

Research Article

Tourist Attraction Commodification in the Wayang Topeng Performance in Malang

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ORCIDTri Wahyuningtyas: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2076-0109>**Abstract.**

Wayang Topeng is a drama-shaped performance by dancers wearing masks who hide their faces, carrying essential and symbolic purposes. Wayang Topeng performances are always associated with rites as a medium of worshipping ancestral spirits. Today, Wayang Topeng is undergoing a change, from a routine event to a show for tourists held by one of the hotels in Malang city. This change in the performance' format from a stage show to a tourism packaging show, made the Wayang Topeng experience a shift in its values and original meaning. It is suspected that it has shifted the cultural values that were once a part of traditional culture to the direction of mass culture. This phenomenon is not only seen as an adjustment to the media format, but as a form of commodification. This research seeks to uncover forms, processes, ideologies, and powers related to the commodification of the Wayang Topeng performance. This qualitative research uses interview data and observations which were analyzed using the interperatation technique. The method used was the art phenomenology research with a study of critical discourse analysis. From this analysis of the Wayang Topeng performance through interviews with several sources and combined with relevant literature, the results show that: (1) content commodification happened in the Wayang Topeng performance, and (2) the ideology behind the process of commodification is capitalism. The power behind commodification is market power.

Keywords: commodification, mass culture, Wayang Topeng

1. Introduction

Wayang Topeng is a local product of culture from Malang region which has philosophical values related to the patterns of human life, especially reflecting the life's patterns of the people in Malang. According to [1] *Wayang Topeng* is a drama or play performed by dancers wearing masks, in which the performers not only hide their faces, but it shows more essential and symbolic goals. As stated by [2], traditional performances are basically not to be watched, but the presence of the show has a symbolic connection

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to the human life in a society. In addition, *Wayang Topeng* performances in Malang are closely related to religion, and it is realized that Malang people still worship the ancestral spirits. Some religious activities are often carried out by Malang people, one of which is the implementation of rituals such as *bersih desa*, *nyadran in punden* (a sacred place), and so on.

Wayang Topeng in Malang is currently experiencing developments and changes in accordance with the dynamics of the community supporting the show. It is realized that the current of globalization also had an impact on the changes of *Wayang Topeng* in Malang. The development of technology, communication media, and tourism made *Wayang Topeng* no longer fulfill the spiritual ties of the people as a means of ritual in achieving blessings and excellences. Instead, it made *Wayang Topeng* become a medium of politics, entertainment, and tourists' art attractions. It was realized that the economic needs and interests of capitalist ideology had dominated the minds of traditional art performers.

The impact of the development of traditional arts into tourist arts with various tourist attractions has made traditional arts in Malang undergo a process of reform from aesthetic value to economic value. Artists with their skills have tried to make Malang mask puppets designed and commodified into packaged performances to meet various economic and ideological interests of the capitalists of several art agents in Malang. It is suspected that it has shifted cultural values that were previously traditional to mass culture. This phenomenon is seen not only as an adjustment to media formats, but as a form of commodification. This research tries to reveal the form, process, ideology, and power related to the commodification of wayang mask performances.

2. Research Methodology

The research method is a qualitative study, and the data is in the form of words (oral or written) and the actions by Malang's *Wayang Topeng* performers and artists, spectators, businessmen, and the Culture and Tourism Service Agencies that were explored through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Data collection techniques are carried out by a triangulation (combined) technique. The data analysis is inductive/qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasize more on meanings rather than generalization [3]

Oral data sources were obtained from sources being interviewed, including 37 year-old Tri Handoyo, the chairperson of *Padepokan Wayang Topeng* Asmarabangun Kedungmonggo Pakisaji, and Eko Ujang (an artist, 42 years old), Sholeh Adi Pramono (Dalang Wayang Topeng), Joko (an artist) Observations were made during the performance of *Wayang Topeng* in the studio / *padepokan* and tourist attractions located in some hotels in Malang. The purpose of this study is to describe: (1) how the practices of commodification of Malang's *Wayang Topeng* are carried out, (2) how the form of *Wayang Topeng* packaging is presented as an object of art.

Data analysis uses interpretation theory. The words and actions expressed by the *dalang* (puppeteer) are interpreted based on the denotation and connotation meanings and are related to the mass culture both synchronously or diachronically.

3. Results And Discussion

In accordance with the case of study, it is necessary to convey the meaning of commodification. According to [4]), commodification is a process that is closely related to capitalism in which objects, qualities, and signs are transformed into commodities. Commodity itself is understood as an item which its primary purpose is to be sold on the market. Commodification is a process of making something that was not previously a commodity, but at the end, it could become a commodity [5].

In the perspective of political economy, commodification usually embodies commercial forms in which the state places rules based on the market standards and also sets market rules. Commodification becomes the main tool to transform social relations into economic relations [6]. Commodification has broad meanings and does not only concern the production of goods and services being traded, but it also includes the goods and services that are distributed and consumed. Therefore, the commodification of culture (*Wayang Topeng*) means turning performances into marketable products. Commodification supported by mass media in the form of marketing communication (advertising) will be able to threaten various forms of norms, values, identities, and symbols of local culture. Gradually, the values of local cultures such as those contained in *Wayang Topeng* will experience a shift and will even change the values in a new different level.

3.1. The Process of Commodification of Wayang Topeng Show

Adorno in [7] stated that the birth of Indonesia's commodity societies can be characterized by a phenomenon that shows the support of the cultural industry for the masses like the proliferation of popular magazines, private television, VCD and DVD products, luxurious residences, entertainment centers, tourist areas, and modern shopping centers.

