: space, time, and energy. A wide range of ethnographic and performing arts literature on Java has extensively examined traditional arts from the perspectives of history, ritual function, and their impact on local tourism. However, when it comes to textual-choreographic analysis, studies that specifically dissect the anatomy of movement in Kendal's distinctive art forms particularly the Opak Abang Dance remain very limited. Most existing academic documents only scratch the surface, such as historical narratives or general descriptions of the performance's sequence.

The main reason this study focuses on the structure of movement rather than merely historical narratives or costumes is that the structure of movement serves as the "backbone" of the choreographic text, within which the cultural codes and aesthetic values of the Pasigitan community are embedded. Movement is the most concrete medium through which local values are embodied; through the dynamics of accentuation, the use of open space, and dynamic tempo, the social character of the Pasigitan people is vividly represented. Without a systematic analysis of movement structure, dance scholarship will struggle to understand how small movement motifs are formed and strung together to become a cohesive, unified performance. Furthermore, the aspect of movement is the element most vulnerable to distortion and narrowing of meaning as generations of dancers change, unless it is documented through detailed transcription and textual analysis.

To address this issue, this study presents a new perspective by analyzing the Opak Abang Dance through a hierarchically structured choreographic approach. The analysis is conducted not only at the macro level (the overall flow of the performance) but also extends to the meso level (movement phrases) and down to the micro level (basic movement patterns and motifs). Furthermore, this study examines how the elements of space, time, and energy are organized in such a way as to produce a distinctive rhythm. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to connect the technical structure of these movements with their sociocultural functions namely, how these movement forms serve as a

medium for representing group identity, a means of transmitting local knowledge, and a social capital that binds the residents of Pasigitan Village.

Research on the Opak Abang dance has been conducted from several perspectives, particularly regarding the dance's existence, performance forms, cultural identity, and reconstruction processes. However, studies that specifically detail the movement structure of the Opak Abang Dance based on the relationship between motifs, phrases, and performance structure still have room for development. Therefore, previous research is used to establish the position of this study while highlighting the differences between prior research and the current study.

Based on this theoretical framework, the primary focus of this study is to examine how the movement structure in the Opak Abang dance is formed and organized, and how the interrelationships among its movement elements reflect the cultural identity of the local community. Through this in-depth analysis, it is hoped that this study will not only contribute theoretically to the development of dance ethnology in Indonesia but also serve as a concrete archival document in the effort to preserve the Opak Abang Dance as a valuable intangible cultural heritage.

METODHS

This study employs a qualitative approach using ethnocoreological methods. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of and provide a detailed description of the movement structure of the Opak Abang dance within the sociocultural context of the community in Pasigitan Village, Kendal. The research was conducted in Pasigitan Village, Boja Subdistrict, Kendal Regency, Central Java. This location was chosen because Pasigitan Village is the birthplace and center of the preservation of the Opak Abang dance. This study used primary data obtained directly through visual observation of Opak Abang dance performances and rehearsals, audio-visual recordings of various movements, and in-depth interviews with key informants. Informants included senior dancers, traditional leaders, and Opak Abang dance artists in Pasigitan Village, as well as cultural officials from Kendal Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Beneath the lush hills of Pasigitan Village, Boja, Kendal Regency, dawn is greeted not only by the crowing of roosters and the roar of the mountain winds, but also by the warmth of stories from the past that continue to live on. It is in this agrarian land that the art of the Opak Abang dance was born and has taken deep root in the very pulse of the community's life. Research by Novalita and Pramutomo also reveals that Opak Abang is closely tied to the history and identity of the Kendal community. Thus, this research serves as a crucial foundation for understanding that the movements in Opak Abang are not merely aesthetic elements but are also intrinsically linked to the social and cultural environment in which the dance evolved.

The name "Opak Abang" is not merely a meaningless label. According to oral tradition, this name stems from the fusion of two folk art forms into one: Kentrung Ketopak shortened to "Opak" and the dramatic art form Terbang Dibang shortened to "Abang." This fusion creates a complete performance that combines the beauty of dance movements, the rhythms of the rebana, and the narration of folk tales rich in moral lessons. The story goes that the Opak Abang Dance originated from a tradition among the residents of Pasigitan following the harvest season. As an expression of gratitude to God Almighty for the abundance of the earth's bounty, farmers and community leaders gathered in the village square. Accompanied by the rhythmic beating of the terobong and rebana drums, the dancers moved with straightforward, unpretentious steps.

