



Religious Values in the Cowongan Tradition of the Banyumas Regency
Community
(Case Study in Sanggar Cowong Sewu Purwokerto)

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Abstract

This article examines the Cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province. The people of Banyumas carry out this tradition to bring rain during the dry season. The method used in this research is descriptive-qualitative and is included in the type of field research. The subjects of this study were the people who are members of the Cowong Sewu Banyumas Padepokan, precisely in Pangebatan Village, Karanglewes District, Banyumas Regency. Researchers use various instruments to explore data sources, such as interviews, observations, and documentation or studies of related documents. Researchers use data reduction, data display, and conclusion analysis. In clarifying the validity of the data, researchers extended participation and triangulation of sources and methods. From the research conducted, it can be seen that (1) The form of the cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency is the provision of offerings and the chanting of certain “mantras” as a manifestation of prayer; (2) The religious values raised by actors in the cowongan tradition are (a) as the implementation of social teachings such as cooperation, mutual assistance, and side by side to create a better life; (b) servitude to God. These two meanings arise because humans usually seek solutions to various life problems based on the ability of reason and knowledge. However, in reality, reason and knowledge are limited. Therefore, life problems that cannot be solved through reason will be solved by something irrational. In this regard, a culture exists as a solution because it has a system that affirms suprarational forces.

Keywords: *Cowongan; Sanggar Cowong Sewu; Religiosity*

Introduction

Banyumasan traditional art culture has characteristics that are different from other regions in Central Java, although its roots are still Javanese culture. The cultural values of traditional art, passed on to the next generation, have been carried out by the community in traditional ceremonies, one of which is the cowongan tradition (Koderi, 1991).

The cowongan tradition is a ceremony of asking for rain using equipment such as a *siwur* (dipper) or *irus* (vegetable duck), decorated to resemble a princess. The perpetrators of cowongan are usually

carried out by a woman consisting of women who are not menstruating, postpartum, or have had sexual intercourse (Fatmawaty et al., 2017). The cowongan tradition is usually carried out when it rains for a short time (only during a long dry season). Usually, this ritual is carried out starting at the end of the hapat period (counting the period in the Javanese calendar) or around September (Kamal, 2018).

It is held every Friday night starting on Friday night kliwon. According to their belief, the arrival of rain is the help of Dewi Sri, an angel. Dewi Sri, who is the goddess of rice, is a symbol of prosperity and well-being. Through prayers performed with full faith, Dewi Sri will come through the Ferris wheel (rainbow) to Earth to send down rain. The coming of rain means the coming of grace from God, which is the source of life for all creatures that live on Earth.

Based on this description, the author takes the title “Religious Values in the Cowongan Tradition of the Banyumas Community (Case Study at the Cowong Sewu Studio, Purwokerto). The cowongan tradition is important to study because apart from revealing the form of the cowongan tradition, it also explains the values contained in the cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency. Thus, it is hoped that this research will benefit the readers. The purpose of this study is to describe the form of the cowongan tradition in the Banyumas Regency and to find out the religious values contained in the cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency.

Several previous studies that can be used as a literature review in this study include: *first*, Murtisari's study entitled “Some Traditional Javanese Values in NSM: From God to Social Interaction” (Murtisari, 2005). *Second*, Susanti, with her article entitled “Upacara Tradisional Grebeg Besar Demak (Kajian Sejarah Sosial Budaya Tahun 1995-2005)” (Susanti, 2005). *Third* is Cahyono, with an article entitled “Ruwatan Cukur Rambut Gimbal di Desa Dieng Kecamatan Kejajar Kabupaten Wonosobo” (Wulandari & Wuryani, 2019). *Fourth*, Fitriani, with her article entitled “Makna Simbolis dalam Upacara Tradisional Bersih Desa di Desa Landungsari Kabupaten Malang (Sebagai Kajian Folklor)” (Fitriani, 2008). *Fifth*, Wasilah with his article entitled “Comparative Study of Traditional Architecture Toraja and Mamasa” (Sahabuddin, n.d.); and sixth, Wati with her article entitled “Pengaruh dan Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Upacara Sedekah Bumi Terhadap Masyarakat Desa Bagung Sumberhadi Kecamatan Prembun Kabupaten Kebumen” (Wati, 2014).

