

**Tourism Politics and Local Wisdom:  
Revitalizing the Art of *Jemblung* in the Cultural Tourism Development of  
Banyumas, Central Java**

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**Abstract**

*Jemblung* is one of the folk arts in Banyumas reflecting the local culture of the region. It constitutes an indigenous oral tradition in the form of a traditional theater which does not exist in the other regions. As the rampant globalization grows, however, *Jemblung* is almost extinct. This study aims at: 1) identifying, understanding and explaining the causes of the extinction process of *Jemblung* as the manifestation of local wisdom in Banyumas, 2) understanding and describing the efforts done by the local governments, business groups and local communities to revitalize the arts of *Jemblung* in the development of cultural tourism in Banyumas and 3) understanding and explaining the contextual factors that hinder and support the revitalization efforts. By using a qualitative method through a case study approach, the results of this research indicates that the extinction process of the *Jemblung* art as the manifestation of local wisdom in Banyumas caused by the absence of relevant actors such as the local government through the Office of Youth Sport Culture and Tourism as well as the Regional Board of Art, the commercial enterprises and the local people. Those actors are not able to run the comprehensive efforts and synergy of revitalization among themselves. The revitalization efforts to preserve the art of *Jemblung* undertaken so far are just sporadic and reactive. It is caused by several factors, i.e.: 1) having weak commitment from the local government; 2) having weak support from the commercial enterprises and the local people; 3) having lack of interest from the tourists. However, there is still a hope that becomes a supporting factor to revitalize the *Jemblung* art of Banyumas, i.e.: the spirit of love from the cultural actors and cultural apparatus. This is because they believe that the art of *Jemblung* is one of the local heritages as well as an important asset of cultural tourism in Banyumas.

**Keywords:** revitalization, *Jemblung*, local wisdom, cultural tourism development

## **Introduction**

As one of the autonomous regions in Indonesia, Banyumas has cultural values that reflect its local wisdom. Cultural values are reflected in the characteristics of Banyumas people and the diversity of their cultural products. In this case, the long-life and growing local wisdom attached to the cultural systems of Banyumas people becomes one of the priceless nation's assets and cultural elements that must be maintained and striven to be holistically integrated.

One of the many treasures of traditional cultural heritage in Banyumas is the art of *Jemblung*. It is now, however, almost extinct as the rampant globalization grows. There are even just a few people who still remember how *Jemblung* is played. Nowadays, the number of its community declines to the limitation count of fingers. The fate of *Jemblung* has been crushed by the emergence of popular culture made more as the mecca of art by the young generation.

In connection with its extinction process, *Jemblung* as a traditional cultural heritage of Banyumas needs to be revitalized. Since local wisdom considered to be the means of solving the problems existed in Banyumas, then the revitalization efforts of *Jemblung* have to be done in the framework of revitalizing the local culture through identifying the new strategies that are able to preserve and develop the local wisdom in the cultural tourism development of Banyumas. The identification and cultural revitalization are intended to be the process of exploring and creating a space for various forms of tradition, artworks and performances such as *Jemblung*. In this case, the concern of the local

government, the commercial entrepreneurs and the local people of Banyumas is needed to preserve *Jemblung* as the folk art with noble values and moral lessons to be learned.

This paper is written based on the result of the research about tourism politics and local wisdom focusing on revitalizing the art of *Jemblung* in the cultural tourism development of Banyumas.<sup>1</sup> The research used a qualitative method with a case study as its approach. There are three kind of data sources collected in the research: 1) informants covering the Office of Youth Sport Culture and Tourism as well as the Regional Board of Art as the representation of the local government, the art community of *Jemblung* as the representation of commercial enterprises, and the local people as the representation of the cultural actors. This kind of data is collected by doing in-depth interview to the informants; 2) the research location covering the site and the event of *Jemblung* performance. The data collection is done by having the observation towards the research location; 3) documents related to the research focus. The data collected in the research is analyzed by using a model of interactive analysis from Miles and Huberman<sup>2</sup>. To get a good conclusion, the result of the research is validated by a technique of triangulation.<sup>3</sup> The result of the research presented in this paper reveals the characteristics of *Jemblung* as a folk art reflecting the local culture of Banyumas discussed from the emergence to the causes of its extinction process,

