

Pasangiri Damas: A Strategy to Preserve Tembang Sunda Cianjuran Art in West Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article aims at analyzing a vocal contest of a traditional musical art genre namely Tembang Sunda Cianjuran (Cianjur Sundanese Traditional Song) in West Java, Indonesia. The contest, also known by the term PTSC DAMAS, had been held continuously since 1962 by youth social organization called DAMAS (Daya Mahasiswa Sunda). The study was conducted using qualitative approach. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted by using an interactive model. The results show that PTSC DAMAS has greatly affected the preservation and development of the Tembang Sunda Cianjuran, not only in the music accompaniment but also vocal aspects. Various parties has been very supportive of PTSC DAMAS, thus the contest can be carried out consistently.

Keywords

ptsc damas; vocal contest; tembang sunda cianjuran; sundanese traditional song; traditional art preservation

INTRODUCTION

West Java is one of the provinces in Indonesia that is inhabited mainly by the Sundanese. Based on statistical data in 2010, the Sundanese ranks as the second largest ethnicity in Indonesia with a population of 36.7 million people (Na'im and Syaputra, 2011). In West Java, a variety of traditional arts thrive as a result of the people's creativity and culture. Sundanese people are well-known as people who love art. According to Rosidi (2010), the life of Sundanese people is quite relaxed, therefore, they have time to do art. Art forms that existed in West Java were as many as 580 types. However, according to various reports (Sobari, 2012; Kurnia, 2013; Kurnia, 2014; Heriyanto, 2015; Guci, 2015; Ju-

lia, 2016; Hasan, 2016), of 580 arts, 500 types of art are extinct, 40 are in a state of early extinction, 25 are nearly extinct, and 15 are still living. Kurnia, as reported by Maulana (2013), stated that the extinction of about 500 types of Sundanese art occurred because there was no regeneration of the artists. Along with the development of an increasingly globalized era, the life of a modern society with adequate entertainment facilities either in the form of electronic media (television, radio), or in the form of live performances (closed or open stage), popular mu-

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sic looks much favored among young people (Cholifah, 2011; Muashomah, 2013; Sinaga, 2001; Soekito, 1992).

However, there is one type of art that is successfully passed from generation to generation, namely the art of *Tembang Sunda Cianjuran* (*TSC*) created in the 18th century and reached the peak of its creation in the 1840s (Sukanda et al., 1977; Sukanda, 1983; Wiradiredja, 2012b). Until today, the art of *TSC* is able to survive and has never lost its fans. One of the indicated factors that enable *TSC* to continue to regenerate is their vocal *pasanggiri* (contests/competitions) held continuously by a Sundanese student organization called *DAMAS* (*Daya Mahasiswa Sunda*), so that the *pasanggiri* is also commonly called *Pasanggiri DAMAS* or *Pasanggiri Tembang Sunda Cianjuran* (*PTSC DAMAS*).

Therefore, the statement of the problem of this study is to investigate the implementation of *PTSC DAMAS* that is assumed to be a strategy in the effort to preserve *TSC* in West Java, Indonesia. As stated by Ako (2009), the competition had a significant impact on the development of music in Indonesia. Even for art preservation, in a specific event there should be contests between the units and community groups who mean to join (Soeroso and Susilo, 2008). Meanwhile, Mubah (2011) states that a strategy to improve the durability of local culture can be done through the construction of national identity, understanding of cultural philosophy, issuing local regulations, and use information technology.

A similar study was conducted and published by Williams (1997); Williams (2003). However, the study was not focused on the impact of *PTSC DAMAS* on the preservation of *TSC*, instead on the description of *Pasanggiri DAMAS* phenomena based on the study of anthropology. The results of the research show that the chance to participate in a competition is one of the forces that attracted new interest in the Sundanese performing arts. It leads to enthusiastic participation and intensive study on the part of young musicians and dancers, and its rewards are tangible and satisfying. Budiarsa