Apart from several literature reviews of previous research, many books and research journal articles still discuss culture in Indonesia. However, researchers have not found previous research that discusses the Cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency, especially regarding the values contained therein. Therefore, this research has a novelty aspect by trying to describe this culture and trying to reveal the meaning that emerges from the cowongan tradition carried out.

The author uses a relevant theoretical basis to support the results of the analysis that has been achieved. The theories used are (1) forms of culture and (2) traditions and theories about philosophical values. The philosophical values in question are the theories that underlie the mind or activity, especially those related to cowongan cultural traditions.

According to Koentjaraningrat (Koentjaraningrat, 2000), human culture contains three dimensions or forms, namely (1) the form of culture as a complex of ideas, ideas, values, norms, regulations, and so on, (2) the form of culture as complex patterned activities and actions of humans in society, and (3) forms of culture as objects created by humans.

The cowongan cultural tradition in Banyumas Regency is a form of the second culture because the form of culture is a complex pattern of activities and actions from humans in society. This form is a social system regarding the patterned actions of the humans themselves. The social system consists of the activities of humans who interact, relate, and associate with each other from second to second, from day to day, and from year to year, always according to certain patterns based on customary rules of conduct in life. man.

There are seven elements of culture: language, art, religious system, technology system, livelihood system, social organization, and knowledge system (Koentjaraningrat, 2000). These seven cultural elements are called universal cultural elements because they are always present in every society. The seven elements of culture are language system, knowledge system, kinship system and social organization, life tools and technology system, economic/livelihood system, religion system, and art.

Traditional values are good and right, have a price, and guide humans to do things that are hereditary and are passed down from their ancestors. Art is a form of culture. Meanwhile, culture is a complex of ideas, ideas, values, norms, and rules and is a complex of patterned activities and actions of humans in society. Soft culture is often equated with the term civilization or civilization.

The importance of cultural forms and traditions and theories about philosophical values in culture aims to maintain traditional art forms and the values contained in that culture. In addition, concrete steps are needed by studying, analyzing, researching, documenting, preserving, and pursuing legal legality in the form of copyrights on intellectual property for that culture.

Methodology of Research

The method used in this study is descriptive-qualitative and is included in field research. The use of the descriptive-qualitative method is due to its suitability with the object and focus of the study. This research seeks to produce findings that cannot be achieved through measurement or statistical procedures (Soehadha, 2012).

The approach taken in this study is phenomenological. This approach describes external behavior (the cowongan tradition) and reveals religious values in the cowongan tradition that were born from the expressions of the cowongan tradition actors. This research was conducted from January to May 2021.

The main target of this research is the form of the cowongan cultural tradition and the values contained in the cowongan cultural tradition in Banyumas Regency. The data used as the research object is to dissect the cowongan cultural traditions in Banyumas Regency. The data is in the form of oral data used to determine the values contained in the cowongan cultural tradition in the Banyumas Regency. The oral data is in the form of discourse utterances contained in the cowongan cultural tradition in the Banyumas Regency. Data sources in this study include oral data sources and written data sources.

The process of collecting data in this study is by making observations, interviews with actors who are integrated into the cowongan tradition, and documentation-tracking of various relevant references related to the focus of the study, both from books, articles and so on that function to support the data. -the data (Moleong, 2006). As for clarifying the validity of the data, researchers extended participation and triangulation of sources and methods.

Result and Discussion

Cowongan Tradition and the Cowong Sewu Community: Description of the Research Object

The form of The Cowongan Tradition in Banyumas Regency is in the form of actors of the cowongan tradition carried out by women in a holy state, cowongan traditional equipment, namely irus or siwur (dipper), and the clothes worn by cowongan tradition actors wearing clothes that are commonly used daily (there are no specific provisions) (Koderi, 1991). Offerings in the implementation of the cowongan tradition, including: (incense, three-colored telon flowers: ylang, rose, and kantil, as well as market snacks, and Cowongan Tradition poems in the form of prayer songs to God so that it rains soon. In addition, in the form of The Cowongan Tradition in Banyumas Regency, there are also stages of implementing the cowongan tradition, which are divided into three, namely the preparation stage for the

cowongan tradition, the implementation stage for Cowongan Tradition, and the final stage, the implementation of Cowongan Tradition (Fatmawaty et al., 2017).