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<sup>1</sup> Triana Ahdiati, Solahuddin Kusumanegara and M. Soebiantoro, "Politik Pariwisata dan Kearifan Lokal: Revitalisasi Kesenian Dalang Jemblung dalam Pengembangan Pariwisata Budaya di Kabupaten Banyumas" (a research report, University of Jenderal Soedirman, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Analisis Data Kualitatif: Buku Sumber Tentang Metode-Metode Baru* (Jakarta: UI-Press, 1992), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Yvonna Lincoln dan Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (London: Sage Publications, 1984); Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 2009), 195.

the revitalization efforts of *Jemblung* as the manifestation of local wisdom in the cultural tourism development of Banyumas, and the contextual factors hindering and supporting the revitalization efforts themselves.

## **The Characteristics of *Jemblung* As Traditional Art Reflecting the Local Culture of Banyumas: From the Emergence to the Causes of Its Extinction Process**

*Jemblung* is a folk art of Banyumas forming in the kind of traditional theater. Unlike *Macapatan* or *Maca Kanda* in the Central Java, Yogyakarta and East Java<sup>4</sup>, *Jemblung* is a specific traditional theater from Banyumas without music instruments or other kinds of equipment which are usually used in a common theatrical performance. The traditional music produced in *Jemblung* comes from the voice of the players. Thus, the players do not only act as the puppets playing the characters of a story, but also become the musical instrument and the singer as well.

*Jemblung* is usually played by a group of four or five persons. Based on the number of the players, a group of *Jemblung* is divided into three kinds of role in playing the performance, i.e. one male player as the leader called *dalang*, one female player as the singer called *waranggana* or *sinden*, and the rest of male players as the music instruments. Since the number of the players is small, then the performance of *Jemblung* does not need a big room like a theater building; it is enough to be done in a room of a house. The form of *Jemblung* performance itself is very simple. With cross-legged position, all players sit around a table. The table used for performing *Jemblung* is small and short with no stuff on it. The only equipment used by the players is *kudhi*, i.e. a kind of specific knife from Banyumas. In this case, *kudhi* functions as a tool of illustration for the players in

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<sup>4</sup> In Central Java, Yogyakarta and East Java, there is a tradition called *Macapatan*, i.e. reading or conveying "oral literature" in the form of singing traditional Javanese songs. In its development, *Macapat* has turned into *Maca Kanda*, i.e. delivering or reading oral literature in the form of prose.

performing *Jemblung* such as a weapon in a battle scene of a story. In addition, the simplicity of *Jemblung* also reflects in the costumes of the players. They just wear the ordinary clothes used by the local people in Banyumas for carrying a ceremony of a tradition. The clothes consist of *surjan* (a kind of Javanese male dress), *kebaya* (a kind of Javanese female dress), *batik* cloth, *belangkon* (a kind of Javanese male hat for a man) or *iket* (a kind of small and long cloth banded on a man's head), *sanggul* (a kind of a woman's hair bun), and *selop* (a kind of Javanese sandals).

