

## Barongsai Form and Color at the Cap Go Meh Festival in Singkawang City

Muammar Irsyadi<sup>1</sup>, Yully Ambarsih Ekawardhani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Magister Desain, Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>muammar.75322002@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

**Abstract.** The aim of this study is to identify the significance of the visual elements of the Barongsai In Singkawang City, West Kalimantan during the Cap Go Meh festival. Qualitative methodologies were used to perform research on the Barongsai visual aspects. Observation, interviews, and documentation are used to acquire data. Due to the predominantly Chinese population, Singkawang City is also known as Amoy City. One of the inherited legacies of art and culture in Singkawang City that is still being preserved today is the Barongsai Dancing Art, which can be seen at the annual Chinese New Year celebrations planned by the Chinese community. According to research, the Barongsai is a mythical animal from Chinese mythology that resembles a lion and comes in two forms: the North Lion and the South Lion. Each form has a distinct meaning based on the visual elements it has. The findings of this study can help comprehend how each Lion Dance performed at the Cap Go Meh festival differs from one another in order to show respect for one of Indonesia's cultural traditions. This study was conducted in the hopes that it will be useful to researchers who study lion dances in the future. It can be concluded that the visual components of the lion dance are created by paying attention to their beauty as well as considering every meaning that will be associated with them.

**Keywords:** Barongsai, Cap Go Meh, Chinese New Year, culture, Singkawang.

### 1. Introduction

In slowly changing societies, the concept of tradition, literally translated from Latin as "something handed over," was almost equivalent to inheritance. Tradition was both a means of subsistence and the symbols, stories, and memories that provided one with both identity and status [1]. According to Eliot, Tradition is that part of living culture that has been passed down from the past and is active in the formation of the present [2]. Due to its diverse ethnicities, religions, and customs, Indonesia is known as a pluralistic country. This diversity is incorporated into Indonesia's motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means that it is different but still one. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is an important unifying saying that Indonesian society as a whole cannot be easily divided [3]. Barongsai art is one of the assets of Chinese ethnic tradition and culture that have entered and developed in Indonesia up to the present day. The barongsai art has been known to the Indonesian people since the 1500s, when traders from China arrived in the country. During the New Order era in Indonesia, the government restricted barongsai arts and other Chinese customs [4]. The discriminatory distinction between pribumi and non-pribumi Indonesians was formally abolished by President Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as 'Gus Dur,' 1999-2001) in 2000 via government decree number 6/2000. This process was further solidified with the passage of Anti-Racial Discrimination Law No. 12/2006 on Citizenship. President Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004) declared Chinese New Year a national public holiday in 2002. Her declaration

of Imlek as a public holiday followed her predecessor Gus Dur's decision to make Chinese New Year a 'optional holiday' in 2001 [5].

The celebration of Imlek [十五暝 *shi wu ming*], or Chinese New Year, comes to an end on Cap Go Meh [Shi Wu Ming], the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. Hundreds of spirit-mediums parade through the West Kalimantan, Singkawang City on this special day. The city's relationship with China's cultural history is intimate in Singkawang, and it extends to the mutual transculturation of Chinese, Dayak (Indigenous peoples of Kalimantan), and Malay peoples in Kalimantan. Although Dayaks and Chinese have clashed in the past, such conflicts were frequently instigated by outside parties seeking to use the Dayaks to control the Chinese. Today, Cap Go Meh's street parade-cum-performance in Singkawang serves as a cultural stage for demonstrating Dayak and Chinese unity. [6]. The procession symbolizes an army of spirit-warriors which have gathered to cast out devils that could harm the neighborhood in the upcoming year. A theatre of ritual violence where the spirit fight is performed annually brings tens of thousands of visitors to Singkawang City. The Cap Go Meh festival in Singkawang has been acknowledged in the official Visit Indonesia calendar since 2008, giving the occasion national prominence [7]. Cap Go Meh celebrations originated in age-old traditional Chinese folk religiosity, and its ritual elements, such as exorcisms, can still be understood as expressions of popular religious impulses in this era of tourist-oriented commodification of such events [8]. Singkawang City was overflowing with tourists during Cap Go Meh festival. The general public flocked to see this horrific spectacle, but for observers of the Indonesian-Chinese diaspora, reading how this ritual theater, with its exaggerated display of Chineseness, was played out against historical inter-ethnic communal palimpsests political was a more interesting spectacle [9]. In the reformasi era, Chinese New Year celebrations have taken on political significance, and Indonesian presidents since Abdurrahman Wahid have made a point of attending celebrations in Jakarta. In major cities such as Jakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, Bandung, Bogor, and Yogyakarta, Chinese communities hold open street parades featuring the Barongsai [Chinese lion dance], but none of them can compares to the Cap Go Meh celebrations in Singkawang City with their parade of spirit-mediums [10].

