

A History of *Gambyong*: From Folk Art to Classical Dance

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Abstract

Gambyong is a Central Javanese dance form with folk origins. Today, it is performed in royal courts, at opening ceremonies for official municipal events, as well as at other social events such as weddings, performing arts festivals, and the anniversaries of establishments. While *gambyong* developed within the two court cities of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, it is in the latter where the dance has been more prominently cultivated and woven into the social fabric of today. Infused with the aesthetics and prestige of the Central Javanese courts, *gambyong* characteristically portrays the elegance, amorousness, and alluring liveliness of its female dancers. In this monograph, Sri Rochana Widyastutieningrum discusses the history and recent developments of *gambyong*, the content and context of its performance, and its practice in the present day. The author also explores *gambyong*'s sociocultural values and symbolism, its educational value for women's minds and souls, its aesthetics and philosophical underpinnings, and its musical accompaniment.

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Sri Rochana Widyastutieningrum was born in Surakarta on April 11, 1957. She began her higher education at the Indonesian Dance Academy (Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, ASTI) in Yogyakarta, graduating in 1984 from the Indonesian Academy of Karawitan (Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia, ASKI) in Surakarta, obtaining both her master's degree in 1994 and PhD in 2006 in Performing Arts Studies from Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta. She has written a number of books which primarily focus on dance practice and traditions from Java, Indonesia. She currently teaches undergraduate and graduate level courses on dance and research methods at Institut Kesenian Indonesia, Surakarta, where she has formerly served as a rector.

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Maho A. Ishiguro is an assistant professor of ethnomusicology at Emory University. Her research focuses on music and dance from Indonesia. She holds a PhD in ethnomusicology and MA in music from Wesleyan University, as well as an MA in music history from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She has published articles on Acehnese dance and music in the *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, *Asian Music*, and the *Dance Research Journal*. She is currently writing her first monograph, tentatively titled *Gifts from the Waves? Acehnese dance and music in Post-Tsunami Aceh and Beyond*, which analyzes how Muslim women in Indonesia practice Acehnese dance and music, navigating through the increasingly conservative religious climate in the nation.

Rajendra Amira L.S. is an Indonesian dancer, performing artist, and translator based in Bogor, Indonesia. With a background in dance styles such as Javanese dance, contemporary, and Bharatanatyam, they developed their choreographic style from dance theater, uniting social issues and performing arts in their storytelling and aesthetics. A graduate of Wesleyan University, they have performed with Teater Keliling and on stages in Taman Ismail Marzuki, Erasmus Huis, and Komunitas Salihara Arts Center.

Sonia Pangesti Lambangsari holds a master's degree in Performing Arts from Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta. She is a practitioner of Central Javanese dance, and her research focuses on traditional dance from Indonesia. She has published articles in the *Gelar Journal* and *Greget Journal*. She is currently writing an article about characteristics of Javanese dance in Surakarta style with Dr. Sri Rochana Widyastutieningrum.

Thow Xin Wei has been learning and playing Javanese Gamelan since 2007 with the Singa Nglaras Gamelan Ensemble in Singapore, where he is the music director. In 2012 he participated in the Darmasiswa program in Indonesia, studying the music in Surakarta both at the Institut Seni Surakarta as well as with various teachers and community groups within the city. His MA thesis, completed at the National University of Singapore in 2018, explored musicians' notions of musical decline in Surakarta. Subsequently, he was accepted into a second round of the Darmasiswa program from 2018 to 2019. Currently, Thow teaches at Singapore Polytechnic and Singapore University of Social Sciences.

Manuscript Editor's Introduction—Maho A. Ishiguro

Sri Rochana Widyastutieningrum's book, *Serajah Tari Gambyong: Seni Rakyat Menuju Istana*, is a product of her experience as an educator, scholar, and practitioner of dance. She has published extensively on history, development, and sociocultural roles of female traditional dance repertoires in Central Java. These dance traditions include *gambyong* and *tayub* (the focus of the book we've translated here); *lengger* from Banyumas in the southwest corner of Central Java; *langendrian* from the Mangkunegaran Palace in Surakarta; and *wayang wong*, a theatrical production known for inclusion of Central Javanese court dance repertoires. As an educator, Widyastutieningrum has served as a professor and rector at the Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta and nurtured young Indonesian students and scholars through their projects and theses. While her writings tend to center on her archival research and historical findings, her analysis of philosophical underpinnings in movements and sociocultural and spiritual contexts that surround the dance practices are based on her firsthand experience as a practitioner of

dance. Such research methods certainly enrich her discussion and writings on the dance repertoires, particularly that of *beksan*, a repertoire of central Javanese court dance.

Throughout the past several decades, Indonesian scholars—particularly ethnic Javanese—have published and produced rich scholarship on dances from various areas of the archipelago. Many important scholarly works are also written by respected practitioner-scholars of dance—especially on Central Javanese dance repertoire, such as Wahyu Santoso Prabowo’s *Tari Bedhaya Sebuah Gatra Keunggulan* (1996); Soedarsono’s *Wayang Wong: Drama Tari Ritual Kenegaraan di Kraton Yogyakarta* (1997); and Theresia Suharti’s *Bedhaya Semang: Karaton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Reaktualisasi sebuah Tari Pusaka* (2015). This is also true for publications on dance traditions outside of Central Java, including Robby Hidajat’s *Wayang Topeng Malang* (2008) about mask dance from East Java; and Murtala’s *Tari Aceh: Yuslizar dan Kreasi Yang Mentradisi* (2009) about an Acehnese choreographer and the process of traditionalization of dances in the late 20th century. Indonesian scholars have contributed to and engaged significantly with publications on various Indonesian dances by European and American scholars such as Felicia Hughes-Freeland’s *Embodied Communities: Dance Traditions and Change in Java* (2011); Henry Spiller’s *Erotic Triangles: Sundanese Dance and Masculinity in West Java* (2010); and Christina Sunardi’s *Stunning Males and Powerful Females: Gender and Tradition in East Javanese Dance* (2015). Widyastutieningrum’s research commands the same respect and high regard as these works. In my own classroom teaching, in which practice on dance techniques and examination of cultural meaning and performing context are integrated in a single space, Widyastutieningrum’s work has been particularly instrumental.

Widyastutieningrum draws from the work of scholars familiar to international readers of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and dance studies, and particularly from research on Southeast Asia and South Asia. In the opening of the book, Widyastutieningrum applies anthropologist Robert Redfield’s concept of great tradition and little tradition to Java’s performing arts traditions in a discussion on the origin of *gambiyong* dance and its parent form, *tayub* dance. Excavating the history of *taledhek*—the dancers of *tayub*—she engages with a description of performance contexts, appearances, and the dancers’ social status drawn from Clifford Geertz’s *The Religion of*

Java (1960). Furthermore, in illustrating the frequent presence of *tayub* dance in the royal houses and its deep interaction with court dance repertoires in 18th-century Central Java, Widyastutieningrum draws from Claire Holt's 1939 publication, *The Development of the Art of Dancing in the Mangkunegaran*. Furthermore, Widyastutieningrum's discussions on the tradition of *tayub* dance practices by *taledhek* dancers builds upon and extends Clara Brakel-Papenhuyzen's translation and analysis of R.M. Suwandi's manuscript from 1937, which vividly illustrates the historical practice of *tayub* traditions in Javanese and Chinese communities in Central Java. Finally, Widyastutieningrum brings together conversations from various communities concerned with Java's performing arts. In addition to the extensive dance scholarship by Indonesian writers on which she draws, I find particularly inspiring the number of interviews she conducted with highly distinguished choreographers and musicians to support her writing.

The opening remarks in the beginning of the book—provided by Edi Sedyawati, a scholar of archeology and history and professor at University of Indonesia—express praise for Widyastutieningrum's holistic approach to research. Sedyawati remarks on Widyastutieningrum's "*keberanian*" (braveness; courage) in bringing various elements of performance of *gambyong* together into one work. As Widyastutieningrum takes a deep dive into development of *Gambyong Pareanom*, a particularly popular and well-known *gambyong* dance, she examines not only the variations in the movements and choreographic movements, but also the accompanying music. Widyastutieningrum provides notations for several instrumental parts in the *gamelan* ensemble, including the *kendhang ciblon*, a principle drum for village-style dance repertoires from Central Java. Furthermore, while it is omitted from our translation project, her historical research on the origin and presence of *gambyong* dance includes in-depth analysis and translation (from high Javanese to Indonesian) of important Javanese treatises, letters and poems from *Serat Centhini* (1814); *Serat Babad Cariyos Lelampahanipun Swargi R.Ng.Ronggowarsito* (mid-19th century); and *Serat-serat Anggitan Dalem KGPAA Mangkunegara IV* (early 19th century).

My hope is that our translation offers a window for a wider audience into one of the important works on *gambyong*, and also inspires readers to return to the original writing by Widyastutieningrum to access the rich wreath of her source materials, both

historical and contemporary. *Gambyong* also has been frequently witnessed on stages, accompanied by gamelan ensembles at universities and wider communities in the United States and Europe. I hope Widyastutieningrum's work will help students and audiences navigate their understanding of and contextualize the *gambyong* performances they see. Finally, I encourage students and scholars—particularly in the fields of ethnomusicology, anthropology, and Southeast Asian area studies and dance studies—to collaborate in scholarship and artistic enterprises with and lift the voices of art practitioner-researchers and cultural bearers.

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A Note from the Translator—Maho A. Ishiguro

This translation, initiated by Maho Ishiguro, is part of a wider project that provides resources for students studying *gambyong* as one of the dance repertoires and cultural practices from Indonesia. Currently, scholarly works on *gambyong* are only available in Indonesian, although other more prestigious dance repertoires from Central Java such as *bedhaya*, *srimpi*, and *golek* have been extensively discussed in English-language works by Felicia Hughes-Freeland (2008) and Clara Brakel-Papenhuyzen (1992). This translation aims to address that gap by making Widyastutieningrum's explorations of *gambyong's* cultural significance and performance context accessible to undergraduate students at American institutes of higher education. To this end, this particular translation of Widyastutieningrum's original monograph has been edited, reorganized, and condensed. Several in-depth discussions on Javanese literature and history have been omitted from the original text.

We faced some technical challenges as we translated the original text by the author, which was mostly in Indonesian, but sometimes in Javanese. The parts where Javanese proverbs, passages from Javanese treatises, and poems appear were particularly difficult; I have relied on Darsono Hadiraharjo, who hails from a long family line of Javanese puppeteers and musicians and currently directs the Emory University Javanese Gamelan Ensemble, for the interpretation of such difficult Javanese passages. In the glossary, I have collected some of the key Indonesian and Javanese terms that appear more than once in the original text. These terms are also given a brief description in the main text or footnotes upon their first appearance. As the Indonesian language does not distinguish between plural and singular nouns, unless specified, I have leaned toward using the plural form when translating into English, or followed the Indonesian term with plural English terms, such as *taledhek dancers*. Furthermore, in the original writing, there are instances where the author has given two different terms for a single thing. For example, when discussing a particular movement in which a dancer leans to the sides with knees bent, the author writes “*hoyog* or *leyek*.” In such a case, the author provides one term that is commonly used in the area of Yogyakarta and another that is commonly used in the area of Surakarta. In some other cases, such as when she describes one part of a section of *gambyong* choreography, the author provides a set of terms like “*kebar* or

kiprahan”—the former commonly used among musicians and the latter among dancers. We have kept these instances as we saw in the original text, since they provide accessibilities to a wider audience.

Finally, in the passages where the author discusses *tayub* and *taledhek* as the historical origin of *gambyong* dance, these two terms are frequently used interchangeably in the original text, just as they are commonly used interchangeably in various Javanese societies. Although there are some areas of Java where dance by a solo *taledhek* dancer without male accompanists is exclusively called *tari talethek* rather than *tayub*, I have communicated with the author and we decided that for the sake of clarity, *tayub* would signify the dance form performed by the *taledhek* dancer. Furthermore, there are a handful of regional terms such as *ledhak*, *tandak*, and *ronggeng* that appear in the original writing and its translation. They all signify *taledhak*, the dancer of *tayub*.

