

# Tari Sulintang: Shaping of a New Image for the Sundanese Dancing Woman and its Contribution to Indonesian Culture and Diplomacy in the 1950s

Susi Machdalena<sup>1\*</sup>, Reiza D. Dienaputra<sup>2</sup>, Awaludin Nugraha<sup>3</sup>, N. Kartika<sup>4</sup>, Nani Sriwardani<sup>5</sup>,  
& Eko Wahyu Koeshandoyo<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,6</sup>Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Sciences,  
Universitas Padjadjaran, Jatinangor, Sumedang, West Java 45363, Indonesia

<sup>2,3,4</sup>Department of History and Philology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences

Universitas Padjadjaran, Jatinangor, Sumedang, West Java 45363, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup>Faculty of Fine Arts and Design

Institute of Indonesian Arts and Culture (ISBI), Bandung, West Java 40265, Indonesia

Email: machdalena@unpad.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, reiza.dienaputra@unpad.ac.id<sup>2</sup>, awaludin.nugraha@unpad.ac.id<sup>3</sup>,  
n.kartika@unpad.ac.id<sup>4</sup>, nsriwardani1@gmail.com<sup>5</sup>, e.w.koeshandoyo@unpad.ac.id<sup>6</sup>

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## Abstract

This research explores the image of Sundanese female dancers in the 1950s, particularly the Sulintang Dance, performed by women in the vernacular settlements. Previously, dances were dominated by men, and women were associated with ronggeng dancers who have a negative image. Since elected, president Soekarno used cultural diplomacy to introduce Indonesia as an independent country abroad, introducing Indonesian culture through dance bringing these dances from the rural settlements. The Sulintang Dance represents educated, polite, and refined Sundanese women through graceful movements, colorful costumes, and accessories

This research employed a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach to performing arts communication. Through ethnography, an understanding of beauty in performing arts can be captured. Dance movements supported by costumes, accessories and gamelan accompaniment can communicate the ideas, goals, and meanings of the dances. It can then reveal Sundanese ethnic culture.

The findings reveal that Sulintang Dance raises the image of dignified Sundanese female dancers by displaying and communicating Sundanese culture through the dancers' movements, costumes, and accessories. Being used to welcome guests from abroad who visit Indonesia, the Sulintang dance has become a cultural mission that served as a tool of cultural diplomacy. The communication that Soekarno built through this dance succeeded in captivating the world. Indeed, the world began to know Indonesia through art. As shown, Indonesia's existence on the world stage was visible during the Soekarno era (1945-1965).

**Keywords:** Sulintang Dance, Representation of Sundanese noble women, Sundanese culture, Cultural diplomacy.

## Introduction

In the 1950s, Indonesia was a newly independent country. Therefore, it needed to introduce itself to the outside world as a sovereign country. One of the methods chosen by the first Indonesian President, Soekarno to introduce Indonesia was through cultural diplomacy. Today, the cultural diplomacy model is developing rapidly through scholarship activities for foreigners studying Indonesian art. Artists are brought from Indonesia to be placed in Indonesian embassies in various countries, holding large-scale festivals to facilitate artistic exchange. In Indonesia, arts diplomacy is represented by high-ranking officials in the Ministry of Education and Culture. In fact, it promotes itself through collaborations between the Indonesian government agencies and the professionals, as well as international production bodies, galleries, and festivals. Houses of culture have been built in the key cities abroad and national platforms for international festivals. Moreover, foreign academics and art students are recruited to promote Indonesia abroad (Cohen, 2019).

Moreover, Soekarno aggressively sought art throughout Java to be displayed on the world stage. Soekarno was very interested in dance. However, at that time, women's dances, especially in West Java, were dominated by dances performed by men. According to Narawati (2003), these dances are *Ketuk Tilu*, *Ronggeng Gunung*, *Topeng Banjet*, *Doger*, *Tayub*, *Keurseus*, and *Wayang*. Those dances grow rapidly among the lower classes (Narawati, 2003). Among them, *Ronggeng* is the only dance for women. However, it has a negative connotation because it is intended for men's personal entertainment.

One of the dances, namely the *Tayub* Dance, was developed into a dance that expresses the identity of the *priyayi* (*menak*). In this dance, many *ronggeng* invite the *priyayi* to join, and the dance ends in a private room. This reveals that men's position is higher than women's in society. Therefore, the image of Sundanese female dancers then was very low. It is understood that *Menak*'s family would not allow their daughters to dance. Dancing at that time was taboo for *menak* women. They were not allowed to appear in public. This is related to social and cultural factors that play a significant role in women's performance in dance. As Hughes-Freeland & Hanna argue, dance, sex, and gender are closely related to the social context and society (Hughes-Freeland and Hanna, 1989; Narawati, 2003).

