

Gandasari Gandawangi Dance: The Transformation of Legendary Form Into Tourism Arts in Jalawastu Brebes

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This article traces the transformation process of the legend of the characters Gandasari and Gandawangi into Gandasari Gandawangi Dance, created as a tourism performing art in Jalawastu Traditional Village, Brebes, Central Java. The legend narrates the story of a civil war among prominent figures embracing Islam in that region. From this narrative, a dance and music performance with an innovative tourism package highlighting Jalawastu Traditional Village's local wisdom was realized. The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative with an ethnographic approach. Data collection techniques encompassed interviews, documentary studies, and field observations. Observations were conducted to gather data, which was subsequently analyzed to formulate the transformation process and understand the significance of the Gandasari Gandawangi Dance. This article concludes that Gandasari Gandawangi Dance is adapted from the legend and further developed with creative dance movements, thereby serving as a tourism performing art that is expected to enhance the tourism potential of Jalawastu Traditional Village.

Keywords: *transformation, folklore, Gandasari Gandawangi dance, tourism performing art*

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INTRODUCTION

Gandasari and *Gandawangi* are two legendary figures believed by the indigenous community of Jalawastu, Brebes, Central Java, as symbols of elders who were influential during the spread of Islam in the region. These two legendary figures, *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi*, came from the legendary story of the civil war, which occurred based on the dualism of beliefs, namely the Sundanese Wiwitan faith and Islam ([Haryanto, 2022](#)). Regarding these two beliefs, the local community was divided in two. The first group rejected the introduction of Islam. This group believed in the teachings of the Sundanese Wiwitan faith led by *Gandasari*. The second group, led by *Gandawangi*, accepted Islamic teachings. The story of the conflict ended with *Gandawangi's* victory, which made Jalawastu a traditional village and then embraced the Islam religion.

The tale of *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi* is one of the rich oral traditions or folklore of the Jalawastu community. According to Danandjaja, ([Putra, 2012](#)), folklore is part of a collective culture, which is spread and passed down from generation to generation among any collective, traditionally in different versions, either in oral form or examples accompanied by gestures or reminder tools. Like general folklore in other areas, the story of *Gandasari Gandawangi* continues to be remembered and preserved in Jalawastu.

Based on this story, each region has diverse artistic potential. The richness of oral traditions containing the philosophy and noble values held by Indigenous peoples is a characteristic that differentiates a culture in one region from another, preserving unique histories and fostering a deep sense of identity. This uniqueness may become a unique selling proposition, where different characteristics become an attractive selling factor in the tourism sector ([Hidajat dkk., 2022](#)).

Inskeep ([Darmawan & Nurhidayati, 2019](#)) categorizes tourism attractions into three types: 1) Natural Attractions, such as landscapes and biodiversity; 2) Cultural Attractions, including history, archaeology, religion, and traditional life; and 3) Special Types of Attractions, like theme parks and shopping areas. Among these, cultural attractions are particularly potent in strengthening tourism potential.

Art, tailored explicitly for tourism, often involves a simplified and engaging representation of traditional practices ([Afrianto, 2020](#)). In Jalawastu, the

Centong War performance, part of the *Ngasa* traditional ceremony, is a vital cultural expression that retains its traditional values while adapting to attract tourists. This form of conservation is crucial for Jalawastu's goal of developing as a tourism village, as well as national and international visitors.

The existence of the *Centong War* performance in the *Ngasa* traditional ceremony is still maintained by the indigenous people of Jalawastu today. Without losing its traditional values, this heritage continues to be maintained and preserved as the defining identity of Jalawastu Traditional Village. This form of conservation is essential, referring to the goal of Jalawastu's traditional village, which is to develop the potential of the tourism village. In practice, this village is trying to develop a tourist destination so that it can be a magnetic attraction for local, national and even international tourists. The efforts made to increase the scale of destination orientation of this traditional village include innovations in the field of performing arts.