(2016) in Bali, have studied that the movement of youth generation coupled with adequate attention from the government make dance competitions as prestigious events that attract teenagers. This drew the attention of many, since it was considered effective as a mean to preserve Balinese art and culture. Several other researchers also reported on competitions in Indonesia with a different focus, such as the study of art from the perspective of political culture (Sutton, 1995; Weintraub, 2001). Julia has also done research, but focused on the style of accompaniment music in *TSC* (Julia et al., 2017). In this study, the objectives are to identify and analyze: (1) the movement of *DAMAS* in preserving *Tembang Sunda Cianjuran*, (2) the impact of *PTSC DAMAS* on the existence of *TSC* accompanists, and (3) the impact of *PTSC DAMAS* on the existence of *TSC* singers.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative approach (Alwasilah, 2006; Sugiyono, 2013). The collection of primary data were done by observations, interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out on the musical instrument players and vocalists of *TSC* who attended *PTSC DAMAS* 2016. Interviews were also conducted with musical instrument players and vocalists of *TSC* contestants of *PTSC DAMAS* 2016, and also the organizer, vocal coaches, observers and stakeholders of *TSC*. Secondary data was collected through documentation study.

Thus, the subjects in this study are the artists and appreciators of *TSC*. The study was conducted in two places, namely in Sumedang regency and Bandung regency/city, West Java province, Indonesia. Currently, in these places, routine rehearsals of *TSC* are still lively. Particularly for Bandung regency, in 2016, it hosted the 21st *PTSC DAMAS*.

The data were analyzed using interactive model through the stages of data reduction, data display, data verification and conclusion (Rohidi, 2007; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In conducting the data display, the researcher interpreted data obtained from

observations, interviews, and documentary studies, and paired them with relevant theories, then made a systematic description of factual and accurate data on the facts and relationships between investigated phenomena (Nazir, 2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Movement of DAMAS in Preserving TSC

DAMAS is a youth community organization established on October 14, 1956 in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The official website of *DAMAS* (*DAMAS*, 2016) explained that the purposes of *DAMAS* are: 1) *ngangkat harkat darajat Ki Sunda pikeun kajembaran Indonésia* (to raise the dignity of Sundanese people for the honor of Indonesia); 2) *kahontalna masyarakat gemah ripah répéh rapih anu di pirido ku Gusti nu Maha Suci* (to achieve a prosper and peaceful society blessed by God The Holy One); 3) *nanjeurna kapribadian Sunda pikeun jengléngna kapribadian Indonésia* (to establish Sundanese personality for maintaining Indonesian personality); and 4) *jembarna kabudayaan Sunda dina wangunan kabudayaan Indonésia* (to preserve Sundanese culture in the Indonesian cultural unity). As an organization that addresses the Sundanese culture, one of the strategies was creating a flagship program to preserve *TSC* through what is now known as *PTSC DAMAS*. The implementation of *PTSC DAMAS* is supported by various parties, including the local government, universities, and stakeholders who are able to participate in various ways, particularly funding for the contest. As stated by Nugroho et al. (2014), that the role of stakeholders, among others, is to accommodate various needs or interests, as well as to facilitate and to meet the needs of the target group. Especially now, the Governor of West Java has the authority and responsibility in the maintenance and preservation of arts (Kemendagri, 2014). This means that art contests such as *PTSC DAMAS* could be an event that is fully supported by the local government.

In the history of the Sundanese cul-

ture, Hasan (2015) described that *PTSC DAMAS* was first held in 1962. Afterwards it was held in 1962, 1964, 1966, 1969, 1972, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, and the last was in 2016. Thus, until 2016, *DAMAS* had hosted 21 *PTSCs*. In the holding of *DAMAS PTSC*, the organizer often brings a certain missions related to the development of the *TSC* art. This is illustrated in Hasan (2015), that

... the implementation of *PTSC* II and III, which were in 1964 and 1966, was more focused on efforts to introduce and popularize *TSC* so that to it became widely known and enthused by the public. Therefore, the contest was open for elementary school, junior and senior high school, and university levels. Then *PTSC* VI, in 1969, the goal was more focused on the quality of the songs of in the contest, with the inclusion of songs that had *laras* (scale) *salendro*. Meanwhile, at the time, *mamaos* (another term for *TSC*) songs with *laras salendro* had received less attention (were less popular). Since then, *mamaos laras salendro* was spreading again in the society (especially the *TSC* community) ... in *PTSC* 1999, *laras mandalungan* was included. Although it was just an introduction, it was expected that *laras mandalungan* could be better known in the world of Sundanese songs, which in turn could motivate the songwriters.