Cowong Sewu is a Banyumas cultural hermitage that Titut Edi Purwanto raises. The arts found in Cowong Sewu include begalan, horse lumping, cowongan, lengger, and so on. Cowongan comes from the word cowong, which also means cowang-coweng. Cowongan uses scribbled coconut shells or cumplung. Cowong describes the figure of a person who looks good but is not in his mind. Modern man is finally looking for meaning in life or filling his soul so that it is not empty.

According to Purwanto, modern is a return to the ancestors. He conveyed that:

“In the beginning, cowongan was a ritual in ancient times in the Banyumas area. This ritual is expected to bring rain in the dry season. The coconut shell, which is the media for the ceremony, shows that coconut, a fruit with much water, does not even release water because the drought is too long.” (T. E. P. Purwanto, personal communication, 2021)

Thus, the culture and rituals performed by the ancestors are searched for and preserved again to fill the void of meaning in life. This is what the ancestors did in seeking religious values by performing rituals.

The cowongan ceremony is carried out in the field; a handler brings a cowong doll in the form of an angel. Incense was burned after the incantation was recited. The goal is that the smoke will deliver prayers to the sky.



Figure 1. Cowongan Banyumas Tradition

The rite calls for the jinn, demons, and other spirits. Cowong as the medium. After they come to Earth, they will know that humans are in trouble and extinction. This should not happen to Satan.

In his interview with Purwanto, he explained that

“The balance of life is that there is evil and good. The task of satan and demons as human pests will end if humans become extinct due to drought. For them, the world must not end. So they also help people to ask God for rain.” (T. E. P. Purwanto, personal communication, 2021)

The equipment in this ritual is the handler, cowong, dancer, flowers, smoke, and incense. The handler is the performer of the ritual who holds the key to the running of the ritual because he is considered a person with more ability to cast spells. At the same time, cowong is a medium for the presence of spirits who are believed to be rain-bearing angels. Before being used in rituals, the handler and cowong usually meditate in a quiet place such as a tomb, under a tree, on a rock, or by a river. Usually, the cowong will be left for three days to meditate in that place to be easily “filled.” Dancers are also important because, in this ritual, the dancers are usually symbols of the universe who have different roles, such as angels, courtiers, and demons/devils. The existence of flowers, smoke, and incense should

also not be forgotten because these three things are believed to be “food” that can invite the universe to support the cowongan ritual (Fatmawaty et al., 2017). Apart from that, Purwanto added,

“Currently, the cowongan ritual has been modified, not just as a ritual but as an art performance, which can be collaborated with lengger, ebeg, theater, and other Banyumas arts.” (T. E. P. Purwanto, personal communication, 2021)

Mantra in cowongan has a very meaningful literary value, which reads:

Sulasih sulanjana kukus menyan ngundhang dewa

*Ana dewa dening sukma widadari temuruna
Runtung-runtung kesanga, sing mburi karia lima
Leng-leng guleng, gulenge pagebatan
Gelang-gelang nglayoni, nglayoni putria ngungkung
Cek-incek raga bali rog-rog asem kamilega*

Reg-regan rog-rogan

Reg-regan rog-rogan

They burn the sorcerer carefully while reciting the mantra:

*Sang kamadipa, Sang kamadipa
Sang kamadadi, Sang kamadipa*

Sang kamadadi,

Ismu kuning apa rupane

*Sang kalewa jati arane menyan
Sang cublek kuning urubing menyan*

Then cowong is lifted by the puppeteer so that the fairy descends. However, because the cowongan that Titut Edi Purwanto worked on was an art performance after the cowong puppet was paraded, it was followed up with other traditional arts such as ebeg, lengger, and so on, according to the request of those who considered the art.

Cowongan teaches the relationship between humans, nature, and the existence of God. These three are a balance. In religion, there is a human relationship vertically and horizontally or social and transcendental. Meanwhile, this can be balanced in culture through cultural media, including art (Soedarsono, 2016).

Religious Values in the Cowongan Tradition

The cowongan ritual has a high meaning; according to Roberston Smith, some of the perpetrators are people who are aware that rites are orders or demands based on their beliefs, but some carry them out because they follow things that have become a tradition (Suwito, 2008). In Smith's opinion, cowongan has a dual role as a rite and an art that must be preserved. For example, based on the narrative of the cowong puppeteer, Titut, he explained that the cowongan he worked on was an art. He is the only person left to understand, guys. The religious values that exist in cowongan art, whether seen as a ritual or just art, can be described as follows:

They were first, Knowing the Meaning of Life. Cowongan are human. Cowongan becomes a picture of human nature. Modern humans, according to Titut, are humans who have returned to the past. The point is that those who have been busy with various work matters that only pursue the world there are

flaws in their souls. So, the search for the meaning of life is an attempt to balance between rational and the ultimate goal in life. Cowongan is also motivated by a search for meaning in life.