One potential art form that can be used as an attraction to create a tourism area in the region is the *Centong War* performance. The touch of innovation and creativity in the dance and music aspects contained in the *Centong War* presentation aims to transform the legend believed by the local community into a new performing arts presentation in the form of a dance performance entitled *Gandasari Gandawangi*.

Transformation is the formation of something in a different or new direction without changing its structure, although the new form has already changed ([Indriani dkk., 2023](#)). Regarding the art aspect, transformation is carried out to harmonize existing cultural elements with external factors, such as a response to social, political and economic changes ([Setyaningrum, 2018](#)). In *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance, transformation is carried out to package the legendary story believed by Indigenous people to be the basis for the creative process of creating new performing arts as a tourism village attraction.

This research explores the transformation of the *Gandasari Gandawangi* legend into a tourism performing art and its impact on the tourism potential of the Jalawastu Traditional Village. The author assumes that the transformation process of folklore legends into *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance performing arts is feasible in accordance with the appropriate research resources.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach to investigate the transformation of the *Gandasari Gandawangi* legend into a tourism performing art in Jalawastu village. This specific methodology is particularly well-suited for this study. Specifically, ethnography allows a deep dive into the cultural context surrounding the transformation (Hoey, t.t.). This research has the strength to observe the main topic because it immerses the researcher in the Jalawastu community, observing and interacting with the people involved in the creative process (Basir, 2021). This also facilitates an understanding of the motivations, beliefs, and values shaping how the legend of *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi* legends transformed into a performance.

In addition, according to Creswell's explanation about ethnographic research that carries deep understanding that a group of people shares, this research allows the researcher to acknowledge the collection of rich, detailed data through techniques like interviews, observations, and participation in cultural events like the *Ngasa* ceremony, then oversees creative process as the foundation of the form of tourism package of *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance performing arts in Jalawastu traditional village.

The techniques for collecting data are field observation, interviews, documentation studies, and data analysis. Field observation is the most important collection technique in qualitative research (Safarudin dkk., 2023). In the early stage, the researcher conducted a literature study on references related to the research topic, about the process of transformation of a legend into a presentation of *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance.

The second stage is an interview. This phase is carried out by interviewing several sources. Whether they have a direct connection to the native village of Jalawastu or other sources who are not the native of the village, they know the tradition of *Ngasa* and the legend of *Gandasari Gandawangi* well. The informants in this research, among others, are:

1. Chief of Jalawastu Village: Singgih
2. Community figure: Dastam, S.Pd

The next stage is intensive field observation, which was conducted from 17 to 21 April 2023 and continued from August until September 2023. However, the general observation has been conducted since 2018 by direct observation of the *Centong War* in *Ngasa* ceremony. The finding of the

new form of legendary transformation was studied and deeply researched in March 2022. This phase is conducted to identify the potential of the research site, both related to the daily life of the community of Jalawastu Village and in connection with the livelihoods of the local community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Story Background

The story of *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi* is a form of legend from Jalawastu Village that depicts the historical background of the region. It is a civil war between two young characters named *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi*. This story is an iconic event that became the identity of the cultural journey of Jalawastu Village, distinguishing it from other villages.

This story was then adopted into a scene of the *Centong War* in the *Ngasa* traditional ceremony. This is called the *Centong War* because this civil war was peaceful, and there was no further conflict after *Gandasari* admitted defeat and left the Jalawastu traditional village area. *Ngasa* is an ingrained tradition and part of the self-identity of the Jalawastu indigenous community. The *Ngasa* tradition has been carried out since pre-history and has faded several times. In 1882, during the 9th Regent of Brebes, Arya Candra Negara, the *Ngasa* traditional ceremony has been revived until now (Dastam, komunikasi pribadi, September 2023). The terminology *Ngasa* is taken from the word *Mangsa kasanga*, which means the ninth season, so the *Ngasa* tradition is periodically held every year on the ninth *Kliwon* Tuesday in March.