This translation is a collaboration among four members with various kinds of expertise. I, Maho Ishiguro, the translator, have studied the music and dance of Central Java, and my scholarly endeavors focus on Indonesian performing arts and cultural practices. The editors are Rajendra and Thow Xin Wei, the former an Indonesian Freeman scholar at Wesleyan University and the latter a long-time student of Javanese gamelan and dance in Surakarta. Sonia Pengesti Lambangsari, a graduate student of Widyastutieningrum, organized and performed in video demonstrations of the dance movements discussed in the translation. These videos are intended to assist the reader unfamiliar with Javanese dance and its terminology. She has also provided invaluable support in facilitating consultations with Widyastutieningrum during the translation and editing process. This translation project has been funded by the Frier Center for the Global Studies at Wesleyan University (CT, USA), the Faculty Development Fund, Bates College (ME, USA), Emory Center for the Digital Scholarship at Emory University (GA, USA), and Ethnomusicology Translations.

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A History of *Gambyong*: From Folk Art to Classical Dance

“Great” and “Little” Traditions in Java

Javanese culture consists of two traditions: a great tradition and little tradition. The former belongs to the royal courts and developed in temples and their surrounding cities, whereas the latter tradition exists as part of the cultural life of village communities (Redfield 1982, 81 [translation of Redfield 1956]). Although commonly understood as being separate in their orientation and ways of thinking, these two traditions have always interacted with and influenced each other (Redfield 1982, 60 [translation of Redfield 1956]). Village farming communities have always interacted with urban society through the sale of rice and fresh produce. Such commercial interactions have facilitated and influenced the engagement between these two groups' respective cultural practices, creating a dialogue between the two traditions (Kayam 1981, 39).

Interactions between the great and little traditions have reached into the inner courts of Central Javanese royal households. Historically, the rulers of these royal households frequently invited artists from the surrounding villages to their courts. This became an occasion for exchange, whereby the aesthetics of the court and village arts intermingled. Artists within the courts have reshaped some of the folk art forms into more refined and elegant forms in accordance with court aesthetics (Koentjaraningrat 1983, 213). The creative spirit of these folk arts was frequently absorbed and further developed in the courts and surrounding urban communities. Villagers who became *abdi dalem* (personnel who serve in the royal households) also learned court etiquette and values, which were then brought back to and spread in their home villages. Within this interactive environment, dance became a major site for the exchange of ideas. Dance genres from the village inspired creation of new dance forms in the courts. Conversely, the aesthetics and characteristics of such court dances as *bedhaya* and *srimpi*—refinement, softness, calmness, politeness—entered folk dance practice, thereby supplanting other characteristics widely associated with the perceived cultural backwardness of the village (Murgiyanto 1991, 11).

Gambyong's Roots in Tayub Dance

Gambyong is one such product of cultural interaction between the great and little traditions. *Gambyong* originated in the village and was later adopted by the courts, where it underwent further development and absorbed court aesthetics. The term *gambyong* first appears in the 18th century work *Serat Centhini*.¹ However, it is believed that *gambyong* developed from *tayub* dance, which existed long before *gambyong* developed. According to the treatise *Sastramiruda*, *tayub* has been practiced since the time of the Jenggala kingdom in the 12th century.² *Tayub* dance has itself existed since the Demak period in the 15th century, when it was called “*taledhek barangan*” or “busking *taledhek*.” It was performed on the street with singing and dancing, accompanied by musicians playing *rebana* and *kendhang* (types of drums) (Radyapustaka 1970, 178). Historically, as well as today, *taledhek* is often used as an umbrella term to refer to dancers of *tayub*, *gambyong*, and *taledhek* dance. Additionally, the term *taledhek* is often used interchangeably with *tandhak* to refer to female performers of masked dances.

There are two types of *tayub*: the first, *taledhek barangan*, is performed on the street in exchange for money and goods and often requires the dancers to travel; the second type is performed in one fixed place. The *taledhek* dancer and her group are also often called to social events such as weddings and circumcisions in villages and urban areas (Koentjaraningrat 1983, 214). In both settings, the performer is expected to sing and dance, a combination of skills rooted in ancient traditions which are mentioned in various poems, such as the 10th-century *Wirata Parwa*³ and the 14th-century *Negarakretagama*. Stamford Raffles, in his *The History of Java* (1817), also describes street performance of *tayub*. Raffles (1978, 341) uses the term *ronggeng* for a performer who sings and dances with a long scarf hanging from her shoulder and a fan held in her hand. His description of the *ronggeng's* use of a scarf is almost identical to today's *gambyong* dancers' use of their scarves. Clifford Geertz (1960) and Thomas Pigeaud (1938) describe *taledhek* dancers who offer dancing services door-to-door in cities and villages with a group that usually consists of one dancer and one musician and sometimes of two or three dancers and six gamelan musicians. The *taledhek* dancers and musicians would sing to each other in a call-and-response pattern, often using lyrics that contain erotic double entendres. The *taledhek* dancer is sometimes requested to perform for a fee. Such a performance is

sometimes considered a form of temptation for men, imparting the dancers with an unsavory reputation (Koentjaraningrat 1983, 218). The dancers were often accused of corrupting the morals of villagers and were disliked by wives who feared their husbands would be led astray.

Despite this reputation, *taledhek* dancers were significant presences at the *keraton*, the royal courts of Central Java. In the *Keraton* of Yogyakarta, *taledhek* dancers were historically invited to dance and sing at Garebeg.⁴ At various royal courts, *ronggeng* or *taledhek* dancers were tied to their kings and had intimate relations with them. The *taledhek* dancers were housed in a special village which was recognized by the administrative head of the region and given wages. Their village was considered no different from a brothel, and they were not accepted as common, respectful women. However, these *taledhek* dancers had higher social status than *taledhek* dancers who traveled and performed, because they were exposed to the environment of the courts and were more educated (Pigeaud 1938, 79).

According to oral history, *tayuban*, a social event where *taledhek* danced, began as a form of worshipping Sang Adi Kodrati, the Almighty Divine in the Javanese belief system. Within the dance formation of six dancers, the *taledhek* dancer symbolized faith in and worship of the figure Sang Adi Kodrati. Five male dancers surrounding her symbolized the unification of the five senses (Karsana 1937). As *tayub* developed, its focus shifted away from this symbolism while retaining its prominent ritualistic function at events celebrating fertility and the rice harvest. For example, at Pundungsari village in the Gunung Kidul region of Yogyakarta, *tayub* dance is still performed as a ritual offering during the rice harvest. To open the performance, the *taledhek* dancer places a stalk of rice on the gamelan while the ensemble accompanies her with a *gendhing* (musical composition) titled *Sri Boyong*.⁵ This ritual celebrates the goddess of rice, Dewi Sri, who gives blessings and protects the rice harvest. Through the *taledhek's* dancing the relationship between the village and Dewi Sri is believed to be renewed.

Weddings are another example in which the *taledhek* dancer ritually performs *tayub*. In Karangasari village, Gunung Kidul region, Yogyakarta, *tayub* is performed as part of the *pelepas nazar* which is a ritual to release the bride from her parents. The safety of the bride is ensured through the *ruwatan* ceremony, which begins with *tayuban* and is

followed by a performance of *wayang kulit*, all sponsored by the bride and her parents.⁶ First, two *taledhak* dancers sit by the gamelan, which begins the event by playing *Ladrang Wilujeng* (a musical piece believed to bestow blessings). Then, the dancers perform *gambyong*, followed by *tayuban*, a social dance as part of the *pelapas nazar* ritual. During *pelapas nazar*, one of the *taledhek* dancers scatters rice as she walks around, thereby releasing the bride to be married (Suharto 1980, 60-61) as well as sowing the seeds for a desired bountiful harvest. The figure of the *taledhek* dancer is an important link between the village and the goddess of fertility; her ritual role is essential for the Javanese as an agrarian society.

The *taledhek*-as-entertainer has also been noted in various oral legends and written sources—including a story from the 16th-century Mataram Kingdom in which Sekar Pembayun, a daughter of the first Mataram King Panembahan Senapati, performed *taledhek barangan* while disguised as a *taledhek* dancer to conquer an enemy of her father, Ki Ageng Mangir (Bahasa 1981). An episode in the *Serat Centhini* also describes a scene of *tayub* being danced by a *taledhek* dancer during a wedding ceremony. By the time the court of Mangkunegaran was founded in Surakarta during the mid-18th century, the *tayub* had become a well-known part of such events as weddings, royal birthdays, and palace receptions (Holt 1939, 2).

Tayuban commonly had two segments: the first was a solo performance of dancing and singing by *taledhek* dancers, and the second involved social dancing in pairs between the *taledhek* dancer and men. In this latter half, the *taledhek* dancer invited respected male figures to dance together—starting with the *bupati*, the head of the district, then progressing down the ladder of hierarchy. The *taledhek* dancer would place a *sampur* on a tray handed to her dance partner. After he was chosen, he would place money on top of the tray and request a *gendhing* (musical composition) to which to dance. Some *tayuban* were followed by drinking, sometimes leading to male dancers' becoming drunk and making the event rather rowdy.

Up until the 1960s *tayuban* was commonly seen in Surakarta, the host city of two Central Javanese royal courts, where Susuhunan Paku Buwana XIII presides in the Surakarta court and Mangkunegara X in the Mangkunegaran court. Today, *tayub* is mainly observed in the surrounding regions of the city, including Sragen, Karanganyar,

Wonogiri, Blora, and Grobogan, with troupes of six to seven members, consisting of one or two *taledhek* dancers, three to four gamelan musicians, and one or two female singers. When they walk around market areas, the *taledhek* dancers collect small tips from merchants and dance upon request. The troupe is commonly paid around 250.00 rupiah per piece—less than half of the cost of a kilogram of rice. While society may have looked down on their lifestyle (at least historically), *taledhek* dancers and their troupes are still very much part of the fabric of Javanese tradition. In Sukoharjo, a region outside of Surakarta, *tayub* dances are performed after every harvest season to express gratitude and joy and to offer prayers and thanks to the spirits, maintaining *tayub*'s original elements of ritual and mystic sacredness (*Tayub untuk Upacara Sakral Bersih Desa* 11 Aug. 1990). *Tayub* today is no longer seen as inappropriate for the educated youth of the city; students from the arts institutes in Yogyakarta and Surakarta often perform it as part of government events and official functions.

From *Tayub* to *Gambyong*

Gambyong is a dance form that developed from *taledhek* and *tayub* dances, inheriting many elements from these genres. *Gambyong* is commonly believed to have been the name of a *taledhek barangan* dancer who sang and danced with extraordinary talent, liveliness, and beauty (Sayid 1984, 142). Another theory is that the term *gambyong* comes from a combination of *Gendhing Gambirsawit* and *Boyong*, two gamelan compositions that accompanied *tayub* dancing (see Suharto 1980, 52). Other accounts from oral history propose that the term comes from the name of Nyi Lurah Gambyong, a traditional healer who had the power to cure illness by dancing. The precise age of the term has been contested, as various written sources—among them *Babad Sala* by R.M. Sayid, *Serat Babad Cariyos Lelampahanipun Swargi* by R.Ng. Ronggowarsito, *Serat Tata Cara*, and *Serat Centhini* (1814)⁷—do not agree on the dating of the *taledhek barangan* Gambyong's life or for the performance of the first *gambyong* dance.

By the reign of Paku Buwana IX (1861-1893), *gambyong* dancing was successfully molded into a solo dance style appropriate for aristocratic circles. At that time, *gambyong* developed in the royal courts of Surakarta, as evidenced by king Mangkunegara V (r. 1881-1896) who held *gambyong* performances at his court and later

sent a performing arts troupe of dancers, accompanied by musicians from Bandung, to perform *gambyong* in Amsterdam.⁸ Susuhunan Paku Buwana X (r. 1893-1939) was also known to have frequently held performances of *gambyong* at his court and guest houses.⁹

Many accounts throughout the first half of the 20th century indicate that royalty, the upper social classes, and merchants of Surakarta were involved with *gambyong* dance. Patrons of this dance included the Mangkunegaran royal court, the Surakarta Keraton, wealthy Chinese merchant families in the area,¹⁰ and even Japanese military troops during the time of their occupation (1941-1945). During this period, the dance itself further developed, with new choreographies and names of well-known dancer-singers beginning to appear. One notable dancer-singer in the time of Mangkunegara VII (r. 1916-1944), Nyi Bei Mardusari, was remembered for her melodious singing style and her role of Menakjingga in the Javanese dance-drama genre, *langendriyan*. The *gambyong* dance itself expanded from the previous era (the 19th century) and came to encompass thirty-three sets of movement that dancers performed in response to patterns the *kendhang* player chose spontaneously.¹¹

Gambyong Pareanom

A key development of *gambyong* began in the 1950s, when Nyi Bei Mintoraras choreographed *Gambyong Pareanom* at the court of Mangkunegaran VIII (1944-1986). Adopting fixed choreographic sequences was a departure from the earlier performance practice in which the dancer would perform in response to the *kendhang* player's drumming patterns. Nyi Bei Mintoraras, as a court artist, arranged the *gambyong* dance in concordance with her socio-cultural environment. Therefore, this particular *gambyong* dance had a different presentation from other *gambyong* dances at the time. Pre-determining the choreography also changed the role of the *kendhang* player, who was now only to play a standardized sequence of patterns. This became one of the most significant aspects of many subsequent *gambyong* creations. *Gambyong Pareanom* has also influenced the current form of *gambyong*, which, like other traditional Javanese dance repertoire, now contains a codified series of named movement units. These will be discussed in detail in later sections.