Their movements do not require the elaborate complexity of court dances, but rather are honest and unpretentious:

- Beginning with the Maju Beksan, the dancers move slowly (lembeyan) while bowing their heads and pressing their palms together in front of their chests (donga). This symbolizes humility and a request for permission, as well as a prayer for safety to the Creator before the celebration begins.
- As the performance enters its core section (Beksan), the atmosphere becomes lively and energetic. The dancers perform the ulap-ulap and ngilo asto motifs, representing eyes that are always vigilant and a mirror for self-reflection. The decisive swipes and flutters of the shawl (kebyak sampur) symbolize the steadfastness, honesty, and openness of the people of Kendal a coastal and agrarian community.
- The performance concludes with the "Mundur Beksan" movement, in which the dancers once again fold their hands in prayer and take steps backward, expressing gratitude and paying their final respects to the audience and the surrounding environment.

More than just a form of entertainment to unwind after a day of farming, Opak Abang in Pasigitan Village serves as a means of fostering community cooperation and a medium for gentle religious outreach. Through the recitation of verses and dynamic, down-to-earth movements, the elders instill values of kindness, courtesy, and togetherness in the younger generation. A study by Pradewi and Lestari (2012), titled "The Existence of the Opak Abang Dance as a Regional Dance of Kendal Regency," is one of the earliest studies specifically examining the existence of Opak Abang. The study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive data and highlighted Opak Abang's status as a traditional art form in Kendal Regency. This study provides important information regarding the status of Opak Abang as a regional art form, as well as the challenges to its survival amid social change and technological advancements.

To this day, even as the times continue to change, the footsteps and the soaring rhythms of Opak Abang still resonate in Pasigitan serving as a legacy of identity that is continually preserved so it does not fade with time.

1. A Textual-Choreographic and Structural Analysis of the Opak Abang Dance

From an ethnocoreological perspective, dance movements are not viewed merely as a sequence of mechanical gestures, but rather as a structured symbolic system through which the cultural values,

history, and social psychology of the community that practices it are articulated. Based on a micro-analytical examination of visual recordings, rehearsal documentation, and performance practices of the Opak Abang Dance in Pasigitan Village, the structure of this dance is built through a highly organized hierarchical scheme. A study by Pradewi and Lestari (2012), titled "The Existence of the Opak Abang Dance as a Regional Dance of Kendal Regency," successfully captured the phenomenon of the marginalization of traditional arts due to the onslaught of modernization and shifting public entertainment preferences. Their study offers a sociological warning that the Opak Abang Dance faces the threat of extinction without conservation efforts. However, the main weakness of the study by Pradewi and Lestari (2012) lies in the absence of technical documentation of the art form itself. They discussed the existence of this cultural instrument without analyzing its choreographic content. If an art form is merely preserved without documenting its movement structure, it is vulnerable to a decline in quality as it is passed down to younger generations.

The choreographic hierarchy of the Opak Abang dance can be classified into three operational levels:

1. Micro Level (Movement Patterns): The smallest unit of movement that conveys basic form and rhythm.
2. Meso Level (Movement Phrases): A combination of several movement patterns that form a complete sequence of movement with a closing motif (cadence).
3. Macro Level (Choreographic Structure): The dramatic flow and overall composition of the performance from beginning to end (advancing beksan, beksan, and retreating beksan).

A. Micro-Level Anatomy: Analysis of Key Movement Elements

At the micro level, the Opak Abang dance features movement motifs rich in techniques that coordinate the body, the sampur prop, and responsive movements to the accompaniment of the terbang and rebana instruments. Each motif explores three fundamental elements of choreography: space, time, and energy.

1. **Lembeyan Motif**
    - **Visual and Technical Analysis**: The arms swing alternately at the sides of the hips in sync with steady footsteps (walk motif). The head is held slightly bowed (tundhuk), symbolizing the obedience and politeness of Eastern traditions when passing fellow villagers or village elders. This motif depicts the everyday gestures of an agrarian community accustomed to walking long distances while carrying agricultural produce.
    - **Analysis of Dance Elements:**
        - Space: Uses a medium-sized space. The dominant orientation is facing straight ahead with a downward gaze.
        - Time: A steady tempo (medium tempo) follows the thok-thek beats of the rebana.
        - Energy: Uses moderate energy (sustained energy), characterized by fluidity and without jerky movements.
        - Choreographic Function: Serves as a connective motif (linking movement) between sequences of main motifs, maintaining the continuity of the dancer's energy flow.