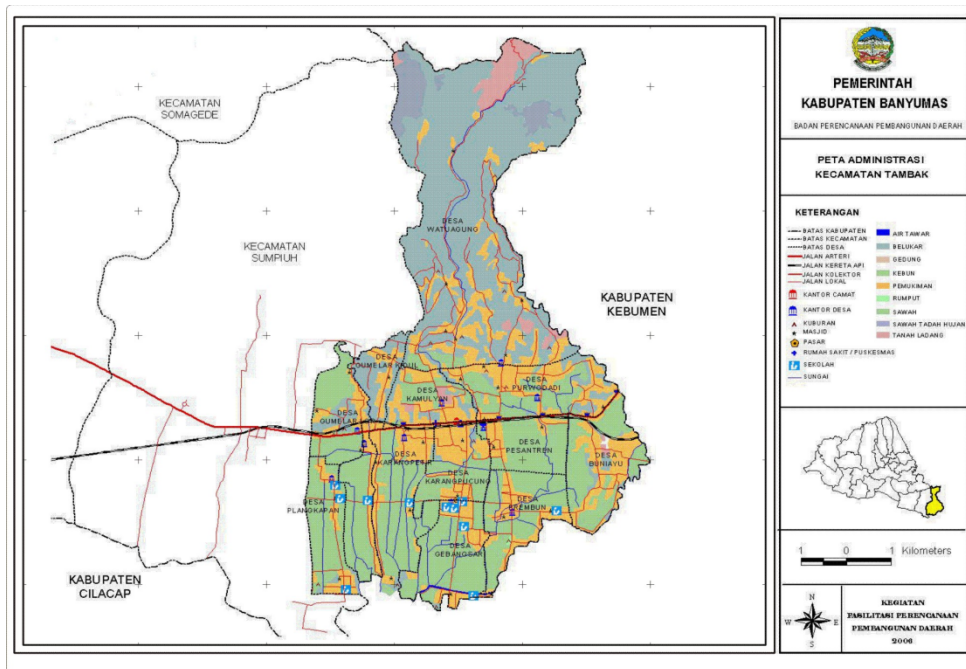
The stories performed in *Jemblung* come from the oral literatures which are already familiar to the local people given by the old people to their children or their relatives. With all of their experiences and expertises, the actors of *Jemblung* play their own characters by giving the great improvisation and new ideas refer to the life development of the society. In addition, the actors have various interesting ways to perform *Jemblung* such as talking about the recent and updated issues in the region. They do it by *geguyon* (playing jokes) with the special dialect of Banyumas.<sup>5</sup> This reflects *Jemblung* as a traditional art with specific values such as simplicity, innocence, *brayan* (togetherness), and creativity. These values are able to create a conducive climate in encouraging the consolidation of democratization at the local level and improve the welfare of the society.

As one of the traditional arts in Banyumas, *Jemblung* grows and develops in the Tambak sub-district and the Sumpiuh sub-district. (See Fig. 1 and

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<sup>5</sup> *Wisata dan Budaya Banyumas Jawa Tengah*. (Purwokerto: Disparbud Kabupaten Banyumas, 2007).