Gambyong Pareanom was unique in many other ways at the time of its creation. First, its choreography incorporates movements from other genres of court dance. For instance, it uses movements characteristic of *srimpi* dance during the *merong* section, the opening section of the accompanying musical piece. It also uses characteristic movements from *golek* during the faster sections called *kebar*.¹² Secondly, the dance has a three-part structure inspired by *wireng*, a dance genre that portrays a stylized battle between characters. The three sections are: *maju beksan*, a prologue to the dance in which the dancers enter; *maju inti*, which presents the main choreography; and *mundur beksan*, when dancers exit the performance space. Lastly, the musical accompaniment to *Gambyong Pareanom* adopted the structure of the Yogyakarta-style gamelan by inserting a particular piece called *Gendhing Sumedhang* in the *kebar* section.

Since *Gambyong Pareanom*'s first performance at the *pendopo* (Javanese pavilion) of the Mangkunegaran palace in 1951 for a royal wedding, choreographers have developed the compositional structure into several versions. Nyi Bei Mintoraras herself re-worked the piece in 1973, shortening it from 45 minutes to 14 minutes. This shorter version eliminates repetition in the choreography and accompanying music. S. Ngaliman, in 1972, adapted the choreography to include movements from older *gambyong* dances rarely performed at the time, in order to preserve them. He also added newly choreographed movements, such as *tawing taweng*, *ogek lambung*, and *nacah miring*. Sutjiati Djoko Suhardjo, a choreographer and teacher at SMKI Surakarta (a vocational high school of the arts), reworked *Gambyong Pareanom* when creating material for high school students. Suhardjo modified some of the movements considered sensual and therefore inappropriate for his young students. In his version of *Gambyong Pareanom*, the modification of movements such as *batangan*, *miwir wiron*, and *laku telu* made the dance softer, more "feminine," and more refined, without exposing too much of the young dancers' physiques.

Some of the modifications were aimed at bringing pre-existing movements into a more dynamic choreography by adding drastic changes in tempo, increasing the sizes of the movements, and creating contrasting sections. For instance, movements typically danced with a highly flowing nature (such as *tumpeng tali kengseran*, *lembehan asta*, and *tumpang tali glebagan*) were set at a faster pace, creating a sharper and firmer feel.

Choreographers made movements centered on the upper body (such as *pilesan* and *kawilan*) more complex, with the dancers changing direction by shifting their feet to turn on the spot. They supplemented movements, especially hand gestures (such as *ulap-ulap kanan*, *penthangan asta*, *tatapan*, *pilesan*, and *tawing taweng*), with variations in posture such as bending the knees (*mendhak*) and lifting up slightly. Utilizing various formations of the dancers was another aspect explored in *gambyong* performance, with dancers traveling from one spot to another during transitional movements (such as *srisig*, *singget ukel*, *kengser*, *magak*, and *nacah miring*). Dancers traveled widely across the stage through such movements as *batangan*, *laku telu*, *nacah miring*, *tumpeng tali glebagan*, *tumpeng tali kengseran*, *lembehan asta*, and *gajah ngileng* (see accompanying video and discussion below). While the dance was originally a solo dance and could still be performed alone, increasing the number of dancers enabled *gambyong* choreographers to explore more complex floor positions as well as forms of interaction among dancers, adding to the dynamism of the performance.

Another area of development in *Gambyong Pareanom* was costuming. Nyi Bei Minoraras's use of elaborate jewelry and formal clothing intentionally differentiated the *gambyong* dancer from the *taledhek* dancer, signifying an elevation of *gambyong* from its origins as a folk dance into part of the courtly repertoire of the Mangkunegaran palace. The formal attire of Nyi Bei Mintoraras's *gambyong* dancer in the royal court included a green velvet *mekak* (top made of thick velvet fabric and embroidery), pleated *batik* with *parang lasem* pattern, and *sampur* (dance scarf) held at the waist with a belt. The dancers' hair was placed in a *kanthong gelung* under a *jamang* (golden crown), *sumping*, and *kelas bahu*. They adorned themselves with golden jewelry including *cundhuk jungkat*, *kalung*, *subang*, and *bros*. Their makeup followed the *lanyap* style of female characters in *wayang* theater.

The costuming in *gambyong* was not standardized and we continue to see many variations today. A typical *gambyong* costume outside of the royal courts uses a top called *angkin*, which is a combination of a corset (known as *stagen*) with colorful fabric to cover the torso when the dancer bares her shoulders; a pleated *batik* to cover the legs; and a *sampur*, which hangs from the right shoulder. The dancer's hair should be done up in a style called *gelung gedhe*, adorned with jasmine flowers and jewelry. Some choose to

use more formal costumes and makeup inspired by *srimpi* and *bedhaya*. However, as these grander dance forms use more elaborate costumes, which could limit the freedom of *gambyong* dancers' movements, not all formal costumes are considered appropriate. Through the costumes and the beauty of the dance movements, the dancer's alluring figure becomes apparent, making the performance more enjoyable in the eyes of the audience.

***Gambyong* in 20th-century Javanese Society**

Javanese society's view of *gambyong* has also changed over the years. Prior to the 1960s, *gambyong*, with its roots in *taledhek* dancing, was still considered unsavory, and daughters of noblemen were forbidden to learn it. However, by the 1960s *gambyong* began to develop into new forms and was even taught to children and adolescents in the Mangkunegaran court's pavilion. Furthermore, as the feudalism of old Javanese society was gradually replaced by egalitarianism, art forms originating from folk traditions began gaining respect. A genuine interest in restoring and preserving traditional cultural practices helped the development of *gambyong* dance in Javanese society. As such, the performance of *gambyong* came to be commonly included in social events such as weddings, ceremonies, and welcoming events.

In particular, the 1970s and 80s saw *gambyong* become increasingly part of the Central Javanese social fabric. In the 1970s a number of events called *massal* were held in which a large number of dancers performed *gambyong*. For example, in 1973 forty-five dancers performed *Gambyong Pangkur* at the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah park in Jakarta to mark the official opening of the Central Javanese section of it.¹³ Many competitions for *gambyong* performance were frequently held in Surakarta. Within a few years, *gambyong* was widely practiced in all regions of Central Java, including Semarang, where 100 dancers performed at the opening of the 1980 Indonesian Film Festival. In 1981 at the centenary of Raden Adjeng Kartini's birth, another 100 *gambyong* dancers performed together.¹⁴ Finally, in 1985 the governor of Central Java designated *gambyong* as the official welcome-dance of the region, codifying it as an essential part of the cultural identity of Central Java. Now *gambyong* is part of every

official event in Central Java, creating frequent opportunities for people to see the dance and attracting them to learn to perform the dance.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the number of choreographed *gambyong* dances increased both within and outside of the royal courts. After the creation of *Gambyong Pangkur* in 1954, *gambyong* began to be known by a wider public. In royal courts *gambyong* entertained important guests; outside the court walls a wider audience also had the opportunity to enjoy it. For example, in 1956 five dancers performed *Gambyong Pancasila* at the opening of Dharma Budaya in Solo.¹⁵ That same year, Nyi Bei Mintoraras choreographed *Gambyong Padhasih* for a royal wedding at the Mangkunegaran palace, where the dancers performed wearing costumes similar to those used in *srimpi* dance. She also choreographed one more *gambyong* dance, namely *Gambyong Campursari* in 1970, which was later renamed *Gambyong Sumyar* in 1975.¹⁶ Sumardjo Hadjoprasanto choreographed his version of *Gambyong Pangkur* in 1962, which was performed with 100 dancers at the opening of Kebun Binatang Tegal Wareng (a zoo in Tegalwareng in Semarang); and S. Ngaliman choreographed his version of *Gambyong Gambirsawit* in 1970, *Gambyong Pareanom* in 1972, and *Gambyong Pancerana* (date of composition unknown). In the next two decades, other well-known Javanese choreographers composed *gambyong* pieces: *Gambyong Ayun-Ayun* (1978) and *Gambyong Sala Minulya* (1979) by S. Maridi; *Gambyong Pancerana* (1981) and *Gambyong Mudhatama* (1989) by Sunarno; *Gambyong Pangkur Langenkusuma* (1989) by R.T. Rono Suropto; and *Gambyong Dewandaru* (1992) by Wahyu Santoso Prabowo.

The development of *gambyong* as a dance form cannot be separated from the development of *gambyong's* function in the lives of the people. *Gambyong* came to serve as entertainment at such functions as weddings, opening ceremonies, officiation ceremonies, and anniversaries of large organizations. When used as a welcome or opening dance for a larger event, a *gambyong* performance commonly lasts about five minutes, containing only a handful of signature movements such as *batangan*, *pilesan*, and *laku telu*. Nevertheless, even in such a short performance, the spirit of the dance—lively, flirtatious and charming—is maintained. *Gambyong* as a welcome or opening dance has the tendency to function as a supplementary event, a *pager ayu* (something to

liven up the atmosphere).¹⁷ In such cases, the organizers choose dancers more on the basis of their appealing physical appearances than on their talent as dancers.

Gambyong as a genre has gone through significant development, particularly with regard to visual elements. However, in the view of some, the soul of the dance has gone missing. Dancers today merely memorize the sequence of movements, but they lack an understanding of the *rasa* (feeling, soul, taste, and spirit) of *gambyong* and its accompanying music. *Gambyong* dancers today deliver little more than a spectacle or piece of entertainment, or something with which to provide technical training for the dancers. No one makes an effort to express the spirit of the dance.¹⁸ And while there are many dancers with good technique, it is difficult to find those who are capable of embodying the spirit of the dance today and carrying it forward.¹⁹ Furthermore, because groups rather than individuals tend to perform *gambyong* today, teachers prioritize training dancers to synchronize with one another rather than educating individual dancers to bring forth the true spirit and meaning of the dance. *Gambyong* as a genre now tends to emphasize its physical movements rather than its soul.²⁰ As Suryobrongto (1976, 10) puts it, “Without the soul, the dance becomes shallow, less lively, and less characteristic.” Perhaps this comes from changes in how the dance is performed today; *gambyong* is performed not as expression in and of itself, but rather as a dance catering to particular aims during specific events.²¹

Gambyong is widely accepted among all social strata of Java for its characteristically Javanese qualities. The term people use to express this idea, *njawani*, refers to the essential nature of Javanese people, customs, and culture. Javanese people commonly characterize themselves as prioritizing slowness, happiness, and harmony, as well as avoiding hastiness in their lives (Hardjowirogo 1989, 7). Such Javanese characteristics are reflected in *gambyong* with its elegance and harmony, emphasizing congruous and graceful dance motions. Its musical pieces, such as *Gendhing Gambirsawit*, are full of *njawani* qualities—calmness, simplicity, and harmony. The costumes used for *gambyong*, including the use of pleated *batik* and the *gelung kondhe* hairstyle, are also characteristically Javanese.