The lion dance is an aspect of human culture that is often referred to art, and it has a meaningful symbolic meaning. The lion dance is a traditional Chinese dance performed while wearing a sarong shaped like a lion. Barongsai art rose to prominence during the South-North dynasty (Nan Bei) from 420 to 589 AD. The attack of King Fan Yang's elephant army from Lin Yi country at the time overwhelmed King Song Wen Di's troops. To repel King Fan's troops, a warlord named Zhong Que created a clone of a stuffed lion. It turned out that the effort was successful, and the lion dance has since become legendary [11]. The embodiment of the lion dance dress has a series of messages to convey to the general public or the Tiong Hoa community through symbols in the Thiong Hoa cultural traditions. The symbols in the Barongsai reflect a culture that contains both values and meanings. The lion dance has a very deep meaning for Chinese people, as evidenced by the very detailed clothing designs that resemble real lions. Each form and color has a meaning, and the colors used cannot be arbitrary, such as the colors that are frequently used, black, white, red, yellow, and green. Each property has its own symbols and meanings, such as ampau, vegetables, and others, which are always related with the lion dance [9].

The lion dance is still performed today with the intention of driving away evil spirits and bad auras and is thought to bring good luck. Aside from the Cap Go Meh celebration, the lion dance is performed at every major event, from temple openings to restaurant openings. In Indonesia, there are two kinds of lion dances: North and South Lions. The North Lion is commonly referred to as Peking Sai, while the South Lion is referred to as the Barongsai [12].

The visual elements in the lion dance require research to determine the deep meaning of these elements, which is based on the Chinese people's belief that the lion dance is a symbol of strength, wisdom, and excellence. Previous research on the visual elements of the Barongsai has been limited. The visual aspects of the Barongsai are examined using qualitative methods in this study.

## 2. Method

The descriptive qualitative method was used for the research. This method focuses on providing specifics about various descriptions, symptoms, and phenomena. Data in the form of words and images rather than numbers [10]. Based on the results of these observations, researchers can conduct data analysis. This qualitative study seeks to comprehend the meaning of the visual elements in the Barongsai, beginning with each shape and ending with the colors used.

The data will be gathered through direct observation of the visual elements in the Barongsai during the Cap Go Meh celebration, as well as good literature studies from reference books, journals, magazines, and internet sources.

## 3. Results & Discussion

The lion dance or Barongsai in Singkawang City is a traditional art originating from China. Barongsai is a combination of the words barong and sai. Barong is an Indonesian word for lion, and sai is a Chinese Hokkien dialect word for lion. The lion dance is performed by two people dressed as lions. At least two lion dances are performed in every lion dance show. The lion is a symbol of courage, stability, and excellence in traditional Chinese beliefs. Lion dances are traditional dances performed in costumes resembling lions. The lion dance is said to be performed to ward off evil spirits. The Chinese community has taken the initiative to design a lion dance costume. The Chinese chose the lion to frighten wild animals because the lion is the king of the forest, and all animals fear him. As a result, when wild animals disturb agricultural land, the community scares them away with lion dances, causing the wild animals to flee. The community then created a lion dance costume, which gradually grew to its current size and weight of 4-5 kg. This is why the lion dance costume looks like a lion.



