

Gaok as a Unique Cultural and Religious Identity Expression from Majalengka, West Java

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Abstract

This article presents an explorative study on the continuity of Gaok traditions amidst social change in Majalengka, West Java, Indonesia. As a cultural heritage, Gaok faced a negative stigma as a bid'ah (heresy). This article investigates how the Gaok serves as a religious expression as well as a form of adaptation for survival. It also explores how Gaok represents the unique religious identity of the Majalengka people with the fusion of Sundanese and Javanese cultures. A folklore approach was employed in this study, involving the texts of manuscripts performed in Gaok, observation of Gaok performances, and interviews with Gaok performers. The study found that Gaok represents the oral religious expressions of the Majalengka people, which contain collective memories about their cultural values, identity, and history. Furthermore, Gaok is an adaptive tradition to the contemporary developments over time, primarily cultural and religious influences in Majalengka. As an oral tradition, Gaok has transformed from participatory and communal art to individual performances.

Keywords: Gaok, cultural identity, religious expressions, oral traditions, Majalengka

Abstrak

Artikel ini menyajikan sebuah studi eksploratif tentang kontinuitas tradisi Gaok di tengah perubahan sosial di Majalengka, Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Sebagai warisan budaya, Gaok menghadapi stigma negatif sebagai bid'ah (inovasi dalam agama). Artikel ini meneliti bagaimana Gaok berfungsi sebagai ekspresi agama sekaligus bentuk adaptasi yang bertahan hingga hari ini. Artikel ini juga mengeksplorasi bagaimana Gaok mewakili identitas religius unik masyarakat Majalengka dengan perpaduan budaya Sunda dan Jawa. Pendekatan folklor digunakan dalam studi ini, melibatkan teks-teks manuskrip yang ditampilkan dalam Gaok, observasi tentang penampilan Gaok dan wawancara dengan para pelaku Gaok. Studi ini menemukan bahwa Gaok mewakili ekspresi agama lisan masyarakat Majalengka, yang berisi kenangan kolektif tentang nilai-nilai budaya, identitas, dan sejarah mereka. Selain itu, Gaok adalah tradisi yang adaptif terhadap perkembangan kontemporer sepanjang waktu, terutama pengaruh-pengaruh budaya dan agama di Majalengka. Sebagai tradisi lisan, Gaok telah bertransformasi dari seni partisipatif dan komunal, menjadi penampilan individu.

Kata kunci: *Gaok, identitas kultural, ekspresi keagamaan, tradisi lisan, Majalengka*

Introduction

The existence of traditional practices often faces significant challenges from two antithetical perspectives: modernity and religion. Modernity views tradition as inertia, a waste of time, an inability to adapt, or, if viewed positively, simply nostalgia (Galland & Lemel, 2008; Giddens, 1996; Gusfield, 1967). Meanwhile, religion views tradition as a form of heresy and superstition, ascribing allegiance to a holy God and other harmful stigmas (Badrudin, 2014; Panggabean et al., 2010; Takdir, 2017; Takdir et al., 2021). This phenomenon was what also occurred in the Gaok tradition in Majalengka, West Java. On the one hand, it was deemed to be *bid'ah* by some Muslim adherents. On the other hand, it still survives and is maintained by the practitioners of the tradition. The survival of traditions amidst increasing religious sentiment shows

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that there are ongoing dynamics between traditional practitioners who are also religious adherents (Arjon, 2018; Chinsinga, 2006; Jainuri, 2014; Sutarno et al., 2023).

Gaok literally originates from the word *ngagorowok* (Sundanese: shouting). In terms of meaning, Gaok is an art of reciting manuscripts of folk tales or *wawacan* (a form of Sundanese literary manuscript) by reciting them in the form of *pupuh*, a form of poetic art in Sundanese. Since the way Gaok is sung is like someone shouting, this tradition is called *ngagorowok* (Arifin, 2019; Fakhrurozi, 2017, 2018; Kurnianingsih, 2013, Kusnadi, 2005). Growing and developing in the agrarian Majalengka society, which is steeped in communality, the Gaok tradition is often used in various community traditions to transfer values to their future generations, including some life cycle rituals (birth, circumcision, marriage, death) and *babarit pare* (rituals of gratitude to welcome the rice harvest season) (Fakhrurozi, 2017, 2018; Kurnianingsih, 2013).