A young Sundanese nobleman named Tjetje Somantri noticed this gap. Tjetje Somantri then created dances for women. Caturwati revealed that Tjetje Somantri was a pioneer of Sundanese dance renewal whose presence was warmly welcomed by the community, especially the nobility. The dances that Tjetje Somantri specifically created for women were considered a brave step because they started a new history in the development of Sundanese dance (Caturwati, 2007). In creating his dances, Tjetje Somantri was inseparable from the social, cultural, and political factors of that time.

In line with Soekarno's cultural diplomacy program, new dances created by Tjetje Somantri emerged in West Java. One of the dances was the *Sulintang* dance. President Soekarno warmly welcomed this dance during his visit to Garut. The *Sulintang* dance was chosen to be performed in front of state guests visiting Indonesia and for Indonesian cultural missions abroad. Thus, this dance provides an opportunity for noble women to dance in public while contributing to the formation of Indonesian culture, giving a strong characteristic to West Java and enriching national culture. Ahimsa Putra stated that this cultural system differentiates citizens of a nation from those who are not part of that nation. In other words, this cultural system is an element of the nation's identity (Ahimsa-Putra, 2022).

In this research, we examine the meaning and symbols of the *Sulintang* dance in representing the culture and image of Sundanese female dancers. How is this idea realized in the movements, costumes, accessories, and accompanying gamelan so that this dance becomes a tool to fill cultural diplomacy programs?

Thus, through the study of the *Sulintang* dance, we will understand the image of Sundanese female dancers, Sundanese culture through movements, costumes, accessories and gamelan and the contribution of this dance, and also the Soekarno's cultural diplomacy in introducing Indonesia as a sovereign country to foreign countries.

## Theoretical Framework

### Structure and Dance

Understanding dance in the context of structure is the same as reading the manifestation of symbols, because every movement displayed in dance has an interrelated meaning. The existence of ethnic dances in society is a part of the cultural unity of the community, the meaning of which must also be seen and read through its role and function. Dances are part of the community's social structure, which can represent the cultural values and communal spirit of the community that owns them. Apart from that, its existence can be interpreted as an identity, symbol, representing historical values in society. These three things are communicated through dance movements, costumes and accessories, and music accompanying the dance (Sumaryono, 2017).

A character, atmosphere, state of mind or situation cannot be presented effectively on stage without movement and its inherent expression. Body movements, including movements of sound-producing organs, are necessary for stage presentations. There is still another aspect of movement that is very important, namely appearance in dancing. When two or more dancers meet on stage, they must enter and approach each other by touching or keeping their distance. Then, they must separate and exit. The grouping of dancers on stage occurs in movement. It is expressive in a sense other than individual movement (Ullmann, 1971).

### Dance Symbols

Dance symbols are natural vectors that trigger meaning and enhance communication in dance. Therefore, dance conveys information, ideas and feelings through the effective use of verbal and nonverbal symbols. The symbols attached to dance are symbols as vectors of meaning to explore various communication symbols created by dance choreographers to communicate relevant cultural issues in society and underline the importance of symbols used in dance to express meaning and value for the dancers and the public. Dance can communicate relevant information through unique cultural symbols and help explore and understand the underlying meaning attached to the dance. The dances provide a more detailed analysis of the cultural symbols used in traditional dances as they are significant vectors and carriers of cultural identity (Ume, 2021).

According to George Herbert Mead, human thoughts, self-concept, and the wider community, people are created through communication—symbolic interactions. Without symbolic interactions, humanity wouldn't exist. However, symbolic interaction isn't just talk. The term refers to language and gestures a person uses in anticipation of the way others will respond. The verbal and non-verbal responses that a listener then provides are likewise crafted in expectation of how the original speaker will react (Griffin, Look and Mead, 2012).

Symbolic interactionism (SI), as a useful and flexible theoretical perspective may help recognize various social aspects of the human body as experienced, managed, and utilized by an individual. The characteristics are perceived as influenced by social and cultural processes through interacting, role-making, negotiating, and constructing identity. SI is a theoretical perspective in which society, reality, and the self are created through interactions based on communication. The leading assertion of this orientation is the processual character of social reality as a result of its permanent creation by social actors in the process of interpreting the actions of others. This is based on the notion that society is a continuously produced and reproduced effect of joint human actions (Byczkowska-Owczarek, 2020).

In this way, symbolic interaction can communicate dance through the dancer's body movements, whose movements are created by the choreographer. These movements express cultural meaning and are characterized by the identity of the people.

## Literature Review

### Sulintang Dance

The word 'sulintang' in Sundanese has a very poetic meaning, namely beauty that comes from traces of sunlight moving through leaves and tree branches swaying in the wind. The overall meaning of 'Sulintang dance' is a dance that depicts the character of a teenage girl who does not yet have a fixed stance or is unstable; like the sunlight that penetrates a tree, it will sway when the wind blows. This can be associated with the body movements in the Sulintang dance, which quickly

change direction to the right and left repeatedly, and circular movements carried out agilely. Tjetje Somantri created this dance with his artistic sensitivity. This dance was inspired by movements from Javanese, Balinese, Burmese, and Indian dances, which were processed, combined, and packaged into a Sundanese dance presentation as a '*tari paduan sari*'.

