



## Visual Acculturation of Chinese Culture in Karawang Banjet Topeng Dance Costumes

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the acculturation of Chinese culture in the Topeng Banjet dance costume, a traditional performing art unique to Karawang, West Java. The main focus of the study is to identify the visual influence of Chinese opera, particularly Peking Opera, on costume elements such as colour, silhouette, ornamentation, and decorative details. This study employs a qualitative approach with data collection methods including literature review, direct observation, interviews with cultural experts and artists, and visual documentation. Design analysis is conducted using Edmund Burke Feldman's model, which includes four stages: description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. The results of the study show that there is an integration of aesthetic and symbolic elements from Chinese culture in the Topeng Banjet dance costume, without losing the local Sundanese identity. In this context, dance costumes function as a medium for representing dynamic cultural acculturation and strengthening the identity of cross-cultural performances. These findings also contribute to a broader understanding of the role of costumes as visual expressions of intercultural processes in traditional Indonesian performing arts

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional dance art usually involves dancers wearing distinctive costumes that reflect cultural identity or the story being portrayed in the dance. However, not all dance art forms require costumes. Some dance forms do use special costumes, while others do not require costumes or simple ones. According to Elizabeth Leese in her book *Costume Design in The Movies* (1991:8): "...the costume is centre stage, and the designers receive their share of the applause alongside all the other craftsmen and technicians whose work is increasingly appreciated by the film-going public." Costumes play a role in creating or even altering what is in someone's imagination (Widagdo & Winastwan, 2004:95). Hardisurya, Irma (2010:126) defines costumes as special attire worn at special events, attire worn by performers on stage, or traditional attire worn during celebrations.

Costumes play a very important role in performances because they are an attraction and a style of clothing designed to represent a particular character, era, or cultural background. In the context of performing arts, costumes serve as visual elements that support characterisation, story atmosphere, and artistic expression in a performance or symbolic celebration to clarify one's identity in the performance. One result of acculturation is dance costumes, which have become a new art form.

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that occurs when two or more different cultural groups interact with each other. In short, acculturation is the blending of cultures, where foreign cultural elements are absorbed and integrated into the original culture, yet the original culture remains intact and is not completely lost. According to Koentjaraningrat (1990: 247-48), acculturation is defined as a social process where the gradual introduction of foreign culture can be accepted without eliminating the original culture of a society.

The process of acculturation between the Sundanese and Chinese communities also took place through intermarriage. Many Chinese men married local women, both Sundanese and Javanese (Catur, 1936: 22 in Hardjasaputra, 2002: 184). Winarni (2017) also notes that since colonial times, such marriages have been an important channel for the formation of a hybrid culture between ethnic Chinese and indigenous peoples. During the colonial period, most of the Chinese community lived as traders—from large-scale to small-scale traders. However, there were also those who worked as teachers in Chinese schools or even became colonial soldiers (Suryadinata, 2010). The spread of culture, including the exchange of knowledge and religion, largely occurred through trade activities. Even in ancient Chinese records, it is mentioned that various nations and envoys from other countries who practised Hinduism or Buddhism were present in Java (Mufidah, Kalla. 2004-2009).

Banjet Mask Dance retains subtle traces of Chinese culture, although it does not dominate its original character. Chinese influences can be seen in the details of the costumes, accessories, and even some of the dance movements, which seem to be inspired by the elegance of Peking Opera. The musical elements, in some parts, seem to bring a familiar yet foreign touch—perhaps as a

result of cultural exchange through a long history of trade and social interaction. Nevertheless, the essence of Topeng Banjet remains firmly rooted in Sundanese tradition; it originated in Karawang and is rich in local values. Just as Peking Opera is renowned for its grand visuals, the costumes of its performers are not merely attire but works of art that weave meaning through colour, pattern, and symbol. The beauty of their embroidery reflects status, character, and ethics – reminding us that in performance art, visuals can speak volumes beyond mere form, (The Art of Peking Opera).