The *Centong War* scene at the *Ngasa* ceremony has Sundanese philosophy: *silih asah, silih asih, and silih asuh*, which is believed to be a view of life that reflects the virtues as the forerunner of the Jalawastu indigenous community. This scene, in detail, tells about the appearance of Islam, which spreads in the Jalawastu community peacefully and openly without any oppression (Turyati & Azizah, 2023). The civil war between *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi* depicts community groups who accepted and rejected the introduction of Islam in the region. The quarrel did not lead to a riot that caused a split between the two brothers but was done with a cool head. This is why the weapon used in this scene is a ladle (*centong*), not sharp. Apart from that, there is some advice in the song accompanying the dance, which is about cooperation and an invitation to maintain ancestral traditions continuously.

The story of *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi*, rich in

philosophical meaning, is a local wisdom asset that becomes a tourism potential when developed and used as a performing art. The distinctive cultural community also becomes an element that attracts tourist sympathy ([Sunantri & Rahayu, 2023](#)).

Putra defines art and culture tourism as a program that introduces visitors to cultural wealth. In some ways, cultural tourism is formed due to the transformation and adaptation of a culture into a packaged form of tourism. The revitalization of folk culture into performing arts gives rise to interpretations of renewal in responding to societal transformations ([Afrianto dkk., 2024](#)).

Meanwhile, according to Soedarsono, tourism art is explicitly packaged for tourists ([Afrianto, 2020](#)). Some features of the tourism art, among others, are (1) the replica of the original; (2) the short or compact version; (3) the sacred, magical, and symbolic values, or its primacy, are excluded; (4) full of variation; (5) appealingly presented; and (6) inexpensive according to the tourists.

Likewise, *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance meets the characteristics of tourism arts according to Soedarsono, namely: (1) *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance is a replica of the *Centong War* scene between the characters of *Gandasari and Gandawangi*; (2) *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance is a short version of a legend of *Gandasari and Gandawangi*, which was later modified to the type of group dance; (3) *Gandasari Gandawangi* tourism packaging dance excluded the pure, sacred values of the story because it prioritizes elements of entertainment brought to tourists; (4) the variations of dance forms, concepts, movements, and music are presented in *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance work; (5) *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance is presented attractively wearing makeup and costume so that it can increase the sale value of the performance; and the last (6) the dance is economical because it can be watched freely by any tourist in the ceremony of *Ngasa*.

Transformation Process

The transformation of a legend into a performing arts is an exciting process, where the initially verbal story is turned into live and staged. Legend or folklore is a form of oral folklore inherited from generation to generation in its community traditionally ([Ryolita & Nurhayani, 2019](#)). As Danandjaja explains, legend also often spreads through a grouping called a cycle, where a group of stories ranges in a character or event ([Putra, 2012](#)).

The legend story of *Gandasari and Gandawangi*, which has been ingrained in the Jalawastu traditional

village community, is the foundation of the formation of a new art presentation. This legend is a part of a story or prose of the people, considered a true story. This is also in line with the Danandjaja statement, which links the belief of Indigenous people with secular legends (worldly). As local knowledge, performing arts represent knowledge about the world around them and their experiences that can relatively quickly change and evolve according to the changes occurring in their environment ([Wastap, 2017](#)).

The elements of the movement of the *Centong War* in *Ngasa* tradition, the nature of courage, and philosophical values of goodness, which have been trusted through the legend, are then transformed into a new form, namely tourism performing arts. According to Bandem ([Sudewa, 2014](#)) transformation is a change of shape, appearance, condition, or transformation on the external level of culture but not the internal level. The transformations present in creative performing arts represent a form of adaptation to the relevance of cultural values applied in the present time ([Ulum dkk., 2021](#)).

Dance Name



Picture 1. Gandasari Gandawangi Dance

(source: personal documentation, 2023)

The dance's name is adapted from *Centong War*'s character, *Gandasari-Gandawangi*.