The flexibility of presentation in *gambyong* dance stems from the necessity to adjust to different performance contexts; it can be choreographed according to the situation,

condition, and venue. This flexibility enables *gambyong* to be performed in a wide range of places, such as proscenium stages, outdoor fields, stadiums, airfields, and on the street. It can also be performed in both the village and the city. The genre also gives space for choreographers and dancers to express their creativity, for, unlike other dance genres such as *bedhaya* or *srimpi*, the content of the dance itself is not standardized. The same can be said about costuming and musical accompaniment as well as the number of dancers in a performance—ranging from one to many dancers, as seen in typical mass dance events. The flexible and adaptable nature of *gambyong* dance allows it to be performed for a wide range of Javanese social strata, from the common folk to noble or aristocratic families, and by young dancers and middle-aged women alike.

On Tangible and Symbolic Technical Components of *Gambyong*

Art forms result from artists' expressing their views and perceptions in a physical form perceptible to the senses. Thus, the medium of an art form is related to artists' expressions of their inner experiences—in other words, form and content are related. "Form" here means the physical and tangible elements of an art form, while "content" is the expression of an artist's inner experiences as expressed through artistic means. "The form of expression in a work of art manifests as physical elements, such as lines, colors, human voices, instrumental sounds, movement of bodies, and words" (Rustopo 1990). However, art is not only a process of creating through a medium but also an expression of the human experiences that enrich our lives and souls. In other words, by the same process that art expresses human experiences, it enriches them. Furthermore, the physical and tangible form does not exceed the expressive content, as the former is utilized to communicate the latter. Both form and content grow within their traditional cultural contexts, surrounded and cultivated by those who embody their traditions and cultural practices (Rustopo 1990). Traditional arts follow certain principles and frameworks in the sense that practitioners recognize constraints and limits on what kinds of material and content should be expressed, what kind of forms and vocabularies should be employed, and what are the objectives of the art form (Humardani 1972, 7). In the case of Javanese dance, a circle of artists creatively interpret such traditional principles and frameworks to

construct what we call the arts within Javanese traditional contexts (Humardani 1979/80, 10).

In traditional Javanese dance, certain movements constitute a set of basic techniques that become building blocks with which choreographers work. These movements are considered the fundamental driving force of the dance form, developed and cultivated over a long period of time. Based on their function in the choreography, these movement units can be divided into four types:

- 1) Basic movements: A series of basic, principal movements, called *sekaran*, constitute a singular, larger unit of movement. It is substantial in length and complexity, representing certain meanings conveyed through the movements *batangan*, *pilesan*, *laku telu*, *engkyek*, *engkrang*, *manglung* and others.
- 2) Prefatory movements: Movements placed before the start of a series of principal movements in the main body of a piece make up their own unit of movement. Such movements include *sembahan*, *sabetan*, and *hoyog*.
- 3) Connecting movements: Dancers use connecting movements to move from one position to another or to connect various *sekaran*. *Srisig*, *besut*, *singget*, and *ngingel* are some of the connecting movements.
- 4) Closing movements: Used to signify the end of a piece, closing movements include *sabetan*, *panggal*, *sindheth*, and *sembahan*.

In Javanese traditional dance, choreographers commonly compose their pieces through creative use of existing motifs and movements. These pre-existing elements are only taken as points of departure and are not strictly binding.

In addition to these four categories of movement vocabularies, choreographers apply other fundamental gestures to positions for the head, torso, hips, chest, as well as arms, feet, and knees (Smith 1985, 7). Control of these movements, use of space, qualities and dynamics of movements, and details regarding the positioning of fingers and hands are also part of these fundamentals.

Gambyong performance consists of two components: 1) the physical and tangible components (the exterior form) and 2) the expressive and symbolic components (the

interior form). In reality, though, these two components make up an inseparable, unified whole.

A. Physical and Tangible Components

As discussed earlier, *gambyong* has its origins in *tayub*, a traditional dance form performed by a solo female dancer. The difference between *gambyong* and *tayub* became more apparent after *gambyong* began to develop within the environment of the Surakarta royal courts. *Gambyong* performed in the court, rather than in villages, began to absorb other conventions of court dance, as well as its etiquette and ideologies. Dancers and choreographers cultivated the qualities of *gambyong* movements, including their pace, tension, shape, and dynamics. As a result, *gambyong* performed in the *keraton* became more refined while retaining the feminine liveliness, gracefulness, and softness of its predecessor. In the process of refining the dance form, choreographers modified several movements. In particular, they removed movements considered overly sensual, such as those that revealed the calves and involved swaying the breasts and casting sensuous sidelong glances.

As a traditional Javanese dance form, *gambyong* also has its own rules regarding movements, sequences of movements, and performance contexts. Every *gambyong* piece consists of six standard series' of choreographic movements (*sekarang*). The dance begins with *laras (merong)*, *batangan*, *pilesan* and *laku telu*, and *menthogan* and *wedhi kengser* appear near the end. These series of choreographic movements interweave. Movements requiring dancers to move from one position to another, called *sekarang mlaku*, and movements danced in place, called *sekarang mandheg*, alternate in the order of a *gambyong* piece.²²

As a whole, *gambyong* pieces are made of these series of movements which are also called *sekarang gambyongan*. The vocabulary of *gambyong* dance movements has continuously developed and changed over the course of its history: Initially, *gambyong* contained five *sekarang* or series of movements, as mentioned in the Serat Sastramiruda, and grew to contain eleven *sekarang* by the time of Wreksadiningrat.²³ *Gambyong Gambirsawit* contained seventeen *sekarang* and used to be performed frequently at the Mangkunegaran palace prior to 1950.²⁴ Currently, *gambyong* choreographers can choose

from at least thirty-three *sekaran*; many of these developed from variations based on pre-existing *sekaran*.²⁵ For instance, the *sekaran* “*tumpang tali*,” has given birth to four other *sekaran* variations: *tumpang tali glebagan*, *tumpang tali indriya*, *tumpang tali kengseran*, and *tumpang tali sigeg*.

Music for *Gambyong*

Musical accompaniment for *gambyong* is made up of two types of gamelan compositional pieces (*gendhing*) called *ladrang* and *gendhing kethuk loro kerep*.²⁶ *Ladrang* compositional pieces include *Pangkur*, *Asmaradana*, *Ayun-Ayun*, and *Sumyar*, while *gendhing kethuk loro kerep* pieces include *Gendhing Gambirsawit*. *Gambyong* dance that uses *ladrang* is referred to as “little” *gambyong*, while *gambyong* dance that uses *gendhing kethuk loro kerep* is called “big” or “grand” *gambyong*. *Gambyong* dances are commonly named after their associated musical pieces such as *Gambyong Pangkur*, *Gambyong Gambirsawit*, and *Gambyong Ayun-Ayun*. Even *gambyong* dances that did not originally have musical accompaniment get named for the accompaniment they acquired. *Gambyong Mudhatama* and *Gambyong Dewandaru* are examples such *gambyong* dances. Some *gambyong* dances, however, are not named after their musical accompaniment. These include: 1) Nyi Bei Mintoraras’s *Gambyong Pareanom* which is accompanied with *Ayak-ayakan* and *Gendhing Gambirsawit*, 2) Nyi Bei Mintoraras’s *Gambyong Campursari* which is paired with *Ladrang Sumyar*, and 3) S. Maridi’s *Gambyong Pareanom* which uses *Ladrang Tirtakencana* and *Gending Gambirsawit*, and 4) *Gambyong Padhasih* which is accompanied by *Ladrang Kutut Manggung*.

The characteristics of musical pieces that accompany *gambyong* dances comes from the drumming patterns, played on the *kendhang ciblon* during the main sections of the *gambyong* choreography. The drummer, according to his individual *wilet* (ability), can develop his own drumming patterns, drawing on a store of twenty-eight known *ciblon* patterns (Martopangrawit 1972, 151-53).²⁷ Dancers choose their movements and set their tempo according to these drumming patterns. The harmonious cohesion and close relationship between the dancers’ movements and drummers’ musical accompaniment makes *gambyong* special. When successful, the musical accompaniment supports the dancers’ embodying the lively, flirtatious, and graceful nature of *gambyong*.

ciblon drum patterns used to be called “*kosek wayangan*,” which suggests that these patterns may have originated in *wayang kulit*, Javanese shadow puppetry theater traditions. In *wayang kulit* performances today, *gambyong* is often included in the comedic *limbukan* scenes and near the end of the performance when the *kayon* puppet is placed in the center of the screen.²⁸ In such performances, a scene called *gambyongan* involves a *wayang golek* puppet character performing *gambyong*.²⁹ Every complete set of *wayang kulit* puppets contains a *wayang golek*, a three-dimensional rod-puppet made of wood that has the form of a female *gambyong* dancer.³⁰

The framework used in *gambyong* to order the sequence of *sekarang* in the choreography depends closely on the structure of the musical accompaniment. The prominent theorist R. L. Martopangrawit discussed this in his *Titilaras Kendangan*, a treatise on drum techniques in gamelan music. Martopangrawit discusses the order of musical patterns played on the drum for *gambyong* dance. It begins with *merong*, then proceeds to *batangan*, *pilesan*, and *lakutelu*. The drumming patterns *menthogan* and *wedhi kengser* come before the end of the piece. Martopangrawit discusses how drummers’ creativity and skill allow them to move beyond these prescribed drumming patterns and create new orderings. Drummers should be mindful, he writes, of the principle in *gambyong* movement whereby stationary movements must alternate with those in which dancers shift location and adjust the drumming pattern accordingly.

The relationship between drummer and dancer differs depending on how *gambyong* is performed. When *gambyong* was first performed, the dancer responded to the drummer’s spontaneous drum patterns and there was no fixed choreography. This kind of interaction was also characteristic of *ledhekan* as part of *Sriwedari* performances from the 1940s to the 1970s, in which dancers sang and danced at the same time. *Gambyong* performed in this way has a strong improvisatory character: As the dancer responds to the drummer’s patterns, she can choose movements in accordance with her tastes and aesthetics and fully embody her expression and character through her interpretation of the music. To achieve a harmonious and successful spontaneous performance of *gambyong*, the connection between the dancer and the drummer must be strong. When done well, this kind of performance showcases the individual dancer’s skills and talent as a professional.

The second style of *gambyong* performance contains movements that a choreographer has designed, making it possible for a larger group of dancers to perform. Here, the artistic expression of the group as a whole takes priority over that of the individual dancers. As mentioned previously, this style began to appear in the early 1950s when Nyi Bei Mintoraras composed *Gambyong Pareanom*. The presence of fixed choreography makes it unnecessary for the dancer to respond to the drummer's patterns, and the dancer is not expected to sing.

B. Expressive and Symbolic Components

Through artistic expression artists invite audiences to dive into diverse kinds of experiences, both external and internal. The artists can depict an array of behaviors and their human impacts in their art: acts of kindness that succeed in helping others, of honesty that bring happiness, and of heroism that manifest in victories; it can also depict fearsome acts of wickedness and tyranny, as well as acts of kindness that result in destruction, or acts of honesty that result in harm or misfortune. Depending on the objectives, expression in art can be divided into two types. The first, or "primary nature," involves deep *cita* (feeling) and is created with a feeling of magnificence. This kind of expression in art pertains to life values, religious and spiritual faith, and unwavering belief. All of these help guide one's own life as well as living in a community with others, in harmony with nature, and maintaining complete trust in one's spiritual beliefs. The objective of this kind of expression is to embody feeling fully; the audience should reflect upon this art at the time of a performance. By contrast, expressive forms with a "secondary nature" are not mainly intended to embody feeling. Such forms serve as entertainment, uplift the audience, and enliven ceremonies and other events.

Such art forms as dance, theater, songs, and carvings contain *rasa* (feeling), *watak* (character) or *isi* (content), and *karep* (purpose) (Humardani 1982/82, 11). Every form of art has content that symbolizes something meaningful. In the choreography of Javanese traditional dance, both abstract and representational movements portray everyday events. Dances such as *srimpi* and *bedhaya* use abstract movements, while *gambyong* uses both abstract and representational movements, with the latter mainly seen in the *kebar* and *kiprahan* sections of the choreography.³¹ *Gambyong* itself does not convey a specific

theme or narrative but depicts female grace and sensuality. Dancers portray gracefulness, liveliness, cheerfulness, and flirtatiousness—identified as feminine in Javanese art forms—through a series of movements, each of which carries symbolic value and represents meaning.