This study focuses on the visual analysis of the Topeng Banjet Karawang dance costume, particularly in tracing the traces of Chinese cultural acculturation reflected through its silhouette, ornaments, colours, and design details. This study also examines the aesthetic, symbolic, and historical value of the costume as part of the evolution of fashion in performing arts. The urgency of this research stems from the fact that many people in Karawang are unaware of the Chinese cultural influence in Topeng Banjet, both in terms of music, dance movements, and costumes. On the other hand, this art form is becoming less known and preserved by the younger generation. This research uses a visual approach to examine elements such as silhouette, fabric material, colour, accessories, ornaments, size, function, and aesthetic value. It is hoped that the results of this study will encourage the creation of new Topeng Banjet costume designs that are more relevant to the needs of today's society – not only as part of performing arts but also as a living expression of fashion.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with visual study methods to examine the acculturation of Chinese culture in the Topeng Banjet Karawang dance costume. The aim is to understand the symbolic meaning, aesthetics, and cultural adaptation in the visual aspects of the costume. This research is descriptive and interpretative, with data collected through direct observation of performances, semi-structured interviews with artists and cultural figures, literature review on Chinese culture and performing arts, as well as visual documentation in the form of photographs and costume archives. Analysis was conducted using Edmund Burke Feldman's model, through four stages: Description (identifying colours, materials, shapes, and ornaments), Analysis (examining structure and design elements), Interpretation (understanding cultural and symbolic meanings), and Evaluation (assessing the extent to which the costumes reflect Sundanese-Chinese acculturation). This model was chosen because it is able to systematically analyse visuals as cultural artefacts.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Topeng dance is a traditional art form of West Java, originating in Cirebon and spreading to coastal areas such as Karawang. One form of this dance, Ronggeng Topeng Banjet, has become part of Karawang's cultural identity and is widely known by the community, Nurhidayah,(2017:22). During the Majapahit Kingdom era, this dance was part of court performances and was performed by the king, as recorded in the *Negarakertagama* and *Pararaton*, with a golden mask in front of the court women, Ayoeningsih, (2007:226).

Parani (2017:51) notes that Betawi Toppeng and Karawang Banjet Toppeng have clear differences, particularly in the use of language—Betawi and Sundanese. This art form originated in Cirebon and spread to the coastal areas of West Java, including Karawang. Banjet masks, which originated from the ronggeng tradition around the early 1900s, have their own distinctive characteristics compared to masks from Central or East Java, namely the addition of the term 'Banjet' by their pioneers. By the mid-20th century, this art form had spread to Subang, Purwakarta, and Priangan, each with its own local identity (Archives of Nusantara Culture, 2023). A blend of interactions between local culture and culture brought from mainland China. In the current era, cultural acculturation is reflected in the cultural differences between local communities and China on the facades of buildings in the West Karawang area, Sudarwani (2021).

In an interview with the owner of the studio and artist Sinar Pusaka Warna, Mr. Asep, the fifth generation descendant of Topeng Banjet Abah Pendul, in Lemahduhur Village, Tepuran District, East Karawang Regency, West Java. Over time, his Topeng Banjet has continued to preserve tradition, one of which is the ngawitan ritual. The performances do not use a stage, the music remains unchanged, there is only one dancer, and the costumes are the same as when his grandfather first established the studio. However, what is unique is that the Banjet mask dancer does not wear a mask; according to the source, the mask is the dancer who performs and jokes. Changes began in 1949 when certain scenes using masks, such as Nganjatuk and Ngendok, were banned by Battalion X in Karawang. The shift in function to entertainment also brought changes in costumes. Nayaga now wears a uniform, comedians wear casual attire, and the character Si Jantuk appears in a robe and cap. Meanwhile, the ronggeng performs in a short-sleeved kebaya and a long, unfolded cloth (Budaya-Indonesia.org).

### **The Influence of Ronggeng Costumes on Chinese Culture - Indonesian Javanese Toppeng Ronggeng Dance**

		
Foto: Group Javanese Ronggeng, 1865. Sumber digitalcollection.universiteitleiden	Foto: Group Kesenian Ronggeng 1870. Sumber: Troppenmuseum 60003353	Foto: Group Ronggeng & Musican 1860-1872. Sumber: Collective NMvWereldculturen TM60005044

Figure 1. This is a Figure Group Javanese Ronggeng Topeng, Indonesia

Analysis of figure 1 focuses on the influence of Chinese culture on the Topeng ronggeng costume, as seen in the crown, which resembles a phonic crown or the headdress worn by Chinese opera dancers called fengguan. The culture of decorating the head is well known in China. The design features round or flat metal ornaments resembling coins, as well as dragon and cloud motifs characteristic of Chinese art. The use of silk fabric indicates the creation of long kebaya garments, while batik fabric reflects the cultural fusion of Javanese, Malay, Portuguese, and Chinese influences, such as the presence of Peranakan Chinese motifs. In the image above, there are no phonic bird motifs, but rather floral patterns.