In accordance with the meaning of the word 'sulintang', this dance is named 'Sulintang Dance.' Giving a name to a human creation is adjusted to the social, cultural, and linguistic context in which the name of the creation was created (Kawęcka, 2023). In this case, giving the name to this dance is in accordance with the principle of onomastics. Using the Sundanese language, the name of this dance is 'Sulintang dance.' This dance's content also expresses the culture and character of Sundanese women and reflects their activities. Another name for the Sulintang Dance is "*Damar Kanginan*", which means "light of the lamp". Another interpretation of the meaning of the Sulintang Dance is that, as the name suggests, this dance is likened to a light that illuminates and unites the beauty of various cultures in Indonesia. Its dynamic and expressive movements depict the spirit of unity and mutual cooperation, noble values that are upheld in Indonesian society.

The Sulintang dance is danced together, not a solo dance. The beauty of this dance can be seen in the cheerfulness of the teenage girls caught in agile movements. The audience can easily grasp the meaning and significance of this dance. The Sulintang dance, with its agile and flexible movements, was created for beautiful women. Irawati Durban Ardjo translated the Sulintang dance as "Dance of Fortitude". Generally, this dance is performed in groups consisting of three, five, or seven dancers, with various graceful and feminine movements such as waving arms, bending the body, swinging and flicking scarves, spinning, and tiptoeing while circling the stage. Group dances are characteristic of twentieth-century Sundanese choreography and find their historical roots in the Badaya dance (dance of aristocratic women in West and Central Java). Due to the noble background of its creator, Tjetje Somantri, Sulintang dance displays elements that are standard for upper-class society, bound by politeness, order, and respect. Sulintang dance, as part of Sundanese ethnic culture, is also inseparable from the symbolic values referred to in Sundanese dance, which are related to cultural elements that apply within the Sundanese ethnicity (Sumaryono, 2017).

### The Works of Tjetje Somantri

Art as a cultural product has its existence related to the socio-cultural background of its people. Culture as a symbol system is a reference and guideline for people's lives. Symbolic codes are used to transmit cultural paradigms and ways of interpreting the world. The idea that culture is an expression of society in the form of ideas and human behavior in its community is implied by the definition of culture as a system of symbols (Rohidi, 2000) from generation to generation, it is a form of art that is integrated with society. This is closely related to customs and regional characteristics. Traditional art that grows and develops in society has a very important function in supporting the community (Sedyawati, 1981; Nurchotimah et al., 2023). Tjetje Somantri's works emerge in accordance with the cultural situation and customs of Sundanese society.

Tjetje Somantri's dance works have brought major changes to the performing arts. Tjetje Somantri's works are aimed at dancing women from the *menak* class. His dances have movements, costumes and accessories that characterize Sundanese ethnicity. Therefore, it was at this time that Sundanese *menak* women could only appear in public to dance.

Many of his works have been written and researched, including research conducted by academics and regional dance experts. These studies include research conducted by Mulyano and Rosila. In their research, Mulyani and Rosilawati (2020) describe Tjetje Somantri's creativity as a Sundanese *menak* who created many dances for Sundanese *menak* women. They highlighted Tjetje Somantri as a very talented choreographer. In their article the two researchers studied Puja dance. In this dance there is the influence of Javanese culture, which is identified with *alus* behavior, which influences the style of Sundanese dance. This *alus* culture originates from the concept of *priyayi* which is symbolized by gentle behavior called *alus*. Some Sundanese dances that are influenced by *alus* culture include Puja Dance, Sulintang Dance. As a result of creativity, there are also patterns of relationships that occur from this touch, namely the cooperation which is marked by contact between Javanese and Sundanese ethnicities, and competition, namely in terms of creating dance works (Mulyani and Rosilawati, 2020). Even though the two researchers did not examine the

Sulintang Dance in detail, it can be concluded that Tjetje Somantri's works have almost the same character from one dance to another. This similarity is found in the dance movements which show the behavior of an educated, polite person and there are no movements that are erotic in nature.

Kartiyani researched a competition between the Merak dance by Tjetje Somantri and the Merak dance by Ira Durban Arjo. In his research, it was found that dances by Tjetje Somantri (*Kukupu* Dance, *Koncaran* Mask Dance, Sulintang Dance, *Renggarini* Dance, *Menak Jingga* Mask Dance and *Kendit Birayung* Dance) were very popular with both domestic and foreign audiences. These researchers did not examine Sulintang Dance specifically, but from Tjetje Somantri's work (*Merak* Dance) there are similarities with Sulintang dance, especially in costumes and accessories. *Merak* Dance accessory Tjetje Somantri uses *Siger* (Crown), *Susumping*, *Giwang* (Earrings), shoulder straps, *Sabuk* (Belt), wrist bracelets, shawls, *sinjang* and *kemben* (in Sulintang Dance it is called *apok*). These accessories and costumes are the same as Sulintang Dance. Apart from that, Tjetje chose various dance costumes for the Merak Dance, including dark red, dark green, dark yellow and dark purple. Red means enthusiasm. All the colors used are related to the classic aristocratic nuances of Sundanese, Cirebon and Java, because Tjetje is the son of a nobleman who also has social relations in noble circles. This background can influence the work created by Tjetje Somantri (Kartiyani, 2018). The difference in costume colors between the Merak Dance and the Sulintang Dance is that for the Merak Dance the dark colors are chosen, while for the Sulintang Dance the bright colors are bright. This shows the difference in the designation of dancers. The Merak Dance is intended for adult dancers, while the Sulintang Dance is intended for teenage dancers.