**Figure 1.** South Lion (Barongsai)



**Figure 2.** North Lion (Peking Sai)

The lion dance is divided into two types: the North Lion, which has a curly mane and four legs, and the South Lion, which does not. The North Lion appears more natural and like a lion than the South Lion, which has scales and the number of legs varies between two and four. The South Lion's head is adorned with horns, giving it the appearance of a "Kilin" animal at times [9]. The lion is a symbol of courage, stability, and excellence in traditional Chinese beliefs, northern lion is traditionally played with two adult lions. They were both wearing ribbons on their heads. The male lion is represented by the red band, while the female is represented by the green band. Meanwhile, the Southern Lion is typically dressed in white, yellow, and black. The colors chosen are not chosen at random; they have a deep philosophical meaning [12].

### Shape Identifications in Barongsai

The Barongsai costume is a hybrid of several animals. Each part of the Barongsai's body is composed of five distinct animal or creature elements, each with its own philosophical significance:

#### a. Back Hump (Turtle)

According to Chinese beliefs, the back hump of the Lion Dance has a symbol of longevity.



**Figure 3.** Back Hump of Barongsai

#### b. Horn (Bird's Crest)

The horns on the lion dance have the meaning of life and regeneration, and represent women.



**Figure 4.** Horn of Barongsai

**c. Spine (Snake)**

The spine on the Lion Dance represents charm and symbolizes wealth.



**Figure 5.** Spine of Barongsai

**d. Forehead & Beard (Dragon)**

The forehead and beard on the Barongsai represent men which mean strength and leadership.



**Figure 6.** Forehead & Beard of Barongsai

**e. Ears & Tail (Mystical Creatures)**

The ears and tail represent wisdom and good luck.








**Figure 7.** Ears & Tail of Barongsai

### Color Analysis on the Lion Dance

The differences in the sign elements, particularly the colors in the lion dance, have the potential to have different meanings. Based on Chairunnisaak's (2017:45) and Choirul Arif's et al study's of signs and meaning (2015:6) [13]. The five colors on the Barongsai's body represent the five directions in the Chinese compass as well as the five elements of life. Yellow, red, green, black, and white are among these colors. The following are the findings of a comparative study of traditional lion dance colors, symbols, and meanings:

**Table 1.** A comparative study of the colors, symbols and meanings of the Barongsai

Barongsai Base Color		Elements of Life (Chairunnisaak, 2017)		Royal Mythology of Sam Kok (Choirul Arif, <i>et.al.</i> , 2015)	
		Symbol	Meaning	Simbol	Makna
Yellow		Earth (Center)	Beauty, Joy and Luck	<i>Huang Zhong</i>	Justice and Knowledge
Red		Fire (South)	Luck, Valor and Cheerfulness	<i>Kwang Kong</i>	Happiness and Wealth
Green		Wood (East)	Prosperity, Harmony and Health	<i>Zhao Yun</i>	High Heroic Spirit
Black		Water (North)	Death and Valor	<i>Zhang Fei</i>	Fierce, Rude, Hot- tempered and Fierce
White		Metal (West)	Death and Valor	<i>Ma Chao</i>	-

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the identification analysis of shapes and colors in the Barongsai above, it can be concluded that the Lion Dance has five main colors, namely yellow, red, green, black, and white, with each color having deep symbols and meanings. The lion dance is shaped like a mash-up of five animals on each part of its body, including turtles, birds, snakes, dragons, and mystical creatures. Because each part has a deep meaning and is a function of religious and customary rituals, the colors and shapes of the Barongsai cannot be changed at will in certain parts. The majority of lion dances performed in Indonesia are South Lion dances, with each shape and color having its own meaning based on existing traditions and customs. In terms of religious rituals, the Chinese community in Indonesia mostly adheres to Confucianism, which is an important teaching that includes the five virtues known as Ngo Siang, which mean Love (Jien), Fair and Wise (Gie), Morality and Manners (Lee), Smart and Alert (Tie), Honest and Sincere (Sien). According to the author's suggestions, it is preferable to hold the Cap Go Meh celebration in Singkawang City while campaigning for the meanings of the visual elements in the Lion Dance in order to raise public awareness of the importance and depth of meaning of each of these visual elements.

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