Once *gambyong* became accepted and grew to occupy a respectable position within the Javanese traditional dance repertoire (particularly in the Surakarta style), an array of expressive meanings were applied to *gambyong* dance to legitimize the fact that *gambyong* was no longer a dance style of ill-repute. Two sets of expressive meanings/symbolic values are attributed to *gambyong*. The first is that *gambyong* depicts the three stages of human life: birth, adulthood, and death. While birth and death are experiences that all humans face, the process of maturity and the experience of adulthood are unique to each individual. Within the first set of meanings, the standard series of movements in *gambyong* are associated with the following:

- 1) *Laras* (tranquility, solemnity): These choreographic movements are delivered in a fixed position and in a slow tempo, and they symbolize the fetus carried in a mother's womb.
- 2) *Batangan* (from Javanese root *mbatang*, "to predict"): In *Batangan* movements, the dancer travels rather freely from one position to another. In this context this *sekarang* means to predict the baby's future and symbolizes the birth of a child.
- 3) *Pilesan* (from *piles*, to grind with a rock and make smooth and fine): In *gambyong*, *Pilesan* symbolizes what the child must learn and hold for the future.
- 4) *Laku telu* (*laku*, "to walk" + *telu*, "three"): "Three paths," or "three directions." This movement sequence re-articulates the symbolic meaning of *gambyong*, namely the three stages of life, namely birth, adulthood, and death.
- 5) *Menthogan* (*Menthog* refers to *itik Manila* or *itik Serati*, or Muscovy ducks, typically farm raised): This *sekarang* portrays an elderly person devoid of energy and attractiveness, but in association with these birds, it also connotes a person who is living a meaningful life, with the ability to live on both land and water.
- 6) *Wedhi Kengser* ("sand that is blown by wind"): This *sekarang* symbolizes a life nearing its end. The dancer performs this movement in a fixed position, shifting her upper body

slowly to the side. This *sekarán* is commonly accompanied by a movement called *entragan* and followed by musical accompaniment that speeds up before slowing to a halt. The changes in tempo and gradual ending symbolize the end of life.³²

The second kind of expressive meaning/symbolic value in *gambyong*, particularly in the *ciblon* section, concerns the intimate relationship between a man and a woman. Looking at the origins of *gambyong*, one is reminded of *gambyong*'s predecessor *tayub* dance which like *lengger*, *runggeng*, *kethuk tilu*, and *gandrung*, has erotic connotations. This second kind of expressive meaning in *gambyong* appears also to be connected with the original function of *tayub* in particular, which traditionally had a role in fertility rituals. However, because *gambyong* movements are highly refined, only the amorourness which may inspire sexual desire in the audience is detected in the dance.³³ Each section of *gambyong* dance is related to this overall purpose:

- 1) The *laras* section, performed with calmness and solemnity, portrays a person meditating on God (Poerwadarminto 1939, 262).
- 2) The *kebar* or *kiprahan* section is a choreographic segment that portrays a woman adorning herself with makeup and jewelry.³⁴
- 3) The *ciblon* section portrays intercourse between a man and a woman.
- 4) The *batangan* movement portrays parents hoping for a child and the birth of the child.
- 5) The *pilesan* movement (from *piles* which can also mean to entwine or caress) portrays a man and woman's mutual acts of seduction (Poerwadarminto 1939, 491).
- 6) The *laku telu* movement represents the moment of intercourse. *Laku telu* is a metaphor in Javanese for a man walking with three legs, the third leg being his erection.
- 7) The *menthogan* movement portrays the moment of orgasm.
- 8) The *wedhi kengser* movement illustrates the culmination of this connection between the man and the woman. This series of movements ends with the *entragan* movement, which portrays the couple shaking in ecstasy.³⁵

In addition, *gambyong* dance can portray a woman about to give birth and convey virtues such as the uniting of body and soul.³⁶ *Gambyong* also portrays sacred

connections in human life and expresses devotion. Such sociocultural meanings of *gambyong* are not always understood by today's society—including dancers and choreographers, even though they still heed the rules of the *gambyong* dance. As *gambyong* is filled with lively, graceful, and dynamic choreographic movements—carrying aesthetic qualities considered desirable for Javanese women—the dance form is a possible medium for educating women in elegance, liveliness, agility, grace, and charm.

Aesthetic Qualities of in Javanese Dance

Experts in philosophy and the arts often discuss aesthetics and beauty. Aesthetics not only explores the objects or outcome of the arts but also the process of creating, utilizing, enjoying, and evaluating the arts (Soedarsono 1977, 22). The definition of beauty is relative in that what is considered beautiful changes over time. The most straightforward definition of beauty, offered by a Sufi community in fifth century Athens, is as something enjoyable and pleasant (Gie 1976, 36). Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) connected the term beauty with desire and laid out its three conditions: 1) “perfection or unimpairedness,” 2) “proportion or harmony,” and 3) “brightness or clarity” (Dickie 1979, 8). Herbert Read, an English historian, poet, and critic, also states, “Beauty is a unity of formal relations among our sense-perceptions.” (Read 1990, 2 [translation of Read 1931]).

In connection with dance, John Martin proposes that beauty is what offers fulfillment to the inner self. As such, all movements—refined, as well as rough, strong, and firm—are beautiful so long as they fulfill our inner selves (Soedarsono 1977, 16). Beauty, then, is not limited to something that entertains and pleases us, but also includes what we find thrilling, fearsome, sad, discerning, interesting, touching, and horrid—all that moves our soul (Parker 1980, 6). Understanding beauty requires one to recognize the value in a work of art and provide an assessment. Audiences thus play an equally important role in determining beauty in art (Gie 1978, 18).

To discuss aesthetic values in *gambyong*, we must understand elements associated with beauty and how aesthetics works in traditional Javanese dance generally. Aesthetics in traditional Javanese dance concerns not only beauty, but also ethics, etiquette, and religion or spirituality. In traditional Javanese thought, the concept of the beautiful-and-noble—in Javanese, *adiluhung* (Sumarsam 1992, 80)—permeates aesthetic discourse as

well as discourses related to philosophy, religion, education, rituals, and other aspects of human life (Prabowo 1990, 80). *Adiluhung* is associated with the creation of the divine king, *dewa raja*, and his rulership over territory, people, and the universe.³⁷ Works of arts considered *adiluhung* are not believed to have been made by humans but by the gods or by people endowed with the god-given capacity to create (Lelyveld 1931, 42).

Javanese dance has also been influenced by Indian traditional dances grounded in Hinduism. According to the concepts within Indian dance traditions, dance can be called *nṛtya* or *nāṭya* and considered beautiful if it has three properties: 1) *rasa*, the most refined essence and core, 2) *bhava*, emotion, and 3) *vyañjana*, "allusion, suggestion." These three elements relate to each other in the following way: *Rasa* is the source of beauty, because *rasa* stimulates the subtlest of feelings within us, such that perception arises and causes emotions (*bhāva*). Then, suggestion (*vyañjana*) propels imagination, and because we have the ability to track meanings hidden behind visible manifestations, our emotion becomes stronger and grows into what is called *hāva* (a strong feeling of love) (Lelyveld 1931, 61). This is why dance is an art form that evokes feelings, in which *rasa* creates atmosphere, evoking a stable *bhāva*, and through *vyañjana* creates subtle and mysterious notions (Lelyveld 1931, 62).

Despite influence from Indian dance traditions, Javanese dance traditions have qualities much their own. The art of Javanese dance reflects Javanese cultural values, highlighting qualities of refinement, gracefulness, politeness, morality, calmness, and control—despite the possibility of lust and turbulence in one's heart. Javanese society highly praises such qualities. The vibrant and exuberant nature of Indian dance does not match the personalities of the Javanese who appear pious, refined, and restrained—especially in contexts of female dance practice. Javanese dance embodies the most essential elements of Javanese culture, and the art of dancing, with its perfection of beauty and rich symbolism, is deep.

The very close relationship between dance movements and rhythm in Javanese dance is one source of its beauty. This recognition of beauty stems from the Javanese sensitivity to music, particularly with regard to time, and extends to the value of maintaining control over one's thoughts, feelings, and desires. Balancing the inner and outer qualities of one's life through such control creates tranquility, grandeur, and beauty

in dance movements. Although subtle, when accompanied by singing or music, these movements become meaningful (Lelyveld 1931, 114). Such a tranquil, glorious, and beautiful balance in Javanese life is reflected in the movement expressions of Javanese dance. Gamelan music has an impact on dance movements and informs the overall aesthetics of a performance through inspiring emotions, supporting movement qualities, and creating particular moods. Understanding the engagement between movements and rhythm is essential, as rhythm gives life to movements and evokes high spirits, happiness, and the overall atmosphere.

The detail-oriented nature of Javanese dance requires attention to the body from the trunk all the way to the fingers and toes. Such attention makes the dance form harmonious. The progression of rhythm within the order of movements in the choreography is spectacular. All the limbs participate in a structured way in the shift from one choreographed movement to the next. This adjustment of the whole body results in the movement appearing to flow smoothly like water. Prince Suryodiningrat defines Javanese dance as “composed of movements from the entire body, regulated by the rhythm of accompanied music, following the themes and meanings of the dance” (Dewan Kesenian Propinsi DIY 1981, 34).

Another profound concept often discussed regarding Javanese dance is the harmonious synthesis of *wiraga*, *wirama*, and *wirasa*. *Wiraga* concerns the dance movements; *wirama* is the relationship between the dancer’s movements and the musical rhythm; and *wirasa* concerns the depth of expression and feeling in the soul. The effect of movements, music, and soulful expression working together in this dance form, along with the meanings embedded in and expressed through physical movement, contribute to the overall aesthetics of Javanese dance. The *Serat Kridhawayangga* (1925) presents concepts relating to the quality, character, and vocabulary of dance movements. For example, in female dance, *mucang kesisan* refers to a dancer moving “like the betel nut tree swaying in the wind”; *anglirik dariji asta* refers to the eyes moving to glance at the fingers; and *pacak gulu ganil* refers to the neck moving flirtatiously (Sastrakartika 1979, 24-26). Javanese dance is an accumulation of elements shaped by cultural practices surrounding it over a long period of time and is tied to tradition through a variety of rules and guidelines. Through a unity acquired over time, Javanese dance carries with it a

universal nature and noble values. As such, it is not only pleasant for the eyes but also moves the soul.

Performers must attend to the “basic” or “fundamental” concepts in Javanese dance, called *waton*. For example, the basic concept of movement in Javanese dance takes in the personality of the dancer, the dancer’s control over her form, the width of the area in which dancing is taking place, and the dynamics of the movements. Owing to the existence of such fundamental concepts, notions of what is correct and incorrect began to emerge within Javanese traditional dance. What is correct has fulfilled *waton*, and what is incorrect has violated *waton*. This understanding of correctness and incorrectness is related to a dancer's form or technique in the broad sense that form and its implementation are physical in nature. Technique is important in traditional dance, despite being only a medium of expression and not the purpose or goal. Every character in Javanese traditional dance has a particular form of movement, expressive power, technique, and soulful expression. For instance, in the male dance repertoire (in Javanese court dance tradition), refined characters should move smoothly to music in a calm, slow, and refined manner, whereas strong characters should have firm and sometimes even aggressive and rough qualities in their movements.

Aesthetic Elements in *Gambyong* Choreography

When speaking of aesthetic values in *gambyong* dance, it is necessary to specify the *gambyong* dance in question. In this case, the discussion focuses on the *gambyong* dance created with principles from royal court dances, as seen in such works as *Gambyong Pangkur* (choreographed by S. Maridi) and *Gambyong Pareanom* (choreographed by Nora Kustantina Dewi and Rusini). Readers should keep in mind that these *gambyong* have been practiced in the royal courts, and therefore contain elements inherited from other court dances and reflect court aesthetics; these elements of *gambyong* differ from what is practiced in villages.