The attributes of nobility used by Sundanese noblewomen have an essential role as a symbol system in noble society' Costumes and makeup used in Sulintang Dance are similar to the clothes of palace princess. Women in Sundanese society often use traditional accessories applied to kebaya, batik cloth, and hair bun as part of their daily dress. This is part of cultural identity and also a form of respect for ancestral heritage. The visualization of the costumes used in Sulintang Dance and the clothes used by the palace princess are illustrated, Sabaria, I (2025).

		
<p>Foto: Group Ronggeng Topeng Pertunjukan Betawi 1900-1950                  Sumber: <a href="https://driwancybermuseum">https://driwancybermuseum</a>.</p>	<p>Foto: Ronggeng Bletek Betawi 2025.                  Sumber: Senibudayabetawi</p>	<p>Foto: Ronggeng Topeng Banjet Karawang                  Sumber: Pramudyarini 2025</p>

Figure 2. This is a Figure the Development of the Mask Dance Group in the 20th Century

Analysis of image 2, the development of ronggeng mask costumes in Karawang and Betawi from the early 1900s to the 1950s, shows that ronggeng costumes still featured crowns, long kebayas, and long cloths, while by the 1920s, significant changes had already occurred. Photo 1 cannot clearly show the colours due to the black-and-white documentation, but by the 1920s, the owners of dance studios and ronggeng performers could choose colours according to the theme and regional identity, though there was still a noticeable influence of Chinese cultural elements.

Chinese culture has influenced the blending of customs and culture. The Betawi people have various forms of ancient art that originated in the pre-Chinese era. One of these is Topeng and Cokek, which developed alongside the

development of music in the Betawi community. Cokek dance has three purposes: as a traditional ceremony, a performance, and a means of socialising Kusumaningtyas (2024). Betawi ronggeng is more popular than Banjet Karawang ronggeng, and their costumes differ in terms of colour, silhouette, and ornamentation.

Table 1. Differences Between Betawi Toppeng and Betawi Banjet Toppeng

Aspects	Betawi Toppeng	Banjet Karawang Toppeng
Fashion Style	Kebaya Encim, embodery, batik Betawi	Kebaya Sundanes, plan fabric or local batik
Costume Colour	Bright, Contrasting, (red, yellow, green), Complementer Colour	Bright, Contras and one Colour
Head Ornament	Small hairpin, ceplok flower (circular ornament on the side of the bun), Engraved gold or silver hairpin Beaded or coin dangles	Small bun, without decoration, with a braid surrounding the center, two hairpins like chopsticks to hold the headpiece, with full bead dangling
Accesories	Large subang, toka-toka to cover the chest, amprang or belly cover, andong or pelvic cover, and pending or belt made of metal used to attach kewer or shawls and necklace	earrings, brooches to cover the chest, amprang or belly cover, andong or pelvic cover, and pending or belt, bodir hand decorations and handkerchiefs
Toppeng	Used (expressive character)	not used since 1949
Accompanying Music	Gambang Kromong	Gamelan, Salendro, Kendang, Kerek, Rebab
Performance Functions	Rituals & Entertainment	Entertainment, Comedy, Folk Ceremonie
Cultural Influence	Chinese, Sundanes, Betawi	Sundanes, Chinese, Coastal

## DISCUSSION

Observations and visual documentation of the Topeng Banjet Karawang costume reveal visual elements that reflect cultural acculturation, particularly the influence of Chinese theatre arts such as Peking Opera. This influence is evident in the choice of striking colours (red, gold, and dark blue), the bold silhouettes of the costumes, and the use of decorative ornaments such as embroidery and intricately detailed headdresses.