Arjo wrote a book about women's classical Sundanese dance techniques. The book describes the attitudes and movements of classical Sundanese dance. Arjo in his book does not write specifically about the Sulintang Dance, but the movements and names of classical Sundanese dance movements by Tjetje Somantri are almost the same, for example: in the Merak Dance, the Dewi Dance, there are movements called *baplang*, *calik ningkat*, *nangreu* hand movements, etc. The names of these movements are also in the Sulintang dance. These dances create movement symbols, costumes, accessories and gamelan nuances of Sundanese culture (Arjo, 2013).

## Research Methodology

This research uses qualitative methods to reveal cultural meanings and symbols in Sulintang dance with an ethnographic approach to performing arts communication (Wastap, 2015). Ethnography was used to observe the Sulintang dance performance as a whole so that the Sundanese cultural symbols attached to the dance could be captured and understood through movements, costumes, accessories and gamelan dance. Specifically, data were obtained by conducting interviews with two informants. This was done to obtain complete and detailed data. Data missing from the researchers' observations could be obtained with interviews.

### a. Participants

This research involved two key informants to obtain data. These two people were dancers, choreographers, and dance trainers who during their youth represented West Java on various cultural missions to various countries, named Irawati Durban Arjo and Indrawati Lukman. They were Tjetje Somantri's very talented students. Apart from that, the researchers interacted directly with dancers, make-up artists, and musicians who were members of the Pusbitasai Irawati Durban dance studio in Bandung, West Java.

### b. Data Collection

Data collected were in the form of movements, costumes, accessories, Sulintang Dance gamelan, and Sulintang Dance recordings. In collecting data, researchers observed the live performance of the Sulintang Dance at the Paguyuban Pasundan Building in Bandung in July 2019 and at the Pusbitari Irawati Durban Dance Studio in Bandung in January 2024.

Observations of live performances were carried out to obtain details and specifications of the dance movements. The interview technique used was the ethnographic interview technique. According to Spradley, this interview technique is used to get informants to tell stories about what

they know (Wastap, 2015; Spradley, 2016). From the results of the interviews with informants, the researchers obtained symbols and meanings of dance movements, symbols and meanings of costumes, accessories, and gamelan. Then, another interview was conducted with Irawati Durban (via telephone in November 2023) and another observation of the Sulintang Dance performance was conducted in January 2024. This was done to refresh the researchers' memories of the data. From the results of this interview, additional data were obtained, showing that the Sulintang dance has detailed movements and detailed costumes, accessories, and musical instruments accompanying the dance. In this way, the researchers saw, recorded, and observed the entire series of dances and interviews to obtain data.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out simultaneously with the data collection stage. Data from documentary observations and interview results were organized, arranged, and interpreted. Categories were searched until a typical ethnographic description was formed. Data analysis followed the data analysis proposed by Creswell. Creswell put forward three steps of data analysis: description, interpretation and analysis (Creswell, 2015). The analysis was carried out after the data had been described and interpreted. Then, an analysis of the meaning and symbols of the movements, costumes and accessories, and gamelan of the Sulintang dance was carried out, as well as aesthetic communication behavior in the dance. Data from interviews, notes from observations of live performances of the Sulintang Dance, and literature observations were used as analysis guides.

### Findings and Discussion

#### **Sulintang Dance Represents Sundanese Culture and New Image of Sundanese Dancers through Movement, Costumes, Accessories, Music (Gamelan) Movement.**

A dancer must master basic movements similar to other Sundanese choreographed dances. According to Soedarsono (2000 in (Mariamurti, 2019), the basic dance movements that both female and male dancers must master are standing position, eye movements, neck movements, hip movements, thigh positions, lifting toes up, and bending. Before moving other body parts such as legs, hands, shoulders, etc., dancers must pay attention to their standing position to show readiness and help them concentrate and master the stage.

Generally, the standing position is followed by eye movements. The dancers will glance around the stage and the audience. Eye movements are very important in dancing because they reflect the 'feelings' of the dancers, so the dance will be more fun to watch and the audience can perceive communication through these movements. The standing position and eye movements radiate confidence and determination, influencing other movements in the dance. There are many important movements in dancing, but those that require skill are neck movements and hip movements. Impressive subsequent movements will produce graceful movements, while skillful hip movements will produce flexible body movements, either sideways, forwards, or backwards. All of which require movement of the hips rather than the knees. The position of the thighs is associated with leg and foot movements, particularly lifting the legs to the side.