2. Donga Motif

- Visual & Technical Description: Both palms are raised parallel to the chest or face, with the palms facing upward, resembling the prayer posture in the Islamic tradition (two gestures). The body remains still (static) or with a slight forward tilt of the pelvis (mendhak).
- Analysis of Dance Elements:
- Space: The movement space narrows toward the center of the body (centripetal space), at a low-to-medium level.
- Time: Slow in duration with a sustained tempo (bound tempo).
- Energy: Subtle and restrained energy (bound/soft energy), creating a religious, devout, and contemplative atmosphere.
- Choreographic Function: Serves as a marker of spirituality amid the dynamics of the performance, affirming the identity of the fusion between dramatic art and Islamic elements.

3. Ulap-ulap Motif

- Visual & Technical Description: One hand (right or left) is raised in front of the forehead with the fingers curved (ngrayung or ngeuwuk), framing the eyes as if peering into the distance. The head and neck move smoothly (sunduk gepeng) following the direction of the hand's gaze.
- Analysis of Dance Elements:
- Space: High-medium level, extending to the front diagonal line.
- Time: Moderate tempo with an emphasis on the pause at the end of the gaze movement.
- Energy: Moderate energy with a focused quality (direct energy).
- Choreographic Function: Depicts the vigilance, hope, and search for direction in the lives of rural communities.

4. Kebyak Sampur Motif

- Visual & Technical Description: The wrist performs a sudden jerking motion to throw or flick the shawl (sampur) outward from the body. This is followed by a stomp (seblak/gedruk) in time with the loud beat of the musical instruments.
- Analysis of Dance Elements:
- Space: Very expansive movement space, opening the chest and arms horizontally.
- Time: Short and rapid (sudden/quick time), creating a rhythmic surprise.
- Energy: Uses strong, jerky energy (staccato/explosive force).
- Choreographic Function: Provides dramatic accentuation to the choreography, breaks the silence, and symbolizes the assertiveness and openness of the local people's character.

5. Ngilo Asto Motif

- Visual & Technical Description: The hand is raised toward the face with the palm facing inward, resembling the gesture of someone admiring themselves in a mirror (mirroring gesture). The body leans to the side, and the eyes gaze gently at the fingers.
- **Analysis of Dance Elements:**
- Space: Intimate space (personal space), moderate level.
- Time: Slow and continuous tempo.
- Energy: Soft force, flowing and sinuous (flexible energy).

- Choreographic Function: Visualization of self-introspection, self-awareness, and feminine/folkloric aesthetic beauty.

6. Embat Sampur Motif

- Visual & Technical Description: Swinging the sampur from one side of the body to the other with a smooth wrist movement. The arm forms a curved parabola supported by a flexible bend at the knee (mendhak).
- Analysis of Dance Elements:
- Space: Horizontal wide space.
- Time: A swaying, moderate tempo (swinging tempo).
- Energy: Moderate, swinging energy (pendular energy).
- Choreographic Function: To create an effect of harmony, fluidity, and elegance in the performance.

7. Ukel Seblak Motif

- Visual & Technical Description: A complex combination of a 360-degree wrist rotation (ukel) that concludes with a sudden throw or flick of the sampur (seblak).
- Analysis of Dance Elements:
- Space: Rotational space transitions into linear space.
- Time: A transition from a slow, flowing tempo to a fast, jerky tempo.
- Energy: Modulation of energy from soft to heavy/strong force.
- Choreographic Function: Serves as the climax of the dancer's technical skill (climax pattern within a movement phrase), demonstrating a high level of motor coordination.

B. The Relationship Between Dance Elements and the Construction of Cultural Identity and Social Capital

This study confirms that the manipulation of the three main elements of dance space, time, and energy in the Opak Abang dance is a direct manifestation of the psychological and sociological characteristics of the community in Pasigitan Village:

1. **Space and Egalitarianism:** The use of medium to wide spatial planes, free from the constraints of rigid body lines, reflects the egalitarian, friendly, and open-minded character of the people of Pasigitan. In contrast to court dances, which are governed by strict rules, the Opak Abang dance allows for a freedom of movement that mirrors the expansive rural living space, which is in harmony with nature.
2. **Time and Agrarian Discipline:** The tight synchronization between the dancers' footsteps and the accompaniment of the rebana drums reflects the way of life of a community accustomed to the regular rhythms of nature (planting, tending, and harvesting). The discipline of time in the movement sequences fosters social synchronization among the villagers.
3. **Islamic-Javanese Energy and Spirituality:** The fusion of the gentle energy found in the Donga and Ngilo Asto motifs with the explosive energy of the Kebyak Sampur represents a

harmonious balance in life. The people of Pasigitan combine spiritual gentleness (humility and religiosity) with steadfastness and courage in facing the challenges of daily life.