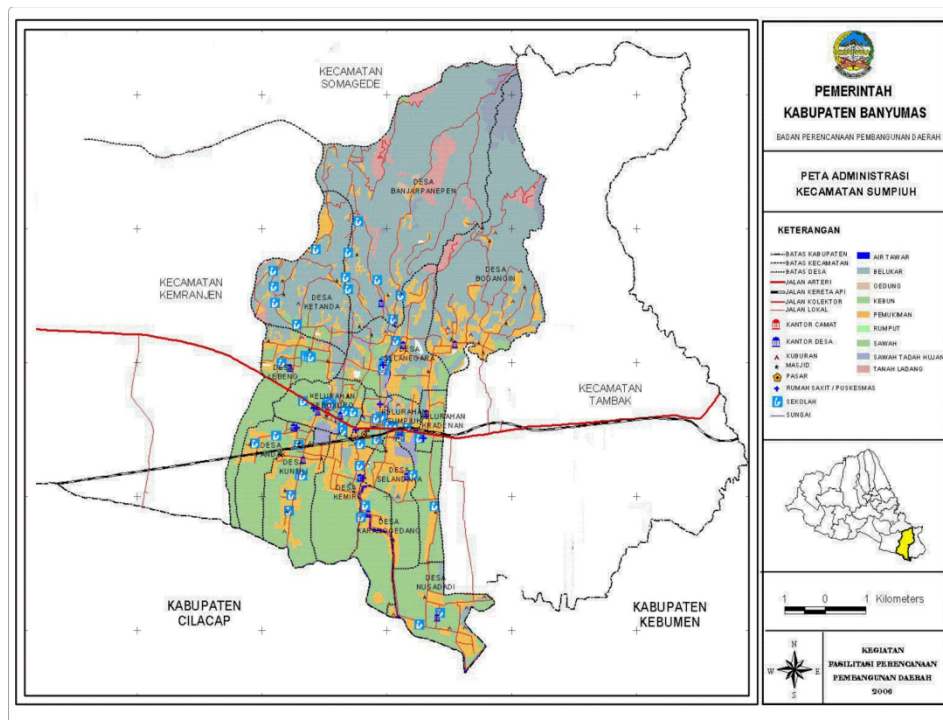
Fig. 2) In its development, however, *Jemblung* also spreads to the outside of the sub-districts. It covers the border territories of Purbalingga, Kebumen and southern Cilacap. At first, the art of *Jemblung* came from the tradition of *bayen* (the birth of a baby), in which the parents of the baby gathered with the neighbors and friends to stay awake all night while waiting for the time to give the baby a name. This kind of tradition is usually called *muyen*, i.e. from the acronym of 'ketemu bayen' (meet the birth of a baby). In this case, those who gathered did *tembangan* (singing Javanese traditional songs) or *macapat* with the prayers uttered for the goodness of the newborn baby as the lyrics of the songs. After that, those prayers were continued by telling *Babad Banyumas* (the history of Banyumas). This has emerged a kind of what is so-called *jarwo dhasa* (abbreviation) to illustrate the activities done in the tradition, i.e. "*jenjem-jenjeme wong gemblung*" abbreviated as '*jemblung*' which means the pleasures of crazy people. As time goes by, the tradition has grown as the art of *Jemblung* or more popularly called *Dalang Jemblung*. This happens because there is a kind of competition from time to time transforming the tradition of *muyen* to be a good show performed in an event.



**FIGURE 1.** The Administrative Map of Tambak sub-district<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>“Peta Administratif Kecamatan Tambak”,  
<http://www.banyumaskab.go.id/images/peta/tambak.jpg>





**FIGURE 2.** The Administrative Map of Sumpiuh sub-district<sup>7</sup>

As a traditional art, *Jemblung* started to be popular in the 1960s. Like the artists of the recent times, the artists of *Jemblung* in the past times had many fans. They even ran out of time to do the performance on account of having so many fans. As what happened to other kinds of traditional arts, *Jemblung* in the sixties was used up by the political parties. This continued to happen until the rebellion of *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party) broke out on September 30, 1965. The rebellion was then popularly called “*Geger 65*” (Tragedy 65). After the rebellion, the popularity of *Jemblung* was waning.

Despite having a desolate period after “*Geger 65*”, the art of *Jemblung* returned briefly into reaching the peak of its popularity in the 1970s. In this era,

<sup>7</sup>“Peta Administratif Kecamatan Sumpiuh”,  
<http://www.banyumaskab.go.id/images/peta/sumpiuh.jpg>

almost every person or group having a celebration or party would like to hold *Jemblung* as the amusement. In addition to become a trend at that time, the cost factor was the reason for a person or a group to hold *Jemblung*. This was because the cost for holding the art of *Jemblung* was cheaper than having other kinds of art.

The golden age of *Jemblung* as a traditional art hold in a celebration or party was fading in 1980s and 1990s. Even it has almost been extinct in 2000s. There are some factors causing the extinction process of *Jemblung*. *First*, the players of *Jemblung* have already been in an old age. In this case, those players are difficult to find the next generation. *Second*, there is a lack of people interested in *Jemblung*. In this case, the local people and the tourists prefer to have other kinds of popular art –such as *lengger*, *ebeg*, and *dangdutan* with single organ– to be the more enjoyable amusements. *Third*, the characteristics of *Jemblung* itself which is only be enjoyed by the limited community. In this case, there is a limitation of language understanding from the audience to enjoy the art performance of *Jemblung*.