From the interviews with Arjo and Lukman, it is known that the Sulintang dance has main movements consisting of *keupat*, *sembada*, *ngarias*, *baplang*, transitional movements: *tristik*, special movements: half circle and full circle *baplang soder* see also (Narawati, 2003).

The movements in the Sulintang dance contain values related to the preferences of upper-class society, manifested as local wisdom of Sundanese culture. Common gestures include a bowing gesture that symbolizes respect, an open hand gesture that symbolizes friendliness, and a swish of a scarf that symbolizes flexibility and elegance. The main movement elements of the Sulintang Dance are *calik jengkeng*, *ngahias*, and *tindak tilu*. All of these movements depict Sundanese women as beautiful, graceful, kind, religious, well-educated, and well-mannered.

**Table 1.** Movements in the Sulintang Dance

Source: Author

| No | Name of Movement                      | Position  | Symbol   |
|----|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1  | <i>Calik jengkeng (calik ningkat)</i> | A sitting position by sitting on the right leg while stretching and bending the left knee and slightly tilting the body to the right  | The dancers carry out this movement when offering prayers at the beginning and end of the dance. It describes human goodness.  |
| 2  | <i>Nyembah</i>                        | A sitting position while placing both hands at the chest position   | It is a movement that is a religious representation, depicting humans as weak creatures who are aware of the existence of their creator.   |
| 3  | <i>Keupat</i>                         | Walk gracefully   | It shows the feminine side of women, twisting it in a simple but graceful way.   |
|    | <i>Keupat sodor</i>                   | Walking gracefully in a shawl stretches the left arm to the side ( <i>bentik</i> ) while holding the scarf between the middle finger and index finger and turning the right wrist ( <i>uke</i> ). | This movement represents doubt in contemplating a problem thoroughly until finding the best solution.  |
|    | <i>Keupat sembada</i>                 | <i>keupat</i> movement (walking gracefully) by turning the right/left wrist and stopping in front of the navel in the <i>nan greu</i> hand position (palm up position)                            | This movement depicts the physical and mental struggle to earn a living.   |
| 4  | <i>Ngahias</i>                        | Describes women's feminine activities: dressing up, applying make-up, and combing and styling hair.   | Beautify yourself to look neat, beautiful, healthy, clean. This movement symbolizes social attitudes, representing the ability to behave well to bring happiness to other people |
| 5  | <i>Tindak tilu</i>                    | Leg movement consisting of three steps: backward, sideways (right or left), and forward (return to original position).  | This movement describes the attitude and religious awareness that humans as creatures who come from God, regardless of the vagaries of life, will ultimately return to God.      |



**Fig. 1:** Getting ready to dance  
Source: Author collection



**Fig. 2:** Sembah movement  
Source: Author collection



**Fig. 3:** Hand position *nangreu* and Position *calik jengkeng (calik ningkat)*  
Source: Author



**Fig. 4:** *Keupat Soder* movement  
Source: Author



**Fig. 5:** *Keupat Sambada* movement  
Source: Author

## Costume

A dancer's costume includes all clothing, shoes, hats and equipment, whether visible to the audience or not. The role of costumes is to bring a dancer's character to life. Roles are differentiated by color and costume style.

Every dance created by Tjetje Somantri has a unique costume. The Sulintang dance costume was adapted to the floor pattern. It was designed by Tubagus Oemay Martakusumah, a nobleman from Banten who was also a teacher, painter, organizer, screenwriter, stage director, and Sundanese theater director. Oemay chose bright colors such as red, yellow, green, and blue for the Sulintang dance costume. This also aims to visualize starlight and the lively, enthusiastic and cheerful nature of young women (see also (Rusliana, 2009).

Each color is associated with symbols. All of which are thought to represent the qualities of Sundanese women. Red symbolizes happiness, green - tenderness, yellow - life, and blue - modesty. These colors symbolize Sundanese women who are looking for identity and self-confidence. This is also reflected in the body's movements, which repeatedly lean to the right and left and change direction quickly, and the rapid movements of the shawl, turning right and left.

Songket is a sarong wrapped several times to cover the body from the waist to the ankles, making the body look slim. The songket (*sinjang*) in the Sulintang dance has its own uniqueness compared to the songket worn in other dances. The songket is embroidered with gold thread in certain parts. This type of textile is usually worn by Malay dancers. This is because the Sulintang

dance is a combination of dance movements from various regions, including India and Sri Lanka. Thus, the Sulintang Dance functions as a unifying performance, claiming local Sundanese distinctiveness and modern characteristics in the 1950s.