The initial emergence of the Gaok tradition in Majalengka itself is still uncertain, but this tradition is often performed in the *babarit pare* ritual. *Babarit pare* (Sundanese: a period where paddy plants start to bud), a tradition typical of agricultural communities is usually held once a year as a form of gratitude and hope that the rice planting process will be successful. Some scholars mention that Gaok was present in Majalengka along with the arrival of Prince Muhammad from Cirebon to spread Islam in the 15th century AD. (Fakhrurozi, 2017, 2018). Meanwhile, another view states that this tradition has experienced syncretism with Islamic teachings when Islam arrived from Cirebon (Arifin, 2019). From these studies, it could be said that Gaok tradition in the developing agrarian society

in Majalengka, has undergone various changes and introduced various new cultures in this region. Gaok change can be seen from Gaok's appearance and the texts read in the performance, such as Wawacan Samun, Wawacan Al Anbiya, Wawacan Rambut Kasih Leungit Jinis, Wawacan Sulanjana, and others.

In this study, Gaok is viewed as a social event, where Gaok becomes a means of binding and gluing social ties in Majalengka society. Therefore, regarding the traditions that have developed in Majalengka society and Indonesia in general, two things cannot be separated from them. First is the environmental context in which the tradition lives and develops, because tradition can also be seen as a pedagogical system. Second are the communities around the tradition, both active and passive. Traditions embedded in art, like Gaok, play a crucial role in fostering and strengthening social ties within a community. These two things cannot be separated from traditions that exist in many places in Indonesia because cultural, religious and linguistic codes are inherent in these traditions (Werbner, 2016).

This article attempts to investigate how Gaok tradition became a religious expression as well as a form of adaptation for its survival. Apart from that, this article explores how Gaok formed the unique religious and cultural identity of the Majalengka people, as a result of the intersection between Sundanese and Javanese cultures. The author argues that the formation of Majalengka's religious identity occurred in line with the process of adapting the Gaok tradition as a legacy of the Hindu-Buddhist tradition acculturating with the Islamic tradition that came later.

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Wilfred Smith (1964) explains that *religion* refers to a power outside humans that requires them to carry out behavior under the threat of sanctions or refers to human feelings in dealing with powers outside themselves. Meanwhile, Geertz (1973) defines *religion* as a symbol system that establishes solid human feelings and motivation. Religious symbols fascinate humans, and to a certain level, these religious symbols contain aesthetic properties. In this sense, religion includes feelings and beliefs about forces outside of humans, and the teachings that are believed to originate from these forces. From these several definitions, in summary, religious expression refers to an embodiment or expression of everything about religion that is spoken or stated related to the system of faith, worship, and rules. It also regulates human-to-human interactions and human-to-their environment based on that belief. Religion intertwines with various other social entities from here, forming a community's identity.

Zoetmulder (2007) explains that understanding of the forms of culture cannot be adequately achieved without understanding the religious teachings, values, or ideas behind them, which penetrate profoundly and shape the culture. An example is the formation of Javanese culture, which was greatly influenced by the mixture of Hindu and Buddhist teachings with Islamic teachings, without either of them defeating the other (Geertz, 1968, 1976; Mulder, 1983; Raffles, 1895; Dewi, 2012; Rubaidi, 2019). The intertwining of these cultural elements later formed the Javanese culture that we know today. Within this framework, this paper attempts to analyze the Gaok tradition as a part of the formation of Majalengka's religious identity resulting from various elements of two primary cultures (Sundanese and Javanese) and also religious influence of Hinduism-Buddhism and Islam. The author argues that the traditions

that are maintained by adapting to various new cultural elements can form a new communal identity without losing the initial identity. Traditions, when sustained through adaptation to new cultural elements, have the power to shape and fortify the identity of a society without erasing its distinctive characters, preserving its core identity and embracing growth through cultural change.

Literature Review

A number of scholars have conducted studies on Gaok tradition from various perspectives. Fakhrurozi (2016), for example, mentioned that Rukmin (a Gaok puppeteer) has a significant role in the continuity of Gaok traditions in Kulur village, Majalengka, especially through his endeavors such as developing studios, creating concepts for changing performance concepts, storing insights, and teaching the younger generation. Despite these efforts, Rukmin has not been able to increase public interest in attending the Gaok performance.

Kurnianingsih (2013) in his study of Gaok in the Babarit Pare ceremony, found that firstly, it has not been known when and where Gaok began to be formed and used in the Babarit Pare ceremony. Secondly, the Gaok at the Babarit Pare ceremony was performed routinely every year. Thirdly, there had been a change in function of Gaok; which previously functioned as expression of asking for blessings from Almighty God through the intermediary of the ancestors, to a means of entertainment for the Majalengka community since the 1980s. Fourthly, the change of accompanying *waditra* (*waditra buyung* and *songsong*) in performance when ending a song/*pupuh* sentence, or the term *madakeun/ngagoongkeun*, into *goong* and *kempul*, drums and

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trumpets and *kecrek* made from metal. This change was due to the fact that today's generation can no longer play *waditra buyung* and *songsong*.

