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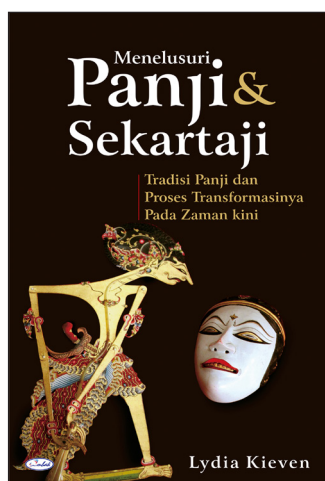
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Book review

Lydia Kieven, *Menelusuri Panji & Sekartaji; Tradisi Panji dan proses transformasinya pada zaman kini*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak, 2018, xiii + 185 pp. + illustrations. ISBN: 978-602-258-485-8. Price: IDR 70,000 (softcover).



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In the last few years, the revitalization of traditions and cultures of the past that had become almost extinct has been given serious attention both by the government and by communities. One such traditions is that of the Panji tales. Recently, these efforts have borne fruit in the designation of the Panji tales as one of “the Memory of the World” (MoW) by UNESCO in 2017. This award represents the world community’s recognition of the existence

of the Panji tales that are widespread not only in Indonesia but also throughout Southeast Asia. However despite the several awards and efforts at revitalization, the question still arises, how far has the revival movement been successful? Are Panji’s cultural values well known and practised by the people in their daily activities?

The answers to the questions can be found in Lydia Kieven’s work entitled *Menelusuri Panji & Sekartaji; Tradisi Panji dan proses transformasinya pada zaman kini*. This book describes the efforts to revitalize and apply the Panji cultural values in the community that has been ongoing in some countries, especially in Indonesia, during the last two decades. The book contains six chapters including attachments, personal notes, and a list of papers about the Panji stories that have been given to the seminars and meetings.

The first part of the book outlines the Panji tradition in historical terms, and discusses literature and artistic aspects, relating to the visual arts, performances, and rituals. Research has shown that Panji tales were already very well known in the Majapahit era (fourteenth to sixteenth century AD). The story of Raden Inu Kertapati, a prince from Kahuripan, who had been looking for his true love, Sekartaji, a queen of Daha, was constructed to

create political stability in the Majapahit Kingdom in its golden age under the reign of Hayam Wuruk (pp. 1-2). In addition to their existence in texts, the Panji tales were also sculpted in temple reliefs and had strong religious and spiritual nuances such as those found at Panataran temple, Mirigambar temple, and Kendalisodo temple. In the description in this section, the author emphasizes that the Panji tales is an authentic form of Javanese culture with specific indigenous features.

In the second part, the book presents community efforts and activities in various regions of the archipelago related to the revitalization and the transformation of Panji. These activities are intended to disseminate the positive values contained in the Panji stories such as modesty, simplicity, creativity, and upholding national culture. A start has been made by revitalizing Panji culture's traditional performing arts such as the Malangan and Jati Dhuwur mask dances, Pacitan and Wonosari Wayang Beber performances, the Wayang Gedhog shadow, and Wayang Krucil wooden puppet theatre. Further action has been taken in the form of festivals and seminars involving the government, academics, and the wider community. In addition, the Panji revival has also been encouraged by publications in a wide variety of media such as academic research, the press, book publishing, and film.

The author also shows the results of a survey held to find the extent to which Panji culture is in demand and implemented by the community. In collecting data, the author interviewed not only lecturers, researchers, artists, and humanists, but also civil servants and environmental activists who also offered their insights and experiences about Panji. The survey showed that the majority of respondents had known the tales of Panji since childhood through tales first told by their parents. Unfortunately, nowadays, this knowledge of the Panji tale has not been transmitted very successfully to the latest generation. This is shown by a considerable age gap of respondents, as most Panji cultural actors – who were knowledgeable about the tradition – who responded were born in the 1950s (p. 98) and those born at a later period had little first-hand knowledge of the Panji tales. In my opinion, it is not enough that the revitalization and transformation of Panji be left entirely to activists and enthusiasts; this work should also be the responsibility of all communities within the nation. One step that can be taken in order for the culture of Panji to be known and used as a philosophy of life for future generations is the integration of Panji culture with primary and secondary education for children in schools. As a form of national cultural identity, the Panji tradition should be introduced early on through a comprehensive educational syllabus.

In the fourth part, Kieven also tries to discuss the dynamics of revitalizing Panji culture as an intangible cultural heritage. She stresses that culture or tradition is not something conservative and rigid, but rather flexible and innovative. This means that tradition has changed and that innovation is a necessity to ensure that the Panji culture is sustainable (p. 102). Therefore, local communities play an important role in cultural preservation. In essence, the preservation of cultural heritage – frequently used for political and economic

purposes – is a continual part of building unity at local and national levels, the intention being that cultural preservation is the reinforcement of values, meanings, and benefits in people's lives.

The fifth part of this book describes the author's personal experience in examining Panji in Java (pp. 125-130). In this section, we learn in general terms from the author that the Panji tales cycle is very relevant to our daily life. The journey of human life is not always smooth; there are obstacles on the way. However, patience, humility, being simple, obeying the spiritual teacher, thirst for knowledge, and courage in overcoming obstacles ensure that we will arrive at our destination. One interesting point to note from this author's experience is how she as a person from the West entered and interacted with Javanese society. Frequently, as a Westerner she was used as a stimulus for revitalizing the culture of the society itself.

The sixth chapter contains several conclusions and suggestions to develop the revitalization and transformation of Panji culture. The author suggests that the development of the Panji tradition can be done through various media, including documentation, research, art, educational activities, and rituals (p. 131). Now, the challenge is how it is able to follow the flow of digital transformation and disruption era in making changes without losing the vitality of the tradition.

This book is important for those interested in Panji culture both in terms of understanding its rich history and in terms of knowing how it may be preserved. The well-written and extensive explanation make the book accessible to all. Data are also presented to provide a quantitative description of the extent preservation of Panji culture that has been running in the community for the past twenty years. These data should be considered by both the Indonesian government and the people involved in Panji culture so that they can evaluate what has already been done and determine the proper way to promote the Panji tradition in the future.