*Pita andong* and *penutup rasa* symbolize morality, covering certain parts of a woman's body that can arouse men's desires. *Tutup rasa* is an additional part of the costume specifically worn for the Sulintang dance. It is a rectangular ornament made of velvet measuring about 10x30 cm, with the ends attached to the front to cover the navel, and other sensitive parts of the female body, namely the hips. *Tutup rasa* symbolizes moral values that must be upheld, especially by women. The word '*rasa*' refers to something that can be enjoyed, one of which is sexuality. In the Sulintang dance, *tutup rasa* implies that Sundanese women must maintain their chastity, because they can only associate with men in marriage.

*Pita andong* is a ribbon measuring approximately 2 cm x 1.5 m, worn by pinning the left end to the left hip and the right end to the right hip, leaving the middle part dangling, giving an aesthetic impression to the dancer's hips. This accessory also symbolizes the moral values that women must uphold. The hips are the most important part of the body for women that can arouse the desire of men who see them, so they must be covered using ribbons to symbolize a fence or distance. This ribbon is worn dangling on the right and left hips. When the dancers rotate their bodies, the ribbon will also rotate, giving the impression of agility.

*Apok* is worn to cover the chest, torso, and hips, while the upper back and shoulders are left open. *Apok* is a representation of clothing worn by women in Sundanese culture. It is worn by female dancers in several dances created by Tjetje Somantri.

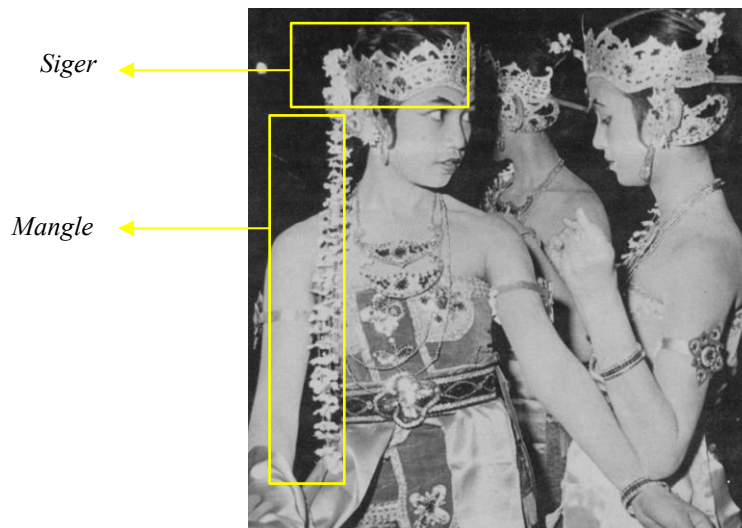


**Fig. 6:** *Pita andong*

Source: Author

### Accessories

The accessories used in the Sulintang Dance include *siger* and *mangle* (usually used by Sundanese brides), *susumping*, *giwang* (earring), *sabuk* (belt). *Siger* is a headdress worn to cover the forehead and sides of the head. They are usually made of gold, brass, or gold-painted leather with beads and sequins. An angle is a flower arrangement, usually jasmine or tuberose, worn to decorate a dancer's hair. *Siger* and dumping (ornaments worn to cover the ears; made of gold, brass, or gold-painted leather with beads and sequins; worn to complement the *siger*) are typical costumes from Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, and Bandung Regencies (Ardjo, 2007) and interview with Irawati Durban Ardjo and Indrawati Lukman on July 31 2019).



**Fig.7:** Maestro dancer Irawati Durban Ardjo (aged 14) before performing Sulintang dance at the Smetana Theatre in Prague, during an Indonesian cultural mission in 1957. We can identify here the different accessories used in Sulintang dance: siger, mangle, susumping, bun cover (round or particularly shaped ornament that is worn to cover the strings of siger behind the bun), kilat bahu (round or particularly shaped ornament worn on the upper right and left hands), necklace to adorn the chest of the dancer and wristbands. Source: Ardjo, 1998 - courtesy IDA

## Music

Dance composers often use music as an accompaniment to their dances, ensuring it complements the idea of the dance. Music sets the dance's mood, style, length, phrasing, intensity, and overall form, providing a structured framework. However, some composers may choose not to use music as accompaniment because of its complexity or purity. Dance and musical accompaniment should appear inseparable, and dance and music should form a structural unity, allowing for emotional, comic, or dramatic interpretation (Smith-Autard, 2010). The music accompanying the Sulintang Dance is played by artists such as drums, flutes, and rebabs who play Sundanese rhythmic music.

The Sulintang dance embodies Sundanese aristocratic values associated with women who have ethics, refined behavior, and elegant character. Through this dance, Tjetje Somantri wants to raise the image of West Javanese Sundanese female dancers as female dancers with a positive, graceful, polite, educated image. Thus, the image of Sundanese women becomes positive in their community. These values emerged in a specific cosmopolitan context of decolonization because the government was looking to create a positive image/representation of Indonesian women to be displayed on the world stage. The Sulintang Dance represents West Java both on the national stage and on the world stage.