Based on the aforementioned elaboration, at least two important things implemented by *DAMAS* were identified. First, *DAMAS* sought to introduce the art of *TSC* to various groups/ages, so that the contests were open for various school levels. *TSC* is in fact more suitable performed by teens and adults since the song ornamentations have a very high difficulty. As stated by the senior singer, Wiradiredja, that *TSC* is a kind of suitable to be sung by adults (Interview, 8 August 2016). In order to introduce *TSC* more widely, this principle was ignored by *DAMAS*. Second, *DAMAS* sought to gradually popularize all *laras* in *TSC*. The musical scales usually used in *TSC* performances were *pelog* and *sorog*, while *salendro* and *mandalungan* were rarely used so that it was

less popular. However, *DAMAS* popularized all *laras* so that now they are all more familiar and often performed.

In 2009, *PTSC DAMAS* sought to develop *TSC* by the addition of new songs created by song writers through strict selection. But this attempt failed because the new songs written, especially the works of Kubarsah, were viewed by the *TSC* community as violating the standard principles of *TSC*. The new songs written by Kubarsah were eventually transformed as a new genre in *TSC* that is called as the *Sekar Anyar* genre today. Therefore, in the 21st *PTSC DAMAS* 2016, the contest was intended to become a means of monitoring and maintaining the continuity of the contest. As stated by Wijaya through Puspitasari (2016), the consistency of the contest had an important role in the preservation of art, particularly the preservation and development of *TSC* art. If an art form is not maintained, then it will certainly vanish from civilization. One effort to maintain the existence of an art form is to consistently hold art activities in the community.

The Impact of PTSC DAMAS on the Existence of TSC Accompanists

For the musical instrument players of *TSC*, *PTSC DAMAS* had a special meaning. In this case, at least three functions of *PTSC DAMAS* particularly for the players of *kacapi indung* (a type of board zither played in West Java) as the main instrument players in the *TSC* performances were identified. First, *PTSC DAMAS* had become a means of proving their skills in playing *kacapi indung*. As a contest, the *kacapi indung* players who accompany the contestant were certainly not amateurs, because it involved the smoothness for the singers in the contest. This means that the *kacapi indung* player should not be a threat to the singer, or potentially harm the singer from the part of the music accompaniment that can lead to failure in winning for the singer. *Kacapi indung* players who were considered less skilled or could harm the singer during the performance were usually dismissed by the organizer from accompanying *PTSC DAMAS*. Moreover, *DAMAS*

PTSC was a quite exhausting event because it lasted for hours and even days. As explained by Julia (2011), that being a *pamirig* (accompaniment player) in a *pasanggih* is something that is quite tiring, because he had to sit cross-legged for hours, and also concentrating on the *pirigan* (accompaniment music) in the contested song.

Second, *PTSC DAMAS* had become a means of proving trustworthiness, especially from the contest organizer towards *kacapi indung* players. It is not easy to gain the trust as an accompanist in *PTSC DAMAS*. In determining the accompanist, contest organizers usually asked for a written recommendation from senior figures of *TSC*, along with the nomination of the song titles that would be contested. As happened in *PTSC DAMAS* 2016, observations showed that Sukaenah as one of the figures of *TSC* from Sumedang regency was asked to give a written recommendation of the names of the accompanists by the organizer of *PTSC DAMAS* 2016. The names that have been proposed from several prominent *TSC* artists were then brought to the organizer meeting. In the final stage, the organizer under the authority of the coordinator of accompanists determined the names that will be an accompanist in *PTSC DAMAS*. Even in the discussion in the final stage, the coordinator would still offer or recruit artists who were considered competent and present in the last contest in technical meetings for of the contest.

Artists who were not present in the final discussion, but because they were highly trusted by the organizer as a competent accompanist of *TSC*, then the artists remain engaged as accompanists in *PTSC DAMAS*. Because basically, trust incurred as a result of a direct connection between two or more people that is associative (Soekanto, 2006) or gives mutual benefit. As experienced by one of the *kacapi indung* players, namely Yusdiana, he was trusted to be an accompanist in several *PTSC DAMAS*. Yusdiana said that he participated in the 17th (2003), 19th (2009), 20th (2012), and the 21st (2016) (Interview, 25 September 2016). In every contest, Yusdiana was trusted to play a *kacapi indung*

in *laras salendro*, a scale in Sundanese music that is quite difficult to play because the scale is rarely played in *TSC* performances. Thus, not all players *kacapi indung* can memorize songs in *laras salendro*.