Arifin's (2019) study on the culture and art of speaking Gaok in Majalengka (1967-2018) showed that Gaok is an art that has experienced syncretism between Sundanese and Islamic Cirebon cultural values, which emerged and developed in Tarikolot Village, Kulur Village, Sindangkasih Subdistrict, Majalengka Regency. There was limited information regarding to when this art was created, but this art began to develop in Majalengka since the arrival of Islam around the 15th century. This art played a significant role in the spread of Islam, which is centered in Cirebon. The development of traditional Gaok art was rapidly accepted by the people of Majalengka, who initially were Hinduism adherents. Judging from its geographical location, Majalengka borders with Cirebon directly, so it is possible for an acculturation of the two areas. These research aims to provide information of Gaok traditions in Kulur village, Majalengka Regency by exploring the cultural and religious factors surrounding the tradition.

This study attempts to complement previous studies on Gaok tradition by focusing on how forms of religious values and expression were reflected in Gaok rituals. As Gaok was perceived to be a heritage rituals, preserving it is essential, and in order to do so, studies on it need to be conducted as to explore the potential sociocultural factors that support the survival of this tradition. More importantly, this study provides insights how tradition and religion could coexist amidst pluralistic society, as in the Majalengka community.

Method

This study approaches Gaok as an oral tradition, even though it is actually a text-based *wawacan* reading tradition. Therefore, the study looks into two essential aspects of the Gaok tradition: (1) society and culture surrounding the traditions and (2) the process of inheriting these traditions (Danandjaja, 2015; Pudentia MPSS, 2015). Qualitative descriptive study was conducted with two primary data collection methods including interview and observation which conducted around September to October, 2019. Interviews were conducted with Gaok traditional art practitioners, stakeholders and other related parties. The interviews were both structured and unstructured, aiming to provide more casual nuance hence yielding more comprehensive data. In the first stage, participants were asked to provide general information regarding Gaok. The second interview inquired the materials of the tradition (text, poetry, songs, mantras), the background to the emergence of the tradition, how they interpret the tradition, and how the tradition is carried out today.

The second data collection method was observation, particularly on: (1) the physical and social environment in which the tradition was formed; (2) the interaction between practitioners and supporters of tradition; (3) the tradition form when it performed; (4) the length of time while it was shown. To complement the interviews and observations, a literature study was conducted to provide secondary data to examine various aspects of the research area's geography, demography, and history. The entire data collection process was carried out in Kulur Village, Majalengka, which geographically is

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the intersection of two primary cultures: Sunda and Java on the North coast.

Result and Discussion

Historical Background of Gaok: from Oral to Written

Gaok is a tradition of telling stories or chronicles that contain *petitih*, a proverb adages advice for living everyday life. The story telling in the Gaok tradition does not only involve script reading, but also include song. Both the script and the song were to be learned and passed down from generation to generation, particularly in Majalengka, West Java. This ritual is led by a performer called who wears black *toro* clothing complete with a head covering called *udeng*. The original duration of the performance lasted from the end of the evening prayer until just before dawn (around ten hours). Recently, the duration changed to only two to three hours. The performance of Gaok ritual differs from art performance in general which places the puppeteer in a certain position. In Gaok performance, the performer sits in the middle of the audience. The performance of Gaok is illustrated as below.



Figure 1. The performers of Gaok (Source: Disbudpar Majalengka 2021)

Before the Gaok ritual is performed, *susuguhan* is served as offerings to the ancestors (*nyuguh karuhun*) in the form of various food and drinks accompanied by incense burning. Once the Gaok ritual equipment is complete, the puppeteer will begin the ritual by reading prayers, burning incense, apologizing to Allah SWT, and asking permission from the ancestors. The texts read in the Gaok ritual can be categorized into two types: *gaok buhun*, which narrates ancient texts, and gaok lines, which tell the story of human life today (Fakhrurozi, 2017). In every wawacan reading, the *gaok buhun* manuscript is sacred and must be read. During the reading, all attendees must listen solemnly and are not allowed to do any other activity. The theme of the *gaok* script in each ritual can be different, depending on the intentions of those having it. Figure 2 below illustrates the one of the manuscripts recited in Gaok performance.