The emergence of various tourist attraction products in the performing arts including music, dance, or drama that have become people's interest now shows the symptoms of the emergence of a commodity society. A commodity, according to [8], is anything that is produced or offered for sale. These goods and services always have ideological origins and consequences. *Wayang Topeng* show gives an illustration as a product of popular culture. The popular culture supported by the culture industry has reconstructed a society that is not merely based on consumption, but has also made all cultural artifacts as industrial products and certainly a commodity.

Meanwhile, the large amount of effort to sell tourist attraction products in the form of *Wayang Topeng* in a large numbers is inevitable. This happens because the commodification of the tourism product of *Wayang Topeng* is determined by the tour organizers, including both the government and the private sector. In a consumer society, there are at least three forms of power that operate behind the production and consumption of aesthetic objects, namely capital power, producer power, and mass media power [9]. In this case, the one that holds the power of capital and producer power is the government or travel agent. Both have full power over the packaging of *Wayang Topeng* show. As a result, artists do not have the discretion to process their own art. Therefore, that artists are only used as industrial products that sometimes do not benefit or support the artists. *Wayang Topeng* artists are not given the opportunity to express their own cultural products, so what happens is that their appearance sometimes does not look optimal. The role of the mass media in shaping people's image or views of *Wayang Topeng* show is very strong. This can be seen in billboards, leaflets, banners, tourism information news as a means of information, as a effort to promote and preserve traditional arts.

In short, it can be said that the existence of producers of tourist attractions is as the only controller of power, namely as the owner of capital, producers as well as holders of control of the mass media that can freely regulate the productivity of the packaging of attractions in *Wayang Topeng* shows. As a result, the traditional arts business in the

packaging of *Wayang Topeng* tourism art products is increasing. The victims of the realized commodification of *Wayang Topeng* show tourist attraction products are the actors, because now the producer is the holder of power. The folk performance art, held in public space, is oriented to commodities (both political and economic), which politically it means that the art is used by certain groups for certain interests as well.

3.2. Commodification of Attractions for Wayang Topeng Performances

Tourism can be said as a "magnet" that is able to attract tourists to visit. A high appreciation for the development of tourism has led to an exploration of ideas and meanings that are more than just existing objects, but the overall empowerment of assets for these objects needs to be socialized to others. One of the ways is to create events to enrich meanings so that it can fulfill the interests to improve welfare and income as well as to expand networks and cooperations.

Various efforts were made to optimize the existence of tourism potentials through the promotion of tourism both cultural tourism and nature tourism. One of the promotions of cultural tourism is the traditional cultural tourism (or local tourism) of Malang, which is developed and packaged neatly and more commercially in order to attract tourists. One of the developed cultural tourisms *Wayang Topeng* show. The existence of *Wayang Topeng* shows in Malang has been widely held at tourism events either by the government or private parties in Tugu hotels or recreation areas. In industrialization, standardize cultural products adapted to the market are also required. As is done at the hotel. The form of packaging for the tourist attractions of the wayang mask show has been packaged in a different dish from conventional performances, various considerations for the packaging of the presentation are directed at attractions that are shorter in terms of time, attractive presentations with many knick-knacks are presented such as clothing, more dramatic elements. strengthened.

In the context of tourism marketing, it certainly raises excitement in the promotion and sale value certain cultural art events. This is part of the practice of cultural commercialization, or as a part of cultural practice of capitalism and consumerism which then results in the commodification of traditional cultural arts in Malang. *Wayang Topeng* shows held at tourism events are also part of a capitalist industry which benefit several tourism agents who only prioritize economic value. Whereas, the artists are only 'tools'

used to commercialize or to seek as much profit as possible. This is what signifies the industrialization process of the culture of commercialization in controlling the system. This shows that the standardization of *Wayang Topeng* show used as tourism art packaging or a product of commodification is determined by capital owners possessing market legal parameters. A product is considered standardized when it applies in the market and allows the process of cultural production in massive quantities resulting in any kind of culture being made into a commodity [10]

The industrialization of tourism from a political economy perspective can have a negative impact, referring to the calculation of cost benefits, in which the government or tourism art operators or agents benefit more from the implementation of the culture industry. It can be observed that *Wayang Topeng* shows, as part of the cultural industry, have made the agents to be art producers who play the role and act as a capitalist instrument. In Habermas's view, there is no aspect of life that is free from interests. The reality built from the contradictions of the agents' interests is always moving and developing, meaning that the role of ideology becomes dominant. Ideology distorts the actual reality in order to pass the interests of the ruling class. With the commodification, *Wayang Topeng* performance in Malang is dominated by economic, political, and power interests, which are the cores of capitalism.

The power of domination has sunk in every event held in several tourist attractions. The artists who work creatively have also created performances in accordance with the demands of the organizers, both from the elements of stories, clothings, stage settings to the *pocapan* of the puppeteer. It has formed a political capitalism, which is to link logic of capitalism and human relations being commodified. *Wayang Topeng* show is displayed as a tourist attraction commodity only to achieve economic and capitalism interests.

4. Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the tourism policy towards *Wayang Topeng* performance as a traditional art provides an alternative solution for employment for the artists. The demands for economic needs make traditional artists more creative in packaging *Wayang Topeng* show as a tourist attraction. *Wayang Topeng* show packaged as a tourism commodity through tourist art attractions is a major component in tourism marketing. In the perspective of political economy, it can

be seen as the dominance of capitalism, including the existence of structured control over the power of agents who dominate the interests of power.

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