As a dance form synthesizing folk traditions and royal court dance, *gambyong* has a unique style that combines the spontaneity and communicative qualities of folk tradition with the refined, graceful, and soft qualities that derive from court dance aesthetics. Movements in *gambyong* are graceful, alluring, and lively, with highly refined

technical aspects (Sedyawati 1984, 141). Some of these complicated movements require complex coordination between movement of the feet and positioning of the hands and head. The movements *laku telu*, *gajah ngoling*, *nacah miring*, *wedhi kengser*, and *kawilan*, for instance, require extremely complex coordination between feet, hands, and head. The movements *nacah*, *ogek lambung*, and *ukel asta*, which are signature to the dance form, contribute to *gambyong*'s charm. Aside from these discrete movements, *gambyong* choreography flows seamlessly, making it difficult to discern where one movement ends and where another begins. *Gambyong* also possesses a very strong appeal or charm "as the dancer attempts to display her passion" (Sedyawati 1984, 133). Because its movements are either abstract or distilled versions of everyday events, this leaves the audience intrigued and the dance allows for a broad range of interpretation for the audience. Furthermore, the dynamism of the dance comes from its fast and nimble tempo and the variations in movement motifs throughout a *gambyong* piece. *Gambyong*'s charm also derives from the erotically inspired characteristic motifs in the movements.

The choreography of *gambyong* mainly uses the feet, legs, torso, arms, and head. Movements of the hands provide a touch of dynamism to the dance, while movements of arms and heads are refined and highly controlled. Eye movements follow the direction of the hands while the dancer's gaze falls on the fingers. In the movement called *ukel asta*, the dancer rotates her wrist delicately and then her hand. As fingers are considered highly central to expression in *gambyong*, many motifs actively involve the fingers. For example, in *ngruji*, all the fingers are pressed together except the thumb, which is bent inward to the palm; in *ngithing*, the middle finger is bent to meet the thumb, while the other fingers are delicately bent towards the palm; and in *nyempurit*, the middle finger is bent, the tip of the thumb touches the center of the middle finger, and all the other fingers are delicately bent.

Dancers pay attention to their feet throughout the dance; the foot movements during standing positions and moving positions should have a harmonious relationship. For example, in *srisig* a dancer travels smoothly across the floor on her tiptoes, using small steps to move quickly from one place to another; in *nacah miring*, the dancer moves her left foot to the side in alternation with placing her right foot in front of the left; and in *kengser*, the dancer performs a shuffling movement in which both feet shift

sideways without leaving the floor. As in some other traditional Javanese dances, motion in the dancer's torso doesn't vary much. The dancer remains in a *mendhak* position, with her knees bent low and turned outwards, and her feet open in a v-shape. The vertical movement *embat* (or *entrag*), in which a dancer in the *mendhak* position raises and lowers her entire body, is unique to *gambyong*. *Hoyog* (or *leyek*) is another of the few movements whereby the torso is swung from side to side.

Flirtatious head movements in *gambyong*, called *pacak gulu ganil*, are quite varied when compared to head movements in Javanese dances such as *bedhaya* and *srimpi*. Head movements have several variations: 1) The dancer turns her head horizontally in a figure eight as part of such dance movements as *batangan*, *pilesan*, and *wedhi kengser*, 2) The dancer tilts her head left and right in *kawilan*, *tatapan*, and *ukel pakis*, and 3) The dancer bobs her head to the front and pulls it back. This is called *pacak gulu lenggut* in dance movements such as *methogan*. These head movements contribute significantly to the character of *gambyong* dance. The dancer's facial expression in *gambyong* differs from that in other Javanese female dance forms, where the dancers tend to remain simple and stern with a level gaze—since showing more emotion on the face would make the other elements of the dance appear shallow. In contrast, *gambyong* requires a little more animation in the expression, with a gaze that is grounded in an expression of joy from within. *Gambyong* expresses tranquility and refinement in *batangan* and *pilesan*, liveliness in *laku telu* and *nacah miring*, as well as flirtatiousness in *tumpang tali* and *tatapan*.

As a form of dance only women perform, *gambyong* is guided by rules for movement that support the ideal qualities that Javanese women in general should possess. Javanese women should be refined, soft, polite, and never overwhelmed with emotion. In accordance with this, *gambyong* choreography never calls for the arms to be raised higher than the shoulders; nor are there movements involving jumping or spreading the legs. In dancing *gambyong*, a dancer must always maintain a balance between the movements and her inner disposition (such as her emotions) so that she can perform the movements with close attentiveness, refinement, and in a harmonious flow of movement.

Dancers change positions between each set of *sekaran* by using transitional movements such as *srisig*, *singlet ukel karna*, *kengser*, and *nacah miring*. They can also

use a kind of *sekaran* that moves a dancer from one place to another, called *sekaran mlaku*; examples of such *sekaran* include *pilesan* and *kawilan*. The positions of the dancers are usually determined by the number of dancers and the available space. The choreographer will also line up rows of dancers according to their heights in order to add variations to the movements. *Gambyong* performance today is often performed by a group of dancers rather than a solo dancer. This allows for more interesting performance choices as, with multiple bodies on the stage, it is possible to work creatively with movements, floor positions, musical accompaniment, and costumes, making the performance dynamic and lively.

According to S. Ngaliman, “The harmonious engagement between music and movement is fundamental to the aesthetic quality of *gambyong*.”³⁸ The *ciblon* drum is primarily responsible for the rhythmic aspect of *gambyong*. It leads by providing the tempo and drummed rhythmic patterns to which the dancers respond. While the close and intimate relationship between movements and the *kendhang* is the signature element in *gambyong*, a dancer must also listen to the *kempul*, the *kenong*, and the gong in order to determine the placement of her movements in each phrase of the dance.³⁹ This close relationship between the dancers and the musical accompaniment allows for the power of expression in the dance to be greatly aided, even changed, by the strength of the musical accompaniment. This synthesis between choreography and music creates the beauty in *gambyong* and is unique when compared to dances such as *srimpi* and *bedhaya*.

Makeup and costume for *gambyong* also support the overall expression of *gambyong* dance. The makeup style is meant to bring out the natural beauty of the dancer. As discussed earlier, costumes for *gambyong* commonly use *kembenan* (also known as *angkinan*)—a type of corset which covers the dancer’s torso and also gives a curve to the dancer’s physique, allowing the torso movements, such as *ogek lambung*, to be seen more clearly and dynamically. The dancer’s breasts are sometimes pushed up into a shape called *glathik mungup*, to look like the *gelatik* (Java sparrow) appearing. The pleated *jarik* cloth that covers the dancer’s legs gives the dance a liveliness, opening and closing as a dancer moves her legs. The development of diverse *gambyong* costumes is decorative in nature and largely independent of general dance decorum or etiquette. The

development of *gambyong* costumes makes *gambyong* performances increasingly diverse and appealing.

Joged Mataram: A Dancer's Expressive Power and Expected Mastery

Choreography cannot be separated from the role of the performing dancer. As choreography is imparted through a dancer's body, its success depends on the dancer's ability to present it. The role of the dancer is to interpret and realize the work of the choreographer in a concrete form. A dancer has to be capable of properly and gracefully executing a dance, carrying out its soulfulness with precision and beauty, and mastering its rhythm while maintaining an appropriate posture (Wardhana 1984, 28). To do so successfully, dancers must maintain their physical and spiritual well-being. Their mental and emotional capacities must also be robust. Athleticism is also desirable, allowing the dancer to express movement powerfully while embodying beauty and enjoyment.

Javanese dancers must fulfill a set of principles known as *Joged Mataram*.

Although more widely known in Yogyakarta, *Joged Mataram* applies both to dancers of Surakarta and to those of Yogyane dance traditions as both dance styles have the same cultural roots in the Mataram kingdom. *Joged Mataram* consists of four principles:

- 1) *Sewiji (Sawiji)* refers to total and continuous concentration without causing tension in one's soul. The dancer places all of her focus, mind, and soul on the role that she plays in order to dance to her utmost capacity.
- 2) *Greget* is the ability to express “depth of soul” in choreographic movements with perfect control. *Greget* is difficult to cultivate, as it is something that individual dancers naturally possess.
- 3) *Sengguh* is faith in one's ability. Confidence creates an air of certainty in one's demeanor.
- 4) *Ora mingkuh* means perseverance or persistence in conducting one's responsibilities as a dancer without backing down in the face of challenges (Ahli 1981, 14).

Through *Joged Mataram* dancers aim to achieve a balance between their inner and outer selves, making their malleable expressions capable of being imbued by and

controlled by depth of soul. As such, through *Joged Mataram*, the dancers are able to discipline themselves, “find their own identity,” “hold confidence,” and have “deep knowledge and control over themselves” (Dewan Kesenian Propinsi DIY 1981, 92).

In addition, good traditional Javanese dancers must fulfill a series of conditions or requirements, called *Hastha Sawanda*, consisting of eight components:

- 1) *Pacak* refers to a dancer's physical form in relation to the basic form of a dance style, including its basic postures, patterns, and qualities of movement. The basic form is altered according to the character of the dance being performed. *Pacak*, in essence, relates to a dancer's basic demeanor, position of the body, arms, hands, and head.
- 2) *Pancat* pertains particularly to the movements of limbs and toes when a dancer moves from one place to another. These movements are carefully calculated so as to be pleasant to perform and witness.
- 3) *Ulat* refers to the direction of the dancer's gaze and facial expressions in accordance with the character being performed so as to bring out the appropriate mood on the stage. For female dancers, the gaze should be directed downwards or toward the floor, at most two to five steps away.
- 4) *Lutut* pertains to the dancer's subconscious movements that become merged with the dance as a whole: that is, the integration of movements, musical accompaniment, and dance character.
- 5) *Luwes* points to the dancer's ability to adjust the quality of movement in accordance with the form and character of the dance being performed. The dancer achieves this quality through tactfulness, always moving with precision, tranquility, and delight. *Luwes* signifies the ability or the skill to move with perfection and touch the hearts of the audience.
- 6) *Wiled* is the cultivation of movement variations based on the dancer's skill and developed from existing movement patterns.
- 7) *Wirama* points to the relationship of dance movements to the musical accompaniment and the flow of choreography as a whole. Rhythm is a necessary element in dance, both in movement and in musical accompaniment.

8) *Gendhing* refers to the mastery of singing and musical accompaniment, encompassing forms of *gendhing*, drumming patterns, rhythm, tempo, *rasa seleh* (purposeful pauses), rhythmic cadences, lyrical sentences, *tembang* (Javanese traditional song), and other forms of singing.⁴⁰

A dancer must also incorporate three other elements:

1) *Luwes*, particularly in the context of performance, is the condition where the dance is delivered without awkward rigidity, so that all the movements appear natural and executed with ease, flowing pleasantly with the rhythm of music. The movements must come from sincere place of the dancer, without making them tense.⁴¹

2) *Patut* means suitable, harmonious, and proper in accordance with the dance being performed. This means that the dancer must possess bodily harmony, closely related to the her *wanda* (characteristic features that depict facial expressions and character). *Patut* also relates to dance techniques that are suitable for the dancer.

3) *Resik* (“clean” or “thorough”) refers to mastery of the dance technique and is related to a dancer’s sensitivity to rhythmic aspects of music, movement, and distance so as to accurately calculate placement of dance movements (Suryobrongto 1981, 66-67).

The success of a dance performance depends on the dancer’s ability to express the dance being performed. *Gambyong* dancers must thus possess physical characteristics suitable for displaying characteristics of the dance that is being performed. These generally include a slim and supple body, a pleasant face, a plump chest, confidence, sensitivity to rhythm, movement fluency, and an ability to put one’s soul into the dance. Strictly speaking, traditional dance requires female dancers to possess particular physical characteristics broadly termed *gandar* and *wanda*, the concepts of which seemingly derive from the shadow puppetry tradition.⁴² *Gandar* concerns the dancer’s height and the shade of her skin. The desired *gandar* in *gambyong* dancers is a tall and slender body with smooth yellow-brown skin. As for *wanda*, an oval face with large and bright eyes, tall nose, thin lips, and soft eyes are preferred. The balance between the dancer’s eyes,

nose, and lips should give an elegant look to her face.⁴³ The dancer should also have a tan-yellow complexion.

Mastering *Joged Mataram* and *Hastha Sawanda* is fundamental to ideal *gambyong* performance and represents a difficult feat for dancers today. To put one's soul into a performance is a challenge that only a virtuosic dancer can meet. These two sets of fundamentals allow a dancer to prepare themselves for *olah raga* and *olah rasa*, the exercises of body and soul. The processes to prepare oneself as a dancer are as follows: 1) Movements should be in balance with the rhythm of the gamelan music; 2) Gracefulness should be maintained through bodily flexibility and suppleness so as to perform movements organically; and, 3) Sensitivity to the rhythm should be cultivated so as to harmonize the feeling of movements with feeling of the gamelan music.