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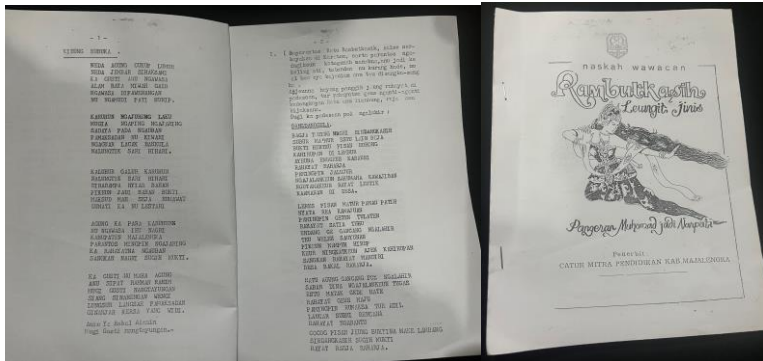


Figure 2. Wawacan Rambut Kasih Leungit Jinis Manuscript (Author's Collection 2023)

This tradition developed in the Majalengka community has become an oral expression that contains collective memories about their cultural values, identity, and history expressed in art. Gaok, for the people of Majalengka, is not just a form of artistic expression but a practical tool that benefits people's lives. Therefore, the manuscript recited during the Gaok performance was suited to the life events that corresponded to it. For example, at the Babarit Pare event, the reading of Sulanjana's Wawacan manuscript was chosen because it contained practical guidelines regarding agricultural systems. Additionally, the reading of wawacan in the Gaok ritual also shares the history of the Majalengka people, as stated in the wawacan of Nyi Rambutkasih and Talaga Manggung. These two wawacan are folklores believed by the local community to be natural history that developed in the past.

The entry of Islamic teachings into this region had changed the local people's perspective on Gaok tradition. Some elements of ritual such as calling the names of ancestors were no longer carried out as it did not align with Islamic faith, although generally the procession did not change. This influence later shaped Majalengka's identity today. Understanding the presence of Islamic influence in Gaok

performance in particular reflects the f religious influence on Majalengka culture in general. Therefore, Zoetmulder (1975), states that understanding culture cannot be adequately achieved without understanding the religious teachings, values, or ideas behind them that penetrate and shape that culture. That is to say, exploring how religious culture shaped Gaok performance means exploring how Majalengka culture experienced shifting over time.

The development and changes in Gaok traditions in Majalengka and the influx of various cultural elements across this region indicated the adaptability of Majalengka traditions and society. This ability had been honed over a very long historical trajectory. This can be seen in the influence of Hindu and Islamic kingdoms as well as the Dutch East Indies, which ultimately shaped Majalengka into a city functioning as a centre of worship as well as a centre of political symbols and prestige (Rahardjo, 2007). This historical influences of Hindu, Islamic, and colonial eras, significantly shaped the transition of Gaok from oral to written forms. The colonial period, particularly under Dutch influence, fostered a climate that favored written documentation for administrative, religious, or educational purposes. This cultural environment influenced the documentation and preservation of Gaok in written form. Despite the shift in its medium, the intrinsic essence and soul of Gaok remains the same. While the transition from spoken to written Gaok represents a pivotal moment in safeguarding and sharing cultural heritage, it is important to recognize that this change does not necessarily reduce or diminish the essence of the tradition itself. Rather, it signifies an evolution of how Gaok is conveyed and preserved, adapting to changing times and technologies while retaining its core values and narratives.

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Understanding this transition offers a window into the evolution of Majalengka's cultural identity amidst historical and technological shifts. It showcases the community's ability to adapt and preserve its rich cultural heritage, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to ensuring accessibility and continuity for future generations and a broader audience. This transition highlights the dynamic nature of cultural traditions and their ability to endure and flourish through time and change.

Geographical and Cultural Contexts behind Gaok

Geographically, Majalengka Regency is located in the eastern part of West Java Province. To the south, it shares border with Ciamis Regency and Tasikmalaya Regency. To the west, it intersects with Sumedang Regency. To the north, it shares border with Indramayu Regency and to the east, it meets Cirebon Regency and Kuningan Regency (West Java Investment Partnership, 2021). Falah (2011) in his study noted that Majalengka Regency was one of the districts formed by the Dutch East Indies Government. However, the existence of Majalengka can be traced long before the arrival of the Dutch to this region. Archaeological and historical evidence dating from before colonialism portrayed life in the Majalengka Regency area. At that time, the Majalengka district was included in the North Cirebon region. Afterwards, the surrounding land was explored for plantations which also emerged small settlements and cities. Several residential centers had turned into district government centers, including Majalengka. Politically, the colonial government system heavily influenced the Majalengka district government. Physically, the culture of living transformed from villages to cities was distinct to the earlier culture of small kingdoms.