Third, *PTSC DAMAS* had become an opportunity to earn extra income. For *kacapi indung* players, to accompany the *PTSC DAMAS* participants could be a side job, especially for *kacapi indung* players who already have a steady job, and became the main job for the players who actually made the world of *TSC* as their profession. Although *PTSC DAMAS* occurred only a few days in a few years, but these activities can help the *kacapi indung* players in meeting their needs.

While in general, especially for the organizers of the contest, *PTSC DAMAS* is identified to be able to become an event for several points. First, it became an event to see the development of the *kacapi indung* player regeneration. *Kacapi indung* players who are spread across West Java is quite a lot. The results of a study in 2007 showed that there were about 45 *kacapi indung* players spread across three regencies, namely Cianjur, Garut and Bandung (Nugraha, 2007; Julia, 2008). This amount did not include other regencies such as Sumedang, Tasikmalaya, Sukabumi, and more. When *PTSC DAMAS* was held, the progress of *kacapi indung* players from time to time could be seen, particularly in terms of regeneration from the older to the younger. For example, based on observations, in previous contests, a senior *kacapi indung* player, Rukmana, was still an accompanist in the contest. However in the last *PTSC DAMAS*, he was replaced by his pupil, Gumilar. Other young *kacapi indung* players have replaced the seniors in this contest among others are Nugraha, the pupils of Sumadipradja, and Rupiandi, the pupil of Rukmana and Garmana. This had occurred since the 20th *PTSC DAMAS* in 2012, as stated by the chairman of the jury at the time, Wiradiredja (2012a), 80% of the *pamirig* (music players) are new players. This is an indicator that the art of *TSC* still exists and grounded among the Sundanese people.

Unfortunately, in *PTSC DAMAS*, not

many *kacapi indung* players from various regencies could accompany participants representing their regencies since the organizer of *PTSC DAMAS* usually provided the accompanists and the participants were not allowed to bring their own accompanists. However, in the 21st *PTSC DAMAS* in 2016, a senior *TSC* figure proposed to change that rule. Herdini said that if the accompanists were not given the opportunity to accompany the singers in the contest, then the accompanists could not develop (Interview, 20 Mei 2016). The proposal was accepted by the organizer, then in the 21st *PTSC DAMAS* in 2016, the singers were allowed to bring their own accompanist, but it was restricted to only in the preliminary rounds, while in the final rounds, the accompanists were provided by the organizer.

Through these new rules, it can be identified that the younger generation were in fact began to emerge to being artists of *TSC*, as can be seen in the following picture 1.



Figure 1. Children contesting in the 21st *PTSC DAMAS* in 2016

(Picture Source: <http://www.jabarprov.go.id/index.php/news/19537/2016/10/11/Puluhan-Masyarakat-Antusias-Ikuti-Pasangiri-Tembang-Cianjuran>)

Second, it had become an event to see the changes in *TSC* musical styles. As a product of culture, *TSC* is inseparable from development or change, because basically people will never be able to escape from changes. Sulasman and Gumilar (2013) said, like an inevitable event, change is a very important aspect in life, both individually

and collectively, because changes in society is closely related to culture. In the context of *PTSC DAMAS*, changes could be seen clearly in the aspect of accompaniment music on the *kacapi indung* instrument. Musical changes were not contrast in the sense the changes were little because *TSC* artists always maintained the standard musical principles in the performances of *TSC*, so that changes only occurred in certain parts. However, the little changes were enough to give distinctiveness to the players, so that it became an individual style of the *kacapi indung* players. In other words, *PTSC DAMAS* had become an event to witness the emergence of new styles in *kacapi indung* accompaniment music. Moreover, from the artists' perspective, *PTSC DAMAS* was also considered as an opportunity to publicize *kacapi indung* accompaniment music arranged by them. As in *PTSC DAMAS 2016*, a *kacapi indung* player provided by the organizer, Rupiandi, played his accompaniment arrangement in the *pasiupan* pattern in *laras pelog* and *sorog*. Similarly, other *kacapi indung* player, Yusdiana, played his arrangement that he developed in a song titled *Sangkuring* in *laras salendro*. This proved what was said by the Merriam (1964) and Sugiharto (2013), that music could serve as a symbolic representation of ideas, stories, behavior or a certain atmosphere, it could serve as a means for education, it could inflame the aggressive and violent instincts, but it could also be a tool to strengthen social conformity, the cohesion of the group, or in other words ideological function.