Olah rasa, maintaining the balance between one's inner spirituality and outward appearance, is a necessity for a dancer. As Bagong Kussudiardjo writes, "*Mateni rasane dhewe, ngrasakake rasaning liyan, sawiji lan wening rasa lan pikire*" (Kussudiardjo 1984, 22; "The dancer must let go of her own feelings in order to completely immerse herself in the purpose of the dance"). To prepare to achieve this state, the dancer practices *tapa brata*, an exercise that may include meditation or fasting. Great *gambyong* dancers such as Warakanya and Sri Kamini Sukanta are known to have cultivated *olah rasa* through fasting before their performances of *gambyong*.⁴⁴ Fasting includes *mutih*, whose practitioners consume only white rice and water for seven days. After this, the dancer washes her hair and stays in her room from midnight until noon while chanting a mantra. As a result of this practice, ten minutes before the performance, the dancer is able to bring herself to focus fully on the dance and let herself go.⁴⁵ Another practice calls for the dancer to eat three small portions of white rice and drink one glass of water at three a.m., or to fast continuously, without a break (called *ngebleng*), for three days and three nights.⁴⁶ It is believed that these practices allow a dancer to achieve a good performance.

The elements that impact the performance even extend to the way a dancer lives. For example, the pace of movements and gracefulness of a dancer has to do with how she conducts herself in everyday life. The dancer's ability to interpret the dance is also directly correlated to the nature of a performance. In the case of *gambyong* dances without fixed choreography, the dancer has much greater latitude for interpretation and

faces a complex task, as she must function as both a performer and a choreographer. Each performance, even given by the same dancer, would be different, as the dancer will have more liberty in her spontaneous process of creation and interpretation. Commonly, the dancer would also have more opportunities in choosing her own ornamental expressions suitable for the main movements. As S. Ngaliman notes, “This type of delivery of *gambyong* gives opportunities for the dancer to show off her abilities in making her dance soulful.”⁴⁷

By contrast, in *gambyong* dances with fixed choreography, the dancer serves merely as a presenter, with the prescribed choreography limiting her opportunities at interpretation. The difference among various *gambyong* pieces, therefore, emerges in this case from the individual choreography and composition of the pieces rather than from the creativity of the dancers. Choreographed *gambyong* pieces differ in a number of ways. For instance, *Gambyong Pareanom* by Nyi Bei Mintoraras appears more refined, with smaller degrees of movement, a slower tempo in comparison to other *gambyong*, and with costumes which are similar to those for *srimpi*. *Gambyong Dewandaru*, by contrast, uses *gobyog*, one of the more lively and popular rhythmic treatments in gamelan music, making the choreography more flirtatious and buoyant. The music for *Gambyong Mudhatama*, presenting another option, has a long and more tranquil *irama dadi* section with the *ciblon* drum, making the tempo slower and allowing more room for ornamentation in the movements.

An exceptional performance of *gambyong* should balance aesthetics and sensuality, a judgement regarding which might depend on the audience. The erotic elements in *gambyong* are essential to the aesthetics of *gambyong*. These elements include the way the costume accentuates the dancer’s posture, as well as more sensual components such as the curvaceousness of her body and sweetness of her face play a significant part in creating erotic impressions in the performance. *Gambyong* dance does not carry any narrative; rather, it portrays the gracefulness of Javanese women, accompanied with meaningful depth. Aesthetics are relative and influenced by what society as well as the individual values within a certain sociocultural setting. Aesthetics and tastes change over time and we observe characteristic changes in the performance of *gambyong* today. First, the pace of the movements is faster—keeping with the faster

tempo of the accompanying music and leaving the impression of hurriedness in the movements. Second, a dancer's interpretation regarding the appropriate degree of movements is changing, influenced by the size of the performance space. Therefore, the delivery of *gambyong* must change depending on what the audience looks for today, and such changes necessarily impact the physical and expressive nature of this dance form.

Closing

Gambyong, with its roots in folk traditions, was adopted by the royal courts and blossomed into a beloved traditional dance form of contemporary Javanese society. During this process of development, various changes were made, including movements, function of the dance, aesthetics, complexity, costumes, relationship between music, dancer and choreographer, and performance contexts. Particularly in the 1980s, significant changes were made which involved tempo, volume, dynamics, qualities of movements, and the creative use of space and floor positions for dancers. Meanwhile, in today's *gambyong* common frameworks remain within which choreographers integrate their creativity, so that *gambyong* remains *njawani*—characteristically Javanese. This flexible nature has allowed *gambyong* to develop vibrantly throughout its history and become incorporated into Java's social fabric.

Notes

¹ Trans. note: *Serat Centhini* is an 18th century literary work which contains Javanese legends and refers to events which took place in the 17th century. It is written in poetic verse, and elements in the legends are considered to contain moral lessons for Javanese society.

² Trans. note: *Sastramiruda* is a treatise written by Kusumadilaga during the time of Paku Buwana X (1893-1939). It was re-worked by Raden Mas Sayid, and published as *Sastramiruda*, which addresses the history of *wayang* from Java.

³ Trans. note: *Wirata Parwa* is a Javanese translation of the Indian epic, *Mahābhārata*.

⁴ Trans. note: *Garebeg* is an official event held as part of a major Islamic holiday commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵ Trans. note: *Gendhing Sri Boyong* is associated with Dewi Sri, fertility rites, and weddings in Central Java.

⁶ Trans. note: *Ruwatan* is a traditional ceremony frequently held in Central Java. It is believed to cleanse and remove bad spirits and curses. *Wayang kulit* is a shadow puppetry theatre which has a prominent cultural place in Central Java.

⁷ Trans. note: *Babad Sala* (1984) is R.M. Sayid's history of Surakarta. *Serat Babad Cariyos Lelampahanipun Suwargi* is a 19th-century autobiography by R. NG. Ranggawarsita, one of the scholars in the Mangkunegaran palace. Patmasusastra's *Serat Tata Cara* (1984) addresses widely practices Javanese traditions and customs. *Serat Centhini* (1814) is known as an encyclopedia of Java.

⁸ This report regarding the art mission to the Netherlands was found in the activity logs of the Mangkunegaran palace, signed by R. M. Ng. Partoheotojo, M. Ng. Hatmosoetaknjo, and R. Djogokartolo.

⁹ Interview with Sr. Kamini Sukanta and R.T. Wloyowidodo in Surakarta on January 22nd and February 15, 1992.

¹⁰ Interview with S. Ngaliman in Surakarta, December 22, 1992.

¹¹ Reported by the late Nyi Wara Kanya, interview with the author in 1980 in Surakarta.

¹² Trans. note: *Kebar* is a section in a gamelan composition, where the *ciblon* drum is played in a particular temporal space called *irama tanggung*. It is characterized by a quick tempo and lively drumming patterns. *Golek* is one of the court dance genres in Central Java, exclusively danced by females. Similar to *gambyong*, *golek* also portrays young women, adorning themselves with makeup, dressing up, and demonstrating their attractiveness.

¹³ Trans. note: Taman Mini Indonesia Indah is a park in East Jakarta, built in 1975, which has pavilions to display a variety of architectural designs and performing arts from various parts of Indonesia.

¹⁴ Trans. note: Raden Adjeng Kartini, known commonly as Kartini in Indonesia, was a prominent Indonesian figure who advocated for women's rights and education. Born into an aristocratic class in Central Java, Kartini is a beloved figure in Java and her birthday is celebrated as a national holiday.

¹⁵ Trans. note: The author has communicated with us that the choreographer of *Gambyong Pancasila* is uncertain, as sources point to more than one person as the original choreographer.

¹⁶ Trans. note: According to the author, *Gambyong Campursari* was renamed *Gambyong Sumyar*, as the term "campursari" was associated with a music genre that developed around the same time in Central Java. However, this particular *gambyong*'s accompanying musical composition does not belong to a genre considered *campursari*. In order to avoid confusion, *Gambyong Campursari* was renamed *Gambyong Sumyar*, after *Ladrang Sumyar*, the name of a piece that accompanies the dance. *Gambyong Sumyar* is also known as *Gambyong Retnokusumo*.

¹⁷ Interview with Sardono Waluyo Kusuma in Sukrakarta, July 12, 1993.

¹⁸ This issue was expressed by S.D. Humardani in the year 1981 during a rehearsal of *gambyong* dance.

¹⁹ Interview with S. Ngaliman in Surakarta, April 12, 1993. This issue was also expressed by S. Maridi and R.T. Rono Suripto.

²⁰ Interview with Suprpto Suryodarmo in Surakarta, September 13, 1993.

²¹ Interview with Suprpto Suryodarmo in Surakarta, September 13, 1993.

²² Interview with S. Ngaliman in Surakarta, 10 January 1992. Similar statements were made by S. Maridi, Sutjiati Djoko Suhardjo, and Sunarno.

²³ Trans. note: *Serat Sastramiruda* is a treatise from the early 19th century that is used as a manual for shadow puppetry performance. It also includes historical accounts regarding dance practice, gamelan, and theater of Java. Wreksadiningrat was active as a court musician in Surakarta's royal palace, Keraton Kasusunan, in the early 20th century.

²⁴ A compilation of movements is found in the Prtelan Gambyong Gambirsawit [About Gambyong Gambirsawit]: (1) beksa mirong, (2) beksa embat cengeh menthang, (3) beksa ukel nayung, (4) beksa lampah miring mirong sampur kiwa sampur tengen, (5) methang miwir sampur embat rangkep ngenggen, (6) ukel tawing wedhi kengser ngenggen mubeng manengen, (7) mirong sampur lampah tiga, (8) tawing miwir sampur kiwa ngogek jaja, (9) tumindak majeng ukel kebyok sampur, (10) gajah-gajahan rangkep, (11) seblak asta tengen kiwa panggél, (12) ngogek jaja lamba menthan asta kalih miwir sampur, (13) lincah gagak lamba wedhi kengser, (14) hanawung embat ubet asta, (15) lampah majeng lincah gagak rangkep, (16) ukel nayung embat asta majeng, (17) ubet asta entrag. The manuscript is in the collection of the Perpustakaan Reksa Pustaka Mangkunegaran.

²⁵ The thirty-three sekaran are: (1) batangan, (2) peilesan, (3) laku-laku, (4) nacah miring, (5) tumpang tali sigeg, (6) tumpang tali glebagan, (7) tumpang tali indriya, (8) ukel pakis, (9) tumpang tali kengseran, (10) kawilan, (11) ogek lambung, (12) gajah ngoling, (13) batangan sigeg, (14) tawing taweng, (15) tawing taweng ogek lambung, (16) pilsan wilet, (17) ngembat asta, (18) abur-aburan, (19) lembahan sampur kiri, (20) ukel asta, (21) lampah tubrukan, (22) ridhong sampur kiri, (23) mandhe sampur, (24) prenjakan, (25) walikan ubet sampur, (26) tatapan, (27) walikan banyakan, (28) natap, (29) lampah gelo asta, (30) ogek gelo asta kebyok sampur, (31) wedhi kengser, (32) menthogan, and (33) entragan. This order of sekaran are taken from Nyi Bei Mintoraras's Gambyong Pareanom.

²⁶ Trans. note: *Gendhing kethut loro kerep* is one of the forms in gamelan music. “*Gendhing*” indicates that there are more than thirty-two beats per gong cycle, and “*kethut loro kerep*” indicates the relationship between the frequency of *kenong* and *kethuk*, two instruments that mark the time in gamelan ensemble.

²⁷ Trans. note: *Irama wilet* is one of the temporal spaces in gamelan music, where the main beats are separated by a larger period of time as compared with *irama dadi* and *irama lancar*, resulting in a more relaxed and flowing atmosphere as a whole.

²⁸ Trans. note: *Kayon* is one of the central puppets in the tradition of central Javanese wayang. Shaped like a tree, it is filled with intricate images of animals, mythical beings, fire, water, wind, and palaces; it is considered a tree of life, and plays various roles in the puppetry play.

²⁹ Trans. note: In today's *wayang kulit* performance, it is rare to encounter the presentation of *gambyong* dance with a *wayang golek*; however, this was a common practice in the past, especially in the Yogyakarta style of *wayang kulit*, which required a complete set of *wayang kulit* puppets to include a *wayang golek* (Communication with Darsono, December 24, 2022).

³⁰ Interview with B. Subono in Surakarta, September 20, 1993.