Until the 15th century, there were several Hindu and Islamic kingdoms existed in Majalengka area, unfortunately left very little historical data to be explored. Some of these kingdoms, namely the Rajagaluh Kingdom, the Talaga Kingdom, the Sindangkasih Kingdom, and the reign of Prince Muhammad, were where the Rajagaluh Kingdom existed, led by Prabu Cakraningrat. Its existence remains questioned and unexplored due to the lack of information. In contrast to the Rajagaluh kingdom, the Talaga kingdom had written records, although incomplete. Apart from that, there are sites of royal remains, texts and folklore that still alive among the people. It is also stated that the Talaga kingdom was first founded by Batara Gunung Bitung (Raden Syadewata) in 1292 AD. Raden Darmasuci, the first child of Raden Syadewata, became the first king, whose son, Sunan Talaga Manggung also succeeded. This kingdom lasted until 1530, led by Raja Parung Gangsa. It was during the leadership of Raja Parung Gangsa that Islam was accepted and given the title of Gunung Djati. However, this history of Talaga still needs to be re-examined to evaluate its validity (BN, 2023; West Java Investment Partnership, 2021).

The Sindangkasih kingdom has always been associated with the Rambut Kasih folklore, which developed among the people of Majalengka. This story is one of the forerunners to the city of Majalengka. In the story, it was told that the loss of Nyi Rambut Kasih and Maja trees in the Sindangkasih kingdom was related to the incident where the people of Cirebon needed an antidote to Malaria, which was endemic in Cirebon. At the time, the people of Cirebon say the word Majae Langka, which means the loss of the Maja tree, which later became Majalengka. This incident was proof of the change of leader/king in Majalengka from Nyi Rambut Kasih

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to Prince Muhammad. In 1490, the people of Majalengka embraced Islam, abandoned their old beliefs, and the name of region was changed to Majalengka (BN, 2023; Saptono, 2014; West Java Investment Partnership, 2021).

The influence of Hindu and Islamic kingdoms and the Dutch East Indies shaped Majalengka as a center of worship, political symbols and prestige (Rahardjo, 2007). It should be noted that although Majalengka was built during the colonial period, the choice of location and the structure of the city followed ancient concepts known to the Sundanese people (Saptono, 2014). The location of the city centre was decided by following the guidance from Ancient Sundanese texts such as the Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian text and the Warugan Lemah. The Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian text stated that a land that was considered good for settlement is *galudra ngupuk*. *Galudra ngupuk* is a land between two hills or mountains, which was believed to bring wealth. Geomorphologically, Majalengka is a plain on high ground. To the southeast, there is Mount Ciremai, and to the northwest, there is Mount Tampomas. In the Warugan Lemah text, four types of land were considered to have a good impact, one of which was *talaga hangsa* (land that tends to lean (*bahé*) towards the north. Majalengka is topographically inclined towards the north, so it can be said that Majalengka is *talaga hangsa* land that was considered good for settlement based on the Sundanese texts.

Majalengka also had an ideological background that was reflected in the kingdoms that developed at that time. Saptono (2014) mentioned that the division of rectangular blocks and parallel longitudinal and transverse roads forming right angles in

Majalengka was almost identical to the city concept during the Majapahit era in Trowulan. During the Islamic era, the same concept was also applied by the city of Surakarta, which was built in a block pattern without city walls. The city was divided into a southern and a northern parts with an east-west main road. The palace, mosque and houses of the princes were located to the south. To the north lied profane areas such as the *kepatihan* and the market (Santoso, 2008). Starting from the two cities based on Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic backgrounds, it can be seen that the Majalengka space was divided into city blocks. The pattern and structure of the city of Majalengka also reflects something similar; although the central road axis is divided into two, this axis is not the central axis. The elements that make up the Majalengka city settlement consist of profane facilities in the western part characterized by a mosque and pagoda. Meanwhile, the eastern part is a profane area characterized by economic and rural facilities (Saptono, 2014).

Apart from the ideological and geomorphological backgrounds, the development of traditions in Majalengka, stemming from the small kingdoms that once thrived there, had deeply influenced the cultural fabric of the society. These traditions, often expressed orally, encapsulate collective memories, cultural values and the historical identity of Majalengka. Among these traditions, Gaok stands out as an artistic expression deeply rooted in the community and is still practiced till today.

According to Fakhrurozi (2016), Gaok is not merely an art form but a practical tool that guides the people's lives in Majalengka. For instance, during the *Babarit Pare* event, the *wawacan* "Sulanjana" (a form of oral literature) was read, as it contained practical guidance

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regarding agricultural systems. It indicates how Gaok serves as a knowledge repository, offering guidance and insights relevant to the community's livelihoods. Similarly, as Fakhrurozi (2016) described, *wawacan* Gaok such as "Nyi Rambutkasih" and "Talaga Manggung," also contain historical narratives of the Majalengka community. Local belief attributes these stories as natural histories that evolved in the past, reflecting the cultural, social, and historical contexts of Majalengka.