Character

The character illustrated in *Gandawangi Gandasari* dance is adapted from the *Centong War* movement. This war-based dance usually combines brave and dramatic movements that reflect battles or conflicts within a particular culture. Movement techniques or skills are necessary for advancing ideas rather than merely serving as a showcase for acrobatic physical prowess ([Wahyudiyanto, 2023](#)). Likewise, *Gandasari Gandawangi's* dance takes the two characters in seeking civil conflict in the differences in their choice of religion.

Therefore, the character of substantial and agile, as

well as the element of 'strength', is performed in the scenes of the *Gandasari-Gandawangi* dance series. The character is aligned based on values of local wisdom about the basic movement of *silat*, which becomes the basis of choreography patterns, which include stances, tidal, step patterns, beats, kicks, and strokes.

The Form of Presentation

Furthermore, the presentation of creative dance forms typically involves ensemble performances with additional props or supporting elements (Fatmawati & Susmiarti, 2024). *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance is a group-themed dance (*rampak*) in which five female dancers perform. The form of presentation accentuates entertainment as a tourism performance dance, which puts forward the aesthetic values of the variety of movement beauty. The pattern of movement is taken from the basic movement of *pencak silat* and the *Centong War* procession.

This dance is presented in the series of *Ngasa* ceremonies as a part of a folk performance intended as the closing part.

Dance Accompaniment Music

The creation of music itself begins with defining the purpose and theme of the music to be conveyed. This can represent cultural values, historical experiences, or stories from local folklore (Sugmatimur & Widiyanto, 2023). In musical terms, the music concept exposed is based on *Pencak Silat* art or *Gending* to accompany *Gandasari Gandawangi* elements. The developed *Pencak Silat* music elaborates on the concept of innovation and creativity in the music adapted to the dance movements' needs. In addition, the song is entitled "*Buah Kawung*", a well-known song in the local community.

Make Up and Dance Costume



Picture 2. Makeup Of Gandasari Gandawangi Dance
(source: personal documentation, 2023)



Picture 3. Costume of Gandasari Gandawangi Dance
(source: personal documentation, 2023)

The makeup and costume are chosen to reflect the local culture of Jalawastu's traditional village. The choice of makeup and costume is also made regarding the character of *Gandasari* and *Gandawangi* in the *Centong War* procession.

Dance Property

The properties used in *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance are a ladle (*centong*) and a traditional wooden fan (*hihid*). These properties are symbols of weapons to be used as a tool of war in this dance.

CONCLUSION

The creation of the tourism performing art of *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance is the result of transforming a legendary story believed by the Jalawastu traditional community, which came down orally from one generation to the next. The story then became the identity of the local region, which has tourism potential rooted in the local wisdom that distinguishes Jalawastu traditional village from other Indigenous villages.

The working process of *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance underwent several phases: 1). Observation of research location, 2). Searching for reference sources, 3). Identification of potential tourism performing art.

The studies investigating the folklore of *Gandasari Gandawangi* foster a creative process grounded in the cultural heritage esteemed by the local community. It is imperative to meticulously examine the inherent potential and translate it into a culturally enriched package with significant tourism value that the researcher oversees. This endeavour embodies a cultural transformation wherein cultural figures are represented through performing arts. Such representations are designed to be appreciated by tourists, thereby facilitating a deeper

understanding of the traditions upheld by the traditional village.

Creating the *Gandasari Gandawangi* dance as a folk entertainment dance has become an added value for the tourism sector in Jalawastu traditional village. A unique cultural experience packaged in the form of war dance and the characteristic art properties of the *Centong War* originating in this region has become a potential diversity of performing art presented in the Jalawastu traditional village. The development of a tourism village in the tourism performing art sector provides significant benefits, both for the local community and the tourism industry as a whole.

The author hypothesizes that this transformation process is feasible and beneficial for developing another traditional village as a tourist destination. Investigate other cultural legends within the region or beyond to assess their potential for similar tourism transformations. Overseas, the potential of cultural history is explored, and the long-term impacts of such transformations on local communities, particularly in terms of social, economic, and cultural sustainability, are examined. Expanding research to include various cultural legends and evaluating the long-term effects of these transformations can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between cultural heritage and tourism development.

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