³¹ Trans. note: *kebar* is a section in gamelan music compositions where *ciblon* drumming plays lively patterns in one of the faster temporal settings. *Kiprahan* is the choreographic segment played during the *kebar* section, where dancers commonly perform movements that involve adorning themselves and showing off their masculine physique in male dance repertoire or feminine beauty in female dance repertoire.

³² The author heard R.T. Martopangrawit offer this interpretation of *Gambyong* in 1985, and other sources have interpreted similarly.

³³ Interview with S. Maridi in Surakarta, January 15, 1993.

³⁴ Trans. note: From the perspectives of musicians, *kiprahan* and *kebar* are not interchangeable, as *kiprahan* is a section in dance or wayang performance calling for a certain set of movements. *Kebar* is a musical style and a section where *kiprahan* is danced. *Kebar* employs *kendhang ciblon* and uses *irama tanggung*, one of the faster tempi in the Central Javanese *karawitan* tradition. Not all *kebar* sections are danced with *kiprahan* choreography. *Kiprahan* in particular is said to illustrate happiness, portraying a person falling in love; other dance pieces such as *Klana* and *Gatutkaca Gandrung* have a similar theme.

³⁵ This information was provided by Mudjono, a student of R.T. Wignyambeksa.

³⁶ Interview with R.T. Rono Suropto in Surakarta, November 27, 1993. In the original, the author offers the following two Javanese phrases: *narubke, ngrujukke, ngrukunke* which Darsono Hadiraharjo translates in Indonesian as *mengenalkan, menyamakan persepsi, menyatukan* [getting to know each other helps us sympathize and unite]; and *manunggaling raos manunggaling nuju nyawiji*, which Darsono translates in Indonesian as *Bersatunya rasa, bersatunya menuju satu kesatuan* [Unifying our feelings we move forward toward a greater unity].

³⁷ Trans. note: *Dewa Raja* means “God-King,” a concept from ancient Javanese tradition and beliefs whereby kings (and queens) are descendants of gods and goddesses and thereby inherit divine power and the right to rule the land and its people.

³⁸ Interview with S. Ngaliman in Surakarta, November 23, 1993.

³⁹ Trans. note: *Kempul*, *kenong*, and gong are instruments that belong to the gamelan ensemble from Central Java. A *kempul* is a small hanging gong, while a *kenong* is a cradle gong suspended horizontally on a frame.

⁴⁰ Interview with S. Ngaliman in Surakarta, November 23, 1992. See also Wahyu Santoso Prabowo, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89; Sal Murgiyanto. 1983. “Basic Principles of the Javanese Court Dance” of *Dance as Cultural Heritage*. Volume One. New York: Congress on Research.

⁴¹ *Luwes* appears twice in this section of discussion. I have discussed this with the author and she has emphasized the importance of looking at the quality of *luwes* in two different contexts. The first mention of *luwes*, drawing from *Hastha Sawanda*, describes *luwes* as a quality of a dancer’s capacity to portray particular characteristic moods of dances, namely that of refined, calm, and meditative. The second mention of *luwes* illustrates the significance of particular nature of movements of dancers.

⁴² *Gandar* and *wanda* are aspects often discussed in detail by dalang when describing characters in *wayang*. See *Serat Tuntunan Pedalangan*, compiled by M.Ng Nojowirongko alias Atmotjendono. 1960. Jogyakarta: Djawatan Kebudayaan, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.

⁴³ Interview with Wahyu Santoso Prabowo in Surakarta, November 29, 1993.

⁴⁴ Interview with Sri Kamini Sukanto in Surakarta, March 12, 1993.

⁴⁵ Interview with R.T. Rono Suripto in Surakarta, November 27, 1993.

⁴⁶ Interview with S. Ngaliman in Surakarta, June 20, 1993.

⁴⁷ Interview with S. Ngaliman in Surakarta, 1993.

Glossary

Abdi dalem: persons who serve in the royal courts.

Bedhaya: One of the dance forms that belong to the royal courts of Central Java. *Bedhaya* is considered sacred, connecting the courts and kings to the Goddess of the South Sea who is believed to dance *bedhaya* among the court dancers.

Campursari: A kind of contemporary and popular music in Java in which a variety of musical styles such as *dangdut* and *langgam Jawa* are fused together. *Campur* means mix and *sari* means essence.

Serat Centhini: An 18th-century literary work of Javanese legends that refers to events that took place in the 17th century. It is written in poetic verse, and elements in the legends are considered to contain moral lessons for Javanese society.

Garebeg: An official event held at royal courts of Java as part of a major Islamic holiday commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

Gendhing: In the tradition of *karawitan*, *gendhing* commonly means a musical composition. However, in some cases, *gendhing* signifies certain musical forms, such as *gendhing kethuk loro kerep*.

Gendhing kethuk loro kerep: One of the forms in the music of *karawitan*. “*Gendhing*” indicates that there are more than 32 beats per gong cycle, and “*kethuk loro kerep*” indicates the relationship between the frequency of *kenong* and *kethuk*, two instruments that mark the time in gamelan ensemble.

Golek: One of the court dance genres in Central Java, exclusively performed by female dancers. Similar to *gambyong*, *golek* also portrays young women, adorning themselves with makeup, dressing up, and demonstrating their attractiveness.

Irama: *Irama* is a terminology used in *karawitan* to signify the tempo and relationships between the instruments of the gamelan ensemble. There are five *irama* in the tradition of *karawitan*: *lancar*, *tanggung*, *dadi*, *wilet*, and *rangkep*. In *irama wilet*, which is frequently mentioned in the discussion of *gambyong*, the main beats played by the *saron* are separated by a larger period of time than *irama dadi* and *irama lancar*, resulting in a more relaxed and flowing atmosphere. The larger temporal space between two beats of

the *saron* is filled with other instruments in the ensemble to elaborate the sparse melodic line.

Kempul, kenong, and gong: instruments that belong to the gamelan ensemble from Central Java. A *kempul* is a small hanging gong; a *kenong* is a cradle gong suspended horizontally on a frame.

Joged Mataram: A set of philosophical, spiritual, and cultural principles which are applied to the court dance traditions of Surakarta and Yogyakarta.

Karawitan: Traditional music of Java and Bali that is played in gamelan ensembles.

Kayon: One of the central puppets in the tradition of central Javanese *wayang*. Shaped like a tree, it is filled with intricate images of animals, mythical beings, fire, water, wind, and palaces. It is considered a tree of life, and it plays various roles in the puppetry play.

Kebar: A section of gamelan music compositions in which *ciblon* drumming plays lively patterns in *irama lancar*, one of the faster temporal settings.

Kendhang ciblon: One of the drums in the Javanese gamelan ensemble.

Keraton/kraton: Royal courts of Java. There are four in Central Java: Karaton Ngayogyakarta, Pura Pakualaman Yogyakarta, Karaton Surakarta, and Pura Mangkunegaran Surakarta.

Kiprahan: The choreographic segment played during the *kebar* section, where dancers perform movements that involve adorning themselves and showing off their masculine physique in male dance repertoire or feminine beauty in female dance repertoire.

Ladrang: One of the forms in the music of *karawitan*. There are thirty-two beats played on the *saron* (metallophones) per gong in *ladrang* form.

Langendriyan: Javanese dance-drama originated and cultivated in the court of Mangkunegaran in Surakarta. The all-female cast performs singing and dialogues as well as Javanese court-style dance.

Merong: A section of musical composition (*gendhing*) in *karawitan* music.

Pelepaz nazar: A ritual performed at village weddings in which a bride is released from her parents to be wed to her groom.

Rebana: A kind of drum that is widespread in Java. Unlike *kendhang ciblon* in the gamelan ensemble, *rebana* is a frame drum. It is believed to have arrived in Java through Islamic cultures that traveled through Muslim trade routes that connected Indonesia with the world beyond Southeast Asia.

Ruwatan: A traditional ceremony frequently held in Central Java, believed to cleanse and remove bad spirits and curses.

Sampur: A long scarf used in many Javanese traditional dances.

Serat Sastramiruda: A treatise written by Kusumadilaga during the time of Paku Buwana X (1893-1939). It was used as a manual for shadow puppetry performance. It also includes historical accounts regarding dance practice, gamelan, and theater of Java.

Sekaran: A set of principle movement units in Javanese dance repertoire, especially that of *gambyong* and *golek*.

Srimpi: One of the dance forms that belong to the royal courts of Central Java. *Srimpi* is a dance of four women. While it is a smaller scale than *bedhaya*, *srimpi* holds equally high prestige in the court cultures.

Sriwedari: A park in the center of the city of Surakarta where *wayang wong*, a traditional Javanese theater, is performed.

Taledhek: Dancers of *tayub*. *Taledhek* are also called *lengger*, *ledhak*, *ronggeng*, and *gandrung*, depending on the region within Java.

Taledhek barangan: *Taledhek* who travels from one place to another to perform on the street.

Tayub: A traditional dance form practiced in many parts of Java. The dancer of *tayub* is commonly called *taledhek*. However, depending on the region, they are also called *ronggeng*, *gandrung*, *ledhak*, and *lengger*. While the movements, costumes, and accompanying music may vary, these regional dancers and their performances share cultural meanings.

Tayuban: An event in which *tayub* is performed. Usually *tayuban* involves men and women from the local community and involves sharing of food, drinks, and social dancing.

Wayang kulit: Shadow puppetry theater, which has a prominent place in Central Java's culture.

Wirata Parwa: A Javanese translation of the Indian epic, *Mahābhārata*.

Wireng: Javanese court dance repertoire that involves choreographed dagger duels between the dancers.

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List of interviewees:

A Sugiarto, 50 years old, resident of Semarang, art critic and the head of a foundation, Bidang Kesenian Jawa Tengah.

Agus Tasman, 65 years old, resident of Surakarta, choreographer and teacher at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Ben Suharto, 50 years old, resident of Yogyakarta, dancer, director, art critic, teacher and Dean of Performing Arts Department at Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Yogyakarta.

Balcus Subono, 42 years old, resident of Surakarta, puppeteer, director of gamelan ensemble and teacher of the art of puppeterring at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Darsi Budyorini, 61 years old, resident of Surakarta, performer at the Sriwidari musical theater in Surakarta.

Mardusari, Nyi Bei, 85 years old (deceased), resident of Surakarta, dancer and singer.

Mardi, S. 63 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer and director of dance, member of Dewan Empu Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Mloyowidodo, S. 74 years old, resident of Surakarta, master of karawitan and member of Dewan Empu Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Ngaliman, S., 73 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer, director of dance and member of Dewan Empu Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Nora Kustantina Dewi, 44 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer, director and teacher of dance at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Pusporaras Suseno, 67 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer and teacher of dance at the Mangkunegaran palace, Surakarta.

Pusporini, 65 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer at the Mangkunegaran Palace, Surakarta.

Rahayu Supanggah, 46 years old, resident of Surakarta, court musician, director of gamelan ensemble, and teacher at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Rono Suropto, R.M., 66 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer and teacher of dance, the head of Langenpraja at the Mangkunegaran Palace, Surakarta.

Rusini, 44 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer and teacher of dance at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Sal Murgiyanto, 50 years old, resident of Jakarta, dancer, critic of dance, and teacher of dance at Institut Kesenian Jakarta.

Sardono Waluyo Kusumo, 48 years old, resident of Jakarta, dancer, director of dance, teacher of dance at Insitut Kesenian jakarta.

Sri Kamini Sukanto, 70 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer at the Mangkunegaran Palace, Surakarta.

Sumardjo Hardjoprasonto, 74 years old, resident of Jakarta, dancer, director of dance and coordinator of Anjungan Taman Mini Indonesia Indah Jakarta.

Sunarno, 39 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer, director of dance and teacher of dance at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Suprpto Suryodarmo, 50 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer and critic of dance.

Surono Roniwibakso, 66 years old, resident of Surakarta, performer of musical theatre at Sriwedari Surakarta and teacher at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.

Sutjiati Djoko Suhardjo, 64 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer, director, teacher of dance at Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia (SMKI) Surakarta.

Suyati Tarwo Sumotargio, 60 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer and teacher of dance at the Mangkunegaran Palace, Surakarta.

Wahyu Santoso Prabowo, 41 years old, resident of Surakarta, dancer, director and teacher of dance at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Surakarta.