The interweaving of practical wisdom, historical narratives and cultural values embedded in Gaok illustrates its multifaceted nature. Gaok does not solely entertain or serve as an artistic expression; it also functions as a container of practical knowledge, historical anecdotes, and cultural identity for the community. This integration of practicality and historical significance within Gaok underscores its pivotal role in preserving, transmitting and embodying the essence of Majalengka's cultural heritage.

From Collective to Individual: Changes in the Transmission of Gaok's Main Actor

One of the key informants of this study, Lurah Wana, mentioned that Gaok began its origin in Majalengka, and it was transformed since the arrival of Islam in the Majalengka Regency area in the 15th century when Prince Muhammad from Cirebon spread Islamic teachings (Fakhrurozi, 2016). At the time, Gaok was used as a medium for Islamic preaching. In contrast to this statement, another informant, Aki Rukmin said that Gaok was first developed by an artist named Sabda Wangsaharja in 1920 in Kulur Village, Majalengka District. Gaok was one of the people's favourite entertainment which always appeared in villages besides *reog*,

jibrug, and *ketuktilu*. At that time, Aki Rukmin and his friends performed at least twice a month. Today, Aki Rukmin is the only figure who still protects and maintains Gaok art. Aki Rukmin began studying Gaok art for four months from his two teachers, Suninta who taught songs, and Syukur who taught *pegon* script. According to Aki Rukmin, Gaok is an ancestral heritage passed down from generation to generation. Aki Rukmin is the fourth generation to inherit Gaok art. Previously, Gaok was led by Aki Surmina, Ulis Marta and Suatma.



Figure 3: Aki Rukmin, Performers of the Gaok Art Tradition
(Source: Author's collection, 2019)

The rapid development of technology and social life implies that Gaok is no longer developed and rarely performed. Several community traditions that used to invite Gaok are no longer carried out. The local community no longer invites Gaok performance to the *ngayun* event (the 40th-day ceremony for the birth of a baby) or the *babarit pare* tradition (thanksgiving before the harvest). This cultural change in the local community made a significant impact on Gaok's sustainability. It could be said that Gaok had lost its 'stage'. Currently, Gaok only appears once a year, when local people invite

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Aki Rukmin to a celebration or when he was questioned for research purposes. According to Abah Dedi (a local leader) (interview, 28 September 2019), it is unfortunate that there is a few Gaok performances nowadays, even though the older generation still wants to maintain Gaok performances. Some Kulur senior residents also feel proud to have an active Gaok puppeteer like Rukmin. This situation indicates that Gaok still has a meaning and function for society and is still accepted by the supporting community.

At first, Aki Rukmin performed with other Gaok players. In the past, Gaok players consisted of 12 to 15 people. Starting in 2014, he started performing alone. Several factors caused Aki Rukmin to perform Gaok himself. First, many Gaok players of his generation had died; two people left, but they are being unhealthy, their hearing was impaired, making it difficult for both to appear on stage. Second, the young generation's low interest in learning Gaok art. Embarrassment and lack of interest are factors of why younger people in the village do not want to pursue this Gaok art. Third, there is no attention and support from the local government preserving this art. In fact, Aki Rukmin is strongly willing to teach Gaok art with no reward, as long as this art can survive and continue to live in the Majalengka community.

For Aki Rukmin, Gaok is not his main income source. Farming is Aki Rukmin's main livelihood to support his family's living expenses. That is, the efforts made by Aki Rukmin to defend Gaok are not motivated by financial factor. Aki Rukmin never sets a price when people call him to perform Gaok in their events. The current efforts are only to maintain the legacy of the Wangsadiharja family. The main motivation for Aki Rukmin was that, in Gaok art there are

noble values that are useful for the community. Establishing a studio, making Gaok combinations, and storing *wawacan* collections are efforts carried out by Aki Rukmin in bringing Gaok art to life as a form of transmission to the younger generation. However, his efforts made have yielded little encouraging results.

Maintaining artistic practices such as Gaok fosters a sense of togetherness and social cohesion. It can nurture residents' memories of communal events, which can nurture experiences of togetherness, and strengthen community bonds created through practice and appreciation of traditions. In addition, traditional arts often carry knowledge, skills and wisdom passed down from generation to generation that can be a valuable educational experience, thereby contributing to the cultural literacy of society. Participation in traditional art forms contributes to the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals within the community. In the economic context, traditional arts can be linked to tourism or trades, thereby providing economic opportunities for the local community. This can be a practical incentive for village governments. In this way, traditional art can no longer be seen as something ancient and obsolete, rather it can suit modern life and values. This case also confirms that Gaok tradition has been historically developed and was not static, and it is made relevant in every era. For this reason, the collaboration of various parties, such as the village government, youth, business people, traditional artists and contemporary artists could take Gaok to a better direction.