### **The Efforts of Revitalizing *Jemblung* as the Manifestation of Local Wisdom in the Cultural Tourism Development of Banyumas**

Tourism has become the strategic regional affair for the local government of Banyumas. This is because tourism has given many benefits to the regional income of Banyumas. Based on the consideration of economic profit, then tourism sector is developed by the local government.

The grand design of tourism development in Banyumas is having a priority on the tourism objects and attractions. There are two kinds of tourism, i.e. natural tourism and cultural tourism. The natural tourism is considered to be more potential to give economic profit than the cultural tourism. In this case, the cultural tourism becomes the complementary part of tourism development because it is considered as having small economic values. Thus, the tourism promotion is focused primarily on the natural objects and attractions. The promotion for the cultural tourism is done selectively to the cultural products which are able to give economic profit. Based on the priority, the cultural products which are actively promoted as the cultural objects and attraction are *lengger*, *ebeg* and *begalan*. This is because: 1) *lengger* and *ebeg* are the very popular traditional arts of Banyumas which become the favorite amusements for the local people; 2) *begalan* is a traditional art which becomes a part of the Banyumas wedding procession.

Based on the condition of the cultural tourism development in Banyumas, the activities done by the local government are focused on the cultural preservation of the region. The institution which is supposed to be responsible for carrying out the cultural preservation is *Dewan Kesenian Kabupaten* (the Banyumas Art Council) or what is so called *DKKab*. In fact, it is practically delegated to *Dewan Kesenian Kecamatan* or what is so called *DKK* (the Sub-sub-districts Art Council) in Tambak and Sumpiuh. The reason of delegating such authority and responsibility is that *DKK* is considered to be closer to the local people as the cultural actors or the owner of the local culture. This happens

because the cultural products of Banyumas are still like pieces growing in the certain places of the region. Furthermore, there is no government policy which has already regulated to collect those pieces into one place like “the center of Banyumas culture”.<sup>8</sup>

The cultural tourism development of Banyumas that has not become the priority of the local government reflects in each activity of the cultural product development. This is obviously seen in the development of *Jemblung*. In this case, what the local government through *Dinas Pemuda Olahraga Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata* (the Office of Youth Sport Culture and Tourism) or what is so called *Dinporabudpar*, prior to *DKK* in the sub-sub-districts of Tambak and Sumpiuh, does is only making *Jemblung* not really extinct. In practice, the art of *Jemblung* is only treated as a spectacle for those who need it. Even the regent of Banyumas himself has never held *Jemblung* as the amusement in a celebration.

From the framework of cultural tourism development, the revitalization efforts of *Jemblung* are still done sporadically by the relevant parties. The first party is the local government through *Dinporabudpar* and *DKK* in the sub-districts of Tambak and Sumpiuh as the local cultural apparatus. In this case, the revitalization efforts are more on doing the promotion and preserving what already exists. The second party is the players of *Jemblung* as the cultural actors. What they do for revitalizing *Jemblung* is having routine practices on each Monday night every week. This effort is done by a group of *Jemblung* who are integrated in the group of *Setiyo Budoyo*. This group has even had their own

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<sup>8</sup> M. Soebiantoro, Triana Ahdiati dan Solahuddin Kusumanegara, “Pengembangan Kebijakan Pariwisata Budaya Berbasis Kearifan Lokal di Kabupaten Banyumas” (laporan penelitian, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, 2010), 57.

basic budget as well as household budget. This group is located in the village of Karang Petir, in the Tambak sub-sub-district. The routine practices of *Jemblung* done by the group of Setiyo Budoyo are not because of having an agreement among the players, but more on a reason of having a need to express their love towards the art of *Jemblung*. This is what makes them keep the spirit to do each activity in revitalizing the art of *Jemblung*. The last party is the commercial enterprises who like the art of *Jemblung*. Unfortunately, the number of the commercial enterprises is only a few. What they do is holding *Jemblung* as the amusement in a celebration or party, but is only done temporarily. It could even be said that it is difficult to find the entrepreneur who wants to help the activities of developing *Jemblung* as a traditional art in Banyumas.