Through this in-depth analysis, the Opak Abang dance has been shown to serve not merely as a form of entertainment, but also as a means of transmitting local knowledge, a vehicle for consolidating collective identity, and a source of social capital that strengthens familial bonds among the residents of Pasigitan Village, Kendal Regency.

2. The Movement Structure of the Opak Abang Dance

From an ethnocoreological perspective, the sequence of the Opak Abang dance performance is divided into three macro-level hierarchies that comprise seven main movement motifs at the micro-level, as identified by previous researchers Pradewi & Lestari (2012), whose study focused more on social existence and dynamics: Highlighting the existence of Opak Abang as a regional art form of Kendal and the challenges to its survival amid changing times, without analyzing the movement structure of the Opak Abang dance itself.

1. Maju Beksan (Opening Section): Macro Level: Part I Orientation & Respect.

This is the part where the dancers enter the stage area. The movements begin with a calm yet firm intensity to establish a religious atmosphere and open up a space for interaction with the audience.

- Lembeyan Motif: The dancers enter by alternately swaying their arms at their hips in time with their steady footsteps. The bowed head (tundhuk) symbolizes the politeness and respect for Eastern traditions when passing others.
- Donga Motif: The dancer pauses briefly in the mendhak position (knees bent low), then raises both palms parallel to each other in front of the chest or face. This depicts a prayerful posture, asking for safety before the performance begins.

2. Beksan (Core Section): Macro Level: Part II Conflict Resolution & Main Themes.

The climax of the choreography depicts the dynamics of life in the agrarian community of Pasigitan Village straightforward, open, full of a spirit of mutual cooperation, and characterized by a strong work ethic.

- Ulap-ulap Motif: The hands are placed on the forehead or above the eyes, with the gaze directed far into the distance. It symbolizes self-reflection, vigilance, and the pursuit of harmony in life.
- Ngilo Asto Motif: The hand is raised toward the face with the palm facing inward. It symbolizes the act of looking in a mirror or self-reflection (introspection).
- Embat Sampur Motif: The hands swing the shawl (sampur) in a wave-like motion to the side and forward. This movement is characterized by its fluidity, dignity, and harmony.
- Kebyak Sampur Motif: The dancer swings the sampur outward suddenly and decisively, accompanied by a stomping footstep. It features wide-ranging movements and strong, staccato energy, symbolizing openness and a firm demeanor.

- Ukel Seblak Motif: The culmination of technical skill that combines a 360-degree wrist rotation (ukel) and concludes with a dynamic sweep of the scarf (seblak), following the rhythm of the rebana.

3.Mundur Beksan (Closing Section): Macro Level: Part III Release & Farewell Greetings.

The closing section of the performance that restores a sense of calm, signaling the end of the celebration or social ritual.

- Donga Motif (Repetition): The dancers once again perform a prayer gesture in front of their chests as an expression of gratitude for the smooth running of the performance.
- Lembeyan Motif (Exit Procession): The dancers step off the stage, gracefully swaying their arms and bowing their heads as a polite farewell to the audience.

Name of the Movement	**Description**
Motion motif A (a person walking while carrying goods)	In counts of 4 x 8.
Motion motif B (flying birds and plants swaying in the wind)	In counts of 4 x 8.
Motion motif C (farming)	In counts of 4 x 8
Movement motif D (connecting movement 1)	In counts of 2 x 8
Movement motif E (a shy person, covering their face with glasses and hands)	In counts of 3 x 8
Movement motif F (Lambeyan Ngleyang, Form 2)	In counts of 5 x 8
Movement motif G (soldiers marching in formation)	In counts of 6 x 8
Movement motif H (shoulder-shrugging movement)	In counts of 6 x 8
Movement motif I (water buffalo wallowing in mud)	In counts of 6 x 8
Transition to movement motif D	In counts of 4 x 8
Movement motif J (silat movement)	In counts of 2 x 8
Movement motif K (ngleyang, form 2)	In counts of 3 x 8
Movement motif L (ngleyang, form 1)	In counts of 4 x 8
Movement motif M (connecting movement 4)	In counts of 2 x 8 + 4
Movement motif N (a woman looking in a mirror)	In counts of 4 x 8

Movement motif O (lambeyan entering)	After the movement is complete, continue by stepping out.

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