## Sulintang Dance Becomes the Arts Ambassador of West Java on National and International Stages

Tjetje Somantri is known as the maestro of Sundanese dance, and his extraordinary works are influential in West Java and throughout Indonesia. His services, especially for West Java and generally for Indonesia, are significant in dance for the performing arts. Tjetje Somantri does not work alone. He is assisted by an assistant named Tb. Oemay Martakusumah (chairman of the Indonesian Arts Agency or BKI and head of the West Java Cultural Bureau). With the existence of this institution, many young women, especially from middle-class families, learn to dance at this place.

The Sulintang dance and other dances created by Tjetje at that time were very successful in building fans and audiences from various circles, especially among educated women and the middle class as dance performers, as well as from the upper classes of government officials, the private sector, up to President Soekarno as fans of his dances. The dances are classical in style,

with typical *apok* costumes, *sinjang* and *siger* headdresses, as well as the lively rhythmic accompaniment of *gending* and *gandang* beats, displaying the beauty and grace of the figure of an educated Sundanese woman, beautiful, moving gracefully and showing strong Sundanese culture.

It is generally performed at national events and is enjoyed by upper-class society. Through the movements, costumes, and accessories, many groups accepted and loved the dances created after Indonesian independence.

It was created in the early 1950s by Tjetje Somantri, and it allowed noble women to display proper dance moves. However, it does not only depict and normalize the high values deeply rooted in the local Sundanese nobility. Sulintang dance participates in developing Indonesian culture and national identity by incorporating elements from other regional dances.

The dance is performed for prestigious guests at official state events such as the Bandung Conference or during diplomatic missions abroad. The Sulintang dance is here to represent Indonesia as a nation. Furthermore, the Sulintang dance also represents the context of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War era and helped strengthen relations between countries, especially in Asia, where China fostered a sense of international brotherhood between socialist countries.

Sulintang is still performed today. It remains an iconic dance for West Java. The normalizing role of works has shifted to a more artistic and representational level because it has now become an inevitable dance to be studied by Sundanese art students.

As seen previously, the Sulintang dance falls into the "creation dance" category, which was developed in the 1950s, combining old traditional elements with new concepts. Creative dance is a reflection of fundamental changes in Indonesian culture since independence and revolution (1945-1949), which manifested a shift between participation and performance dance. The multicultural context of performance dances shows that they display not only gender but also Sundanese or West Javanese ethnic identity. In recognizing this, a shift in focus is implemented from internal/embodied engagement with dance to disembodied visual experiences (Spiller, 2010). The consequence of this shift at the local level was a passing interest in these performance dances by local audiences, accustomed to judging the dances by aesthetic values that departed from the participatory model and the need for choreographers to find ways to incorporate elements, which suggests a "deep and realized focus" to recapture the interest of Sundanese audiences (Spiller, 2010).

The next shift from the function of presentation to the representation of performance occurred simultaneously with various "traditional" performances (*wayang*, *gamelan* music, etc.) as soon as they entered the scope of "Indonesian culture" after 1945, and even earlier, when the arts began to be labeled as "art" and "culture" in the 19th century Dutch East Indie (Pemberton, 1994; Andrieu, 2017). This shift from presentational to representational also occurred in the dances being discussed now, considering the context of their emergence in the 1950s and 1960s (post-independence Indonesia characterized by strong nationalism and the development of a group of non-aligned countries in the context of the Cold War).

In the 1950s in Indonesia, the main attention was focused on shaping Indonesian culture and identity from inside and outside, creating and supporting a desired national image that could be recognized worldwide. Lindsay pointed out that, at that time, Indonesia had great cultural trust because exchanges with other countries were increasingly intensive, both in the form of officials visiting Indonesia and cultural missions sent abroad at various levels between 1954 and 1966. "Indonesian performers were everywhere -where" (Lindsay, 2012). The Sulintang dance has been part of this two-way process since its creation in 1952 and was performed at the Bandung Asia-Africa Conference in 1955. This international movement of artists coincided with the heavy traffic of artists in Indonesia, missions, and performances from one region to another.

These cultural missions abroad, as well as "cultural events" held for foreign dignitaries, provide opportunities for Indonesian dancers to meet each other while creating a framework for the creation of new performances that will be presented. These events were initiated and supported by the first Indonesian President Soekarno and directly supported by the Minister of Basic Education and Culture Prijono (1957-1966). Prijono is a staunch supporter of regional arts, "National consciousness must be stronger than anything else, stronger than ethnic consciousness" (Feith, 1970).

During cultural missions and events, dancers represent a region and a nation. While Central Javanese and West Javanese dances are a constant element of this event, other artists from various islands will join different teams. Many dances were invented or rearranged to fit the "folk dance" items promoted in the socialist world. The Sulintang dance, which consists of movements from various parts of Indonesia, is at the core of the Sundanese dance series and can be seen as a representation of the nation itself. A sense of nationality is then felt by the enthusiastic young dancers who will perform, travel, share costumes, and dance together. These dancers will also visit various countries. They will have a lot of experience so they can consider what is good for themselves and what is good for the country: "By performing dances presented for the audience, they know the benefits for themselves" (Lindsay, 2012). Returning to Indonesia, these dancers will also reflect on their experiences and practices, develop a repertoire suitable for international events, and question the role of traditional arts and national values.