The revitalization efforts in the cultural tourism development in Banyumas which are done sporadically have given a bad impact to the tourists as an important element in organizing tourism in the region. In this case, the tourists are not able to enjoy *Jemblung* as one of the typical cultural products from Banyumas. This can be seen from the number of tourists, in which only a few of them understand *Jemblung* as a typical folk art from Banyumas. There is, however, something happens paradoxically in the development of *Jemblung* itself. This can be seen from the fact that the fans of *Jemblung* or those who are interested in understanding *Jemblung* further –no matter they are only a few– do come from outside of the region, or even from abroad.

## **The Contextual Factors Hindering and Supporting the Revitalization Efforts of *Jemblung* as the Manifestation of Local Wisdom in the Cultural Tourism Development of Banyumas**

The brief description about the cultural tourism development of Banyumas shows that *Jemblung* as one of the traditional arts in the region has been out of having the attention of the local government on account of being not that popular and beneficial as what the others are. Consequently, the art of *Jemblung* does not develop well. In other words, it could even be said that it is almost extinct. In fact, *Jemblung* as the manifestation of local wisdom in Banyumas becomes the cultural product which has to be preserved by the local government. It means the revitalization efforts done so far have not been successful.

The failure of revitalizing the art of *Jemblung* in the cultural tourism development of Banyumas is caused by some hindering factors. The first factor is the weak commitment from the local government. This happens because the art of *Jemblung* is not a preference of the local government. The weak commitment of the local government reflects in the programs of tourism development, from the regional level to the office level in the sub-sub-districts of the region. In this case, *Dinporabudpar* has not been able to do breakthroughs in developing the art of *Jemblung* as one of the typical cultural assets from Banyumas. In fact, *Jemblung* is considered as one of the five rare arts in Indonesia which are supposed to be preserved and developed. This points out that the programs at the office level cannot be realized on account of having no support from the Banyumas legislative council as the authoritative body responsible for legitimating the regional budgets

(APBD). The second factor is the weak support from the commercial enterprises and the local people. In this case, *Jemblung* is considered as having no selling points and market value. In addition, there is no cooperation between the local government and various media in Banyumas due to the limited budget for doing the activities. The third factor is the tourists' lack of interest. This is because the language used in the performance of *Jemblung* is difficult to understand by the tourists. In addition, *Jemblung* as a cultural product is less attractive to the tourists on account of having no strong competitiveness compared to others.

From the three factors hindering the efforts of revitalizing the art of *Jemblung* in the cultural tourism development of Banyumas, it is clear that revitalization becomes a utopia for the art of *Jemblung*. There is still, however, a love spirit from the cultural apparatus at the office level and the cultural actors as the supporting factor to revitalize the art of *Jemblung*.

## **Conclusion**

Banyumas has various folk arts as the cultural products which can be developed as tourism objects and attractions to increase the regional economy. Unfortunately, those cultural products are still scattered and have not been prioritized in the tourism development as what is already done to the natural tourism. Thus, the art of *Jemblung* as the manifestation of local wisdom in Banyumas has not been developed seriously by the local government. Moreover, *Jemblung* is almost extinct because the market demand continues to weaken. Although some efforts are already done to revitalize the art of *Jemblung*, it could

be said that they have not been successful yet. This is caused by: 1) having weak commitment from the local government; 2) having weak support from the commercial enterprises and the local people; having lack of tourists' interest. The only supporting factor is the love spirit from the cultural apparatus and the cultural actors to revitalize the art of *Jemblung*.

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