Transmission of Religious Social Values through Gaok

An oral tradition has at least four elements: the creator, text (traditional material), listener/audience, and the real natural world

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(Koster, 2015). These four elements originate from the model developed by Isenberg and Abrams (1954). In this sense, these elements can be further expanded to creator/storyteller/narrative, text (oral tradition material), listener/viewer/connoisseur/reader, and the real world. When researching oral traditions, it is best, even necessary, to look at these four elements to understand the meaning of the oral tradition.

The four elements mentioned in transmitting socio-religious values through Gaok performances have an important role. **First**, the context of the creator/storyteller/narrative, that is, individuals or groups who are responsible for creating, developing and transmitting oral traditions. They not only tell the story but also maintain the integrity and authenticity of the tradition. They act as guardians and bearers of social and religious values. In remembering and storytelling the Gaok, they convey the story and maintain and respect the religious values reflected in this tradition. Gaok storytellers are responsible for preserving and passing on moral, spiritual and religious messages to the next generation. Creator here refers to the writer of Gaok's text and the performers, including Aki Rukmin. Today, it is only Aki Rukmin who serves as the storyteller.

An essential concept in the creator or storyteller element is "remembering." The creator in the oral tradition can be described as the creator/speaker of his texts through the act of "remembering." Something that he remembers—that he repeats, calls out, applies, and confirms—is a tradition in which various forms of knowledge have been accepted as something considered valid by the people of that tradition. These forms of knowledge are not limited to the meaning of 'literature,' as it also relates to customs, cosmology,

history, and other areas of cultural expression. Remembering and passing down traditions is strictly monitored to avoid arbitrary misuse and “unauthorized” changes. Therefore, learning with a respected teacher is authoritative and essential in the oral tradition. However, this process of remembering does not mean that the creator or speaker loses their creativity. The creator and speaker still have creativity, but that creativity is present and develops basis on memory, and what is often the object of memory are plot schemes in tradition (Koster, 2015).

Regarding the Gaok performance, Aki Rukmin, who is 71 years old, still maintains the way of singing the *wawacan* in Gaok performances to this day. However, the creativity carried out by Aki Rukmin in bringing Gaok to life has become a way of transmitting it to the younger generation. In one of the current performances, a *sinden* (female singer) was present to attract more interest from the audience. Aki Rukmin's efforts in Gaok performances by maintaining the traditional way of singing *wawacan* show dedication to a valuable cultural heritage. Even though it still maintains the essence of tradition, adding creativity such as *Sinden* can effectively enrich the audience's experience, especially the younger generation, in enjoying Gaok.

Integrating *Sinden* in Gaok's performances is a strategic move to attract wider audience. Vocal music by *Sinden* can add an emotional, artistic and beautiful dimensions to the performance, enhancing the experience of listening to and watching Gaok. This can also open up opportunities for the younger generation to become more involved in this tradition in a more fun and interesting way. Creativity in enriching Gaok performances with *Sinden* or other elements, when

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done with full respect for the essence and authenticity of tradition, can be a powerful means to continue transmitting cultural values to future generations. This shows the adaptability of Gaok, which can integrate with the needs of the times without losing the roots and substance of the cultural heritage itself.

Second, Gaok as text or material of this oral tradition, is a vehicle that contains socio-religious values. Moral messages, spiritual teachings and religious values are reflected in the stories. Every narrative, song, or part of a Gaok performance contain messages that inspire or proliferate spiritual values. The concept of text in the oral tradition, particularly related to Gaok performance includes at least five elements of delivery that are relevant to the performance, namely voice intonation, accompanying instruments, and the movements of the storyteller, supporting equipment, and mantras. All of these elements in Gaok's performance contribute to the meaning of the transmission so that texts in the oral tradition are the result of combining several forms of art and not just the result of word art (GL Koster, 2015). Gaok, as an oral tradition, has a broader dimension than just oral narratives or stories. Gaok not only involves conveying stories verbally but also considers how the storyteller uses voice and intonation in singing wawacan or stories. Appropriate intonation, emphasis on keywords, and a unique storytelling style are important parts of Gaok's delivery. The right intonation can be produced with musical accompaniment, which plays an important role in Gaok performances. The use of traditional or modern musical instruments to accompany the delivery of the wawacan can enrich the listener's experience. Music can provide emotional nuances and support the story's atmosphere. Apart from the voice, intonation and music of the accompaniment, the movements of the storyteller in a

Gaok performance also have an important meaning. Facial expressions, body gestures and movements that support the story are part of the interesting delivery to the audience. In certain parts of the story, in some Gaok performances, the use of masks or statues is symbolic in supporting the story. They can represent characters or figures in the story, enrich the visualization, and add an artistic dimension to the performance.