Through this process, a sense of national cultural identity is formed among participants in cultural missions of all levels (from students to Presidential missions), and from the "cultural events" offered to diplomats visiting the country. Lindsay and Wilcox (Wilcox, 2017) observe that each cultural mission coincides either with supporting newly formed relationships or at critical moments of diplomatic tension when political relations cool. "While it is impossible to assess the exact impact of dance diplomacy on geopolitics during this period, it is important to consider how the artistic choices enacted in these projects conveyed specific cultural messages and gave rise to affective processes that advanced the political goals of the Bandung movement. "According to Chinese leaders, it's all about learning and showing mutual respect for cultures, especially between non-western countries, and this" was at the heart of the anti-imperialist significance of the Bandung conference and cultural diplomacy through dance helped support it." (Wilcox, 2017). Indonesian music and dance performances were invited to be held in China and Indonesian art teachers were brought in to teach Chinese artists. Sulintang dance is part of an era when "culture was an inseparable part of the vocabulary of international diplomacy" (Lindsay, 2012).

## Conclusion

During Soekarno's time, dance became an important part of forming Indonesian identity. President Soekarno, a statesman and artist, emphasized the importance of regional arts in national culture. The period 1950-1965 marked the foundation of national culture and the development of a new context of regional dance and dancers. Indonesia was a newly independent country trying to introduce its arts and national identity through cultural diplomacy during the Soekarno era. One of Indonesia's cultural missions was artistic performances in the form of dances from various regions, especially from the island of Java. One of the West Javanese dances chosen to be performed in this cultural mission was the Sulintang Dance. It is performed for prestigious guests at official state events such as the Bandung Conference or during diplomatic missions abroad. It is here to represent Indonesia as a nation. Furthermore, the Sulintang dance also represented the context of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War era. It helped strengthen relations between countries, especially in Asia, where China fostered a sense of international brotherhood between socialist countries.

The Sulintang dance was created in the early 1950s by Tjetje Somantri as a dance that elevates the image of Sundanese female dancers because the dance displays polite, smooth, dignified dance movements and colorful costumes that symbolize the character of Sundanese women. It also displays *andong pita* symbolized to cover sensitive parts of a woman's body, *apok* (breast covering), and accessories (*siger*, *mangle* usually used by Sundanese *menak* brides). All those characteristics not only depict the high values deeply rooted in the Sundanese nobility but also represent Sundanese culture in particular, at the same time, becoming part of the identity of the Indonesian nation.

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### Biography of the authors

**Susi Machdalena** is an Associate Professor of the Russian language in the Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Sciences Universitas Padjadjaran. She holds a Ph.D. in Russian linguistics and culture in 2012 from the Russian State Institute named Aleksandr Sergevich Pushkin Moscow, Russia. Her research interests are ethnolinguistics, onomastics, anthroponyms, culture, and phraseology, performance art.

**Reiza D. Dienaputra** is a Professor of history at the Department of History and Philology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Padjadjaran. He completed his doctoral program in visual history in 2011 at the Bandung Institute of Technology. In addition to history, Reiza D. Dienaputra is interested in cultural studies, politics, and tourism. In recent years, Reiza D. Dienaputra has placed significant emphasis on research in the field of multiculturalism.

**Awaludin Nugraha** is an Associate professor of history in the Department of History and Philology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences Universitas Padjadjaran. He holds a Ph.D. degree in tourism studies from the Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. He has been teaching history and tourism for 31 years at the History Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Padjadjaran, and Sustainable Tourism Study Program, Graduate School, Universitas Padjadjaran. His research interests are indigenous epistemology, indigenous tourism, and the history of everyday life.

**Nyai Kartika** is a lecturer of history in the Department of History and Philology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Padjadjaran. She earned a bachelor's degree from Padjadjaran University (1999), a master's degree from the University of Indonesia (2004), and a doctoral degree from the Bandung Institute of Technology Postgraduate School (2019). She has been teaching Indonesian history for 19 years. Her research interests are history, social, and cultural studies.

**Nani Sriwardani** is a lecturer at the faculty of fine arts and design at ISBI (Institute of Indonesian Arts and Culture) Bandung. Graduated as an architect from Parahyangan Catholic University, Masters in interiors from the Bandung Institute of Technology, PhD in Cultural studies from Padjadjaran University, Bandung. His research interests focus on traditional traditional village cultural spaces, architecture and interiors. Actively working in the field of architecture

**Eko Wahyu Koeshandoyo** is a lecturer in the linguistics department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Padjadjaran University, Bandung. Graduated from Doctoral Degree from Padjadjaran University. Research interests in the fields of cognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics. He also has an interest in the fields of myth and folklore.