In an interview, Sukardi, a practitioner of the cowongan tradition, said:

“I quit my job. I feel like I do not have peace in life. Finally, I tried to fill this “spiritual” void by participating in preserving the ancestral culture, being precise, this cowongan tradition.” (W. Sukardi, personal communication, 2021)

Sukardi said it was as if God instructed him to direct and revive the ancestral rites for which he was looking for meaning. This is to the theory presented by John Naisbitt (Maarif, 1999), a futurologist who states that science and technology do not convey the meaning of life.

Thus, religion becomes an institution that can explain the secrets of the mystery of human life (Priyadi, 2013). Apart from religion, art and literature offer that can respond to human behavior and provide a metaphysical nuance to human life as something science and technology cannot provide. The meaning of life, according to Victor, Frankl-comes from the word logos which means meaning and also spirituality, and therapy means treatment-as. As explained by Bastaman, there are three logotherapy principles: the meaning of life, the will to meaning, and the meaningful life (Bastaman, 2007). First, life still has meaning (meaning) in every situation, even in suffering and pain. Meaning is something that is felt important, true, valuable, and coveted and gives a special value to someone, and is worthy of being the purpose of life. Second, every human being has the freedom — which is almost unlimited — to find meaning in life (Anggraeni et al., 2019). Third, every human being has the ability to take a stand against suffering and tragic events that inevitably happen to himself and the surrounding environment; after efforts to overcome them have been made optimally, they remain unsuccessful.

The meaning of life that can be determined by yourself can be found in three sources: creative, experiential, and attitudinal. Creative values include the activities of working, creating, and carrying out duties and obligations as well as possible with full responsibility. Experiential values include the belief and appreciation of the values of truth, wisdom, beauty, faith, religion, and love. Living and believing in a value can make a person mean his life. Attitudinal values, namely to accept with full fortitude, patience, and courage, all forms of suffering that cannot be avoided (Bastaman, 2007).

The achievement of the meaning of life that is obtained from cowongan is when they think that this rite is believed or not. This rite is a fulfillment of the dryness of the people's souls. Because, in modern life, according to Peter L. Berger, religion is like a holy heaven that is shady and protects life (Maarif, 1999). Religion is sprinkling the heat of life that can grow plants. Religion makes humans feel peaceful, dependent, happy, and peaceful (Kamal, 2018). Religion protects people from chaos, from the meaninglessness of life, and life situations without meaning (Farhan, 2017). Meanwhile, chaos thrives because modern life is too rational and secular.

Cowongan is an irrational one that rests on a belief in substances beyond human ability (Trianton, 2013). Asking God for rain in the media of a cowong doll decorated and likened to an angel is something that does not make sense. Realizing the drought is too long makes people ask their ancestors for help. This is a human effort to give meaning to life. The seasons that do not change make humans think about their survival. The society also returns to things that have relied on this infinite Substance. Humans define the origin of life, namely where they live, what they live for, and where life ends.

Second, A balance of relationships between humans, nature, and God. In the cowongan art, it has indicated that there is a system that must be balanced. The system is the relationship between man and man, man and nature, and man and God.

Humans and humans have a tone of love between males and females. The chanted mantra has that compassionate value. *Sulasih* and *Sulanjana* as lovers in this mantra. They are a likeness between the

Earth and the sky. That is the Earth as a woman and the sky as a man. This has the meaning of a mate, and everything has its partner. The Earth has the nature of a mother, namely in the form of love, coolness, and a place where all living things are born, grow, and die. While the sky is a dashing symbol of heat, it gives clouds and rain. Earth and sky, symbolizing women and men, are connected and need each other. Earth as land that receives rainwater is like a woman who receives semen from men. It contains water and makes life sustainable for creatures on Earth. The mantra ends with repeated *reg-regan rog-rogan // reg-regan rog-rogan*. The sentence signifies pleasure in a husband-wife relationship. They are *reg-regan*, which means they are very happy. Hopefully, when the rain wets the Earth, there will be *reg-regan rog-rogan* so that it will quickly give life - like a pregnant woman.