The Impact of PTSC DAMAS on the Existence of TSC Singers

As it is apparent from the name of the event, *PTSC DAMAS* is an event that is specifically intended for singers, which is to look for new champion singers in the *TSC* community. In addition to having a function to give rise to quality singers, activities of *PTSC DAMAS* also have other functions for the singer themselves as well as for the event organizer. For the singers, the event was identified to have the following functions. First, it was considered as a platform to train one's men-

tality or confidence. This was mainly for the beginner singers. They generally participated in the contest, not targeting champion title but to test their mentality, in order to prepare themselves for becoming professional singers. As said by the owner of Pakuwon Sumedang art studio, Soeridikoesoemah, the participation of singers from Pakuwon art studio in the contest was intended to train the mentality of the student singers (Interview, 13 February 2016).

Secondly, for expert singers in particular, the contest was followed to fight for the champion title. Based on observations, it was not easy for a singer of *TSC* to occupy the top position in *PTSC DAMAS*. In general, singers had to participate a few times to become the first winner. For example, the singer Nurhayati had followed *PTSC DAMAS* twice; in the 17th *PTSC DAMAS* in 2004, she only competed until the finals, and in the 18th *PTSC DAMAS* in 2006, she won first place. Another example of singer is Sukmawati who won third place in the 18th *PTSC DAMAS* (2006), second place in the 18th *PTSC DAMAS* 19th in 2009, and won first prize in the 20th *PTSC DAMAS* in 2012. Typically, after obtaining the title as the champion, the singers no longer participated in the next *PTSC DAMAS*. This means that being the champion of *PTSC DAMAS* was the peak of the struggle in getting their status as professional singers. In other words, *PTSC DAMAS* had become a barometer of the ability of *TSC* artists (Puspitasari, 2016). In this case, it also indicated that the singers participate in *PTSC DAMAS* not to get the prize alone, but also to be considered as professional singers, who held the highest status in the community of *TSC*. Because, basically, after winning first place, a variety of job or project offers often came from various parties. Rudy (2008) said that the peak of a singer's career was when the singer became the top singer, who was always admired by fans, had a very large income and had many luxury amenities, and had a great influence on society. Likewise, Chowdhury (2012), said that a contest was a game in which players had the opportunity to expend scarce resources (such as money, time, or effort) in order to

affect the probabilities of winning prizes.

As for the organizers, especially *DAMAS* and the various parties that cooperated with it, the activities of *PTSC DAMAS* became activities that serve to evaluate the development of the quantity and quality of new generation *TSC* artists. Observations showed that the number of participants of *PTSC DAMAS* was quite volatile. In several *PTSC DAMAS* events, the number of contest participants can be identified as follows.

Table 1. Development of *PTSC DAMAS* Contestants

<i>PTSC DAMAS</i>	Year	Number of contestants
18 th	2006	47
19 th	2009	91
20 th	2012	59
21 st	2016	35

Based on the table 1, it can be seen that the *PTSC DAMAS* participants—from 2009 to 2016—has decreased quite dramatically. The least of participants occurred in the last *PTSC DAMAS* in 2016. This fact was a serious concern of various parties as it was considered to be worrisome. Even the figures/observers/lovers of *TSC* and Sundanese humanists considered the condition as nearly critical. The chairman of *Padepokan* (Art Studio) *Pancaniti Cianjur*, Kertanegara, felt really concerned when seeing the decrease of participants from year to year (Heriyanto, 2016). Despite the decline in quantity, for the organizers and stakeholders, *PTSC DAMAS* played an important role in evaluating and monitoring the development of *TSC* art enthusiasts, at least to serve as a foothold in the search for other strategies to preserve the art of *TSC* in the future. When particularly compared to other Sundanese art, *TSC* is considered very lucky since other art are rarely contested, making it difficult to detect the level of demand growth, which can result in the gradual extinction without any attempt for preservation. Basically, there are several causes of life and death of a performing art, namely changes in the field of politics, economic problems, changes in pub-

lic taste, and the inability to compete with other forms performance art (Soedarsono, 2010; Wibowo and Janah, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, three points can be concluded. First, *DAMAS* as Youth Community Organization in West Java has successfully organized the contests consistently, and given great influence on the interest of the younger generation to continue to love *TSC* art and develop it from time to time. Second, *PTSC DAMAS* has helped the accompanists of *TSC* to show their existence and creativity in developing *TSC* accompaniment music. Third, *PTSC DAMAS* has motivated the singers to continue to improve the quality of their singing, in an attempt to become professional singers by winning the first place in the contest.

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