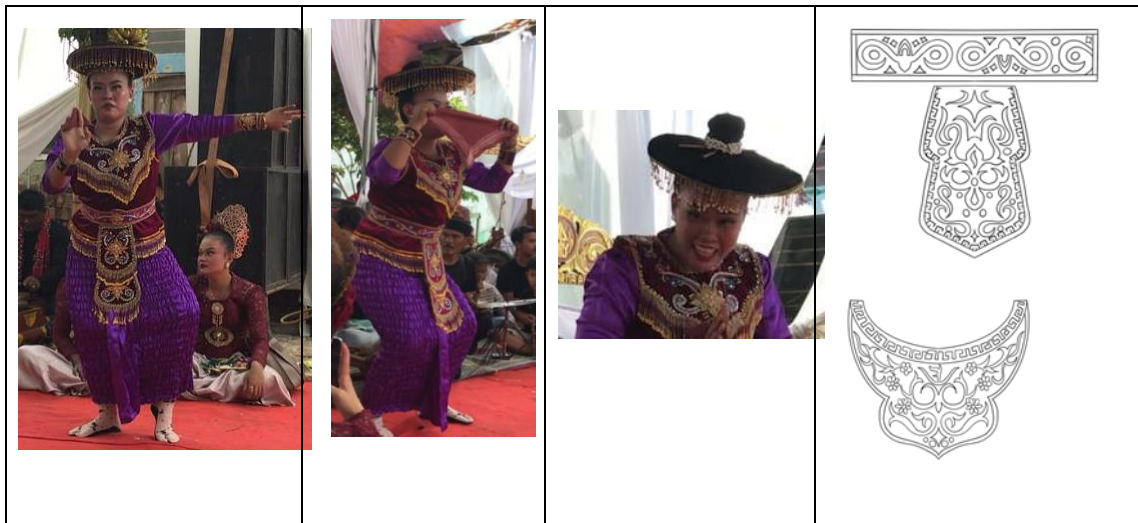


Figure 3. This is a Figure Banjet Karawang Toppeng Costume Pramudyarini, 2025

These elements differ from traditional Sundanese costumes, which are generally simpler and more symbolic in nature. Based on Edmund Burke Feldman's analytical model, these findings can be explained through the following four stages.

### 1. Description

The Banjet Toppeng costume consists of several main elements: a long cloth (ampreng), a short-sleeved kebaya (andong), a belt (pending), and a headdress in the form of flowers (kembang topeng). The dominant colours used are bright red, purple, golden yellow, and deep black—colours that have symbolic meanings in Chinese culture. In addition, several accessories such as tokatoka on the shoulders and the jester's robe show visual patterns that resemble the attributes of Peking Opera costumes.

### 2. Analysis

Structurally, this costume combines traditional forms with dramatic touches that emphasise visual character. The proportions of the fabric, layering techniques, and use of embellishments such as embroidery and lace resemble the aesthetics of Chinese theatre. For example, the comedian's long robe with wide sleeves resembles the costume of the character 'Chou' in Peking Opera, which serves to emphasise theatrical body movements.

### 3. Interpretation

The symbolic meaning of this costume can be interpreted as the result of a cultural fusion that occurs not only physically, but also through visual expression and body language in the performance. Red, in the context of Chinese culture, symbolises luck and courage, which is then internalised in the spirit of Topeng Banjet as a performance that contains elements of heroism and folk entertainment. Ronggeng, as the main female character, appears glamorous yet dynamic, representing women in two cultures at once: local femininity and oriental theatricality.

#### **4. Evaluation**

The acculturation process evident in the Topeng Banjet costume does not erase the local Sundanese identity. On the contrary, Chinese cultural influences enrich the aesthetics and visual appeal of the performance. The costume serves as a medium of expression representing cultural encounters, reflecting the social and historical dynamics of Karawang society connected to trade routes and Chinese ethnic migration in the past.

Furthermore, the change in the function of Topeng Banjet from an agrarian ritual to urban entertainment also influenced the visual transformation of the costume. The costume, which was once simple, has now become more theatrical, following the visual demands of modern society. This phenomenon confirms that dance costumes are not only cultural artefacts, but also a medium for communicating values, identity, and socio-cultural transformation

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that the Topeng Banjet Karawang dance costume is the result of a complex and dynamic cultural acculturation, particularly through visual influences from Chinese culture as reflected in Peking Opera costumes. Through visual analysis using Edmund Burke Feldman's approach, it was identified that elements such as bright colours, dramatic silhouettes, and decorative ornaments in the Topeng Banjet costume indicate the process of absorbing and adapting foreign cultures into the local Sundanese aesthetic form.

This acculturation process does not erase the original cultural identity but enriches the visual appearance and symbolic meaning of the performance costumes. In this context, costumes serve not only as artistic supports but also as media for representing identity, history, and intertwined cultural values. This finding affirms that traditional dance costumes can serve as a meeting point between the past and the present, between local culture and external influences, and between individual and collective expressions of society.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study are expected to provide new insights for costume designers, artists, and cultural activists to be more aware of the historical and symbolic values in costume design creation. Additionally, this research opens opportunities for further exploration of the role of costumes in the construction of cultural identity within the context of cross-cultural performance art in Indonesia.

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