Third, the context of the listener, audience, viewer or reader in the Gaok context plays an important role in the dynamics of this traditional performance. They are not just passive recipients of the story or performance but significantly influence the overall experience. The live audience who watch Gaok's performance is not only to listen to the story but also to see and feel the overall atmosphere of the performance. Responses from the listener or audience, such as emotional reactions, laughter, or fascination, provide direct feedback to the storyteller or performer, creating interaction between the experiencer and the performer. The presence of audience is also to learn some cultural values and beauty of this tradition. They respect the cultural heritage presented and absorb the messages conveyed, enriching their experience of the oral tradition. Individuals who study or analyze Gaok texts in depth, exploring the meaning, values and cultural context. They have an important role in maintaining authenticity, understanding hidden meanings, and expanding understanding of this oral tradition. Their role in the Gaok context is limited to being recipients of stories and as part of transmitting oral traditions. Their response, appreciation for the creativity of the storyteller, and respect for the cultural values conveyed make an important contribution to the survival and sustainability of Gaok as part of a valuable cultural heritage.

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Fourth, the "Real World" context in Gaok's art refers to the real context in which the performance is performed. This includes everything from the physical environment in which the performance takes place to the social and cultural norms that influence and influence the presentation of Gaok. The physical location where Gaok is presented can be an open space such as a square, pavilion, or special stage inside a building. The characteristics of the place can influence the atmosphere and interaction between the storyteller and the audience. The norms, values and customs in the society where Gaok is performed also play an important role. In other words, Gaok's wawacan is not only a performance, but also a guidance that could be implemented in the contemporary world, the real world of the society of Majalengka.

In oral tradition, the concept of nature or world serves as a reference and can be elaborated by the description of the creator/speaker. Storytellers value memorization as a method for generating texts that society deems valid and authoritative. Thus, for them and their audience, determining if a story or play in oral tradition is accurate relies on its alignment with cultural norms rather than mere adherence to verified facts (GL Koster, 2015). The notion of oral tradition also encompasses understanding traditions as a means of expressing aspirations and symbolic images of nature experienced by people.

The development of oral tradition texts depends on the storyteller's intention to influence or captivate the audience through their story or presentation. Occasionally, storytellers involve their listeners in the performance to strengthen dialogue and rapport. Oral traditions particularly emphasize memory as a virtue to be practiced not only

by the creators but also by audience members as reminders. Through memorable examples, the community members are expected to learn valuable lessons about past occurrences that should be remembered and still relevant today (GL Koster, 2015).

In terms of art and culture's external dimension, Gaok symbolizes and socializes principles that form the foundation of harmonious living within Majalengka society. Gaok serves as a medium for conveying and disseminating core values through visual symbolism, narrative messages and collective participation. Due to its adaptability, Gaok can sustain essential identity elements while simultaneously resonating with contemporary cultural dynamics. As an artistic and cultural tradition, Gaok actively testifies to the values that contribute to social and religious harmony in Majalengka. Consequently, Gaok plays a crucial role in transmitting and preserving the cultural and religious identity of Majalengka.

Conclusion

Gaok tradition serves as a medium embodying the religious expression of the Majalengka people. As an oral expression developed within the Majalengka community, Gaok encompasses collective recollections about cultural values, identity, and historical narratives expressed through artistic means. The incorporation of various cultures and religions within this region has resulted to the emergence of an adaptable tradition. The adaptability of this tradition signifies the ability of the actors and their supporting communities to maintain harmony with their surroundings and environment. Both ideological and geomorphological factors have also shaped Gaok tradition in a way that is not only artistic, but also practically useful for Majalengka people.

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The socio-religious harmonization underlying Gaok is evident through the preparations prior to the performance, such as offerings that symbolize the religious/belief that Majalengka people had been adopting, ranging from Hindu-Buddhism to Islam. The collaboration of musical performance and *wawacan* manuscript reading indicates the presence of organizational and social system. Moreover, knowledge regarding medicinal plants as depicted in the history of Majalengka also signifies that Gaok has a practical value. The languages of performance - Sundanese and Javanese – allude to two distinct influences that meld into cohesive unit within Gaok art. Furthermore, Sulanjana's *wawacan* text recounting the origin of rice indirectly portrays the agrarian livelihoods of Majalengka people of as farmers. The gradual change in accompanying instruments/*waditra* from *songsong*, *gong* to *gamelan*, complemented with with modern-day microphones, illustrates Gaok's adaptive nature and receptiveness towards contemporary development.

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