Sarjo as the perpetrator of the cowongan tradition, stated:

“Once in *reg-regan rog-rogan*, usually a male will be possessed by a spirit or ancestor without being able to control it. Titut said that because what he does is art, once there was a cowongan performance in the Purbalingga district. The guy is instantly filled or possessed so that the *rog-rogan reg-rogan* becomes uncontrollable. To get rid of them, throw water on the boys, and they will come out.” (M. Sarjo, personal communication, 2021)

Having good relations with fellow beings and nature is also described in the mantra described above, that life on Earth must occur and that the ancestral beings should know that a drought is coming (Mulyadi, 2017). Through this ceremony, all ancestral beings pray to God to bring down rain.

Humans must respect the existence of ancestral beings. In the mantra to light the incense, it reads, *Sang kamadadi, Sang kamadipa / Sang kamadadi, / Ismu kuning apa rupane / Sang kalewa jati arane menyan / Sang cublek kuning urubing menyan*. They lighted the incense carefully as a form of respect for the ancestors. Using the word “Sang” shows respect for ancestors and God.

In religious values, these three entities, humans, nature, and God, are a vertical and horizontal relationship. In Islam, it is known as the concept of *hablun min Allah* (relationship with Allah) and *hablun minannas* (relationship with humans) so that it becomes a blessing for the universe.

This is as stated by Koentjaraningrat that religion is a system of human behavior to achieve goals by relying on the power of spirits such as spirits, gods, and so on who occupies the supernatural. Magical science becomes a system of human behavior to achieve its goals by mastering and using magical powers and principles in nature. Meanwhile, according to Gennep in the *Passage de Rites*, religious rites or ceremonies basically function as life encouragement because people in certain time intervals need regeneration of social spirit (Suwito, 2008). The theory of Koentjaraningrat is still relevant in this view that cowongan is to ask ancestral beings to cooperate with humans. Meanwhile, according to Gennep, cowongan is a form of social spirit so that humans can work together to realize the ritual.

Third, Transcendental Value. Humans in religion depend on something transcendent (beyond), a feeling based on something beyond the capacity of rational human reason. Transcendence is the most important element of Islamic social teachings in the Prophetic Social Sciences. Transcendence forms the basis of the other two elements; humanization and liberation. Therefore, the three elements (pillars) cannot be separated from each other. What is meant by transcendence in this discussion is a concept derived from *tu'minuna bi Allah* (belief in Allah), or it could be a term in theology (for example, the issue of God and supernatural beings) (Arum, 2018).

Cowongan has a transcendent value that cannot be reached by reason. The burning of incense that becomes incensed symbolizes that the upward smoke will lead to God more slowly. Kuntowijoyo mentions symbols in religion and culture that the interaction between religion and culture can occur because religion influences culture in its formation; its value is religion, but the symbol is culture (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). Culture can influence religious symbols and replace religious values and symbols.

Transcendent values are not part of religious teachings but cannot be separated from religion. The two overlap each other. The power of transcendence is inherent in the prayers offered with certainty by men. In this case, cowongan has transcendent power, which is marked by the presence of prayer. The rite is a prayer because humans cannot face the trials they are facing.

Conclusion

From the research, it can be seen that *first*, the form of the cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency. The form of cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency is in the form of the cowongan tradition performed by women in a state of purity, the cowongan traditional equipment, namely irus or siwur (dipper), and the clothes worn by the cowongan tradition actors wearing clothes that are usually worn every day (no specific provisions), equipment for offerings in the implementation of the cowongan tradition, including (incense, telon flowers of three colors: ylang, roses, and kantil, as well as market snacks, and cowongan tradition poems in the form of prayer songs to God so that it will rain soon. In addition, the form of the cowongan tradition in Banyumas Regency also has stages of the cowongan tradition which are divided into three, namely the preparatory stage for the cowongan tradition, the stage for carrying out the cowongan tradition, and the final stage for carrying out the cowongan tradition.

Second, the religious values raised by actors in the cowongan tradition are (a) as the implementation of social teachings such as cooperation, mutual assistance, and side-by-side to create a better life; (b) servitude to God. These two meanings arise because humans usually seek solutions to various life problems based on the ability of reason and knowledge. However, in reality, reason and knowledge are limited. Therefore, life problems that cannot be solved through reason will be solved by something irrational. In this regard, a culture exists as a solution because it has a system that affirms suprarational forces.

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