

## THE TAXONOMY OF SAKURA AS A LIFE PORTRAIT OF LIWA PEOPLE

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### ABSTRAK

*Seni pertunjukan Sakura yang ada di daerah Liwa, Kabupaten Lampung Barat memiliki beragam karakter sesuai dengan bentuk pertunjukannya. Dalam penampilannya, Sakura dibuat dengan berbagai gaya dan tata busana yang beragam sesuai dengan perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan yang dimiliki oleh pelakunya. Sakura dapat diartikan juga sebagai permainan tradisional yang menggunakan beragam karakter Sakura. Sakura terdiri atas dua jenis yaitu: Sakura Kamak dan Sakura Helau. Sakura Kamak pada masa lampau digunakan sebagai upacara pemujaan kepada roh-roh nenek moyang, yang cenderung berwajah jelek dan bertata busana dari daun-daunan atau seadanya. Sakura berarti penutup wajah dan Kamak dapat diartikan buruk, kotor, atau tua. Ciri-ciri Sakura Kamak sekarang dapat dilihat dari bentuk wajah dan tata busananya yang buruk, kotor; compang-camping, bahkan berlumpur. Untuk Sakura Helau, pemain berwajah tampan dan bertatabusana bagus. Penamaan jenis Sakura tidak ditentukan oleh penggunaan bentuk ekspresi dari penampilannya. Akan tetapi, penamaan Sakura Kamak dan Sakura Helau sangat dipengaruhi oleh kelengkapan tata busana, gaya gerak tari, dan tingkah laku pemain Sakura.*

**Kata Kunci:** budaya, jenis, penampilan, sakura

### ABSTRACT

*Sakura performing arts in Liwa, West Lampung regency, has several varieties of characters in accordance with types of performance. Sakura, viewed from its appearance, has been made with a lot of varieties of style and costume which is in line with the performers' development of science and knowledge. It can also be defined as a traditional game using many varieties of Sakura characters. Sakura consists of two types: (a) Sakura Kamak and (b) Sakura Helau. Sakura Kamak was in the past used as a ritual for worshipping ancestral spirits described to have ugly-looking faces wearing shabby clothes. Sakura means a mask and Kamak means ugly, dirty, or old. Thus, Sakura Kamak is identifiable from its face shapes and ugly, dirty, ragged, and muddy dress. Meanwhile, Sakura Helau has a good-looking face and nice dress. The Sakura types are named according to their costumes, dance movement styles, and behavior of the Sakura performers, rather than the expressions or appearances.*

**Keywords:** culture, performance, Sakura, types

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## INTRODUCTION

The development era, which is also called modernization era, has brought both positive and negative impacts to human beings. Those who are against the concept of development will be likely fall into slavery. Since one can easily get something desired, even a total service for satisfaction, one tends to set aside process which is supposed to be a conscious effort of learning. If more people become reluctant to carry out a process, they will produce less. For example, the cultural products as the products of man's creativity is now "idle" because the promoters have been experiencing a very radical transition.

In the past, performing arts was a cultural event. People should keep it alive as cultural knowledge can help with the formation of national characters and mutual respect. However, what happens to *Sakura* culture in Lampung province is that most people, especially young generation, no longer recognize it as belonging to Lampung. Today, it is hard to find a place to discover this culture. Despite the fact that *Sakura* is still around us, yet only few people are interested to know more about it.

*Sakura* art in Liwa has some forms of appearances and facial characters depending on the knowledge of the performers. It is in line with Hauser's proposition that arts have something to do with knowledge and the whole intellectual structure which is the imitation of the original (1982:6). When performed, *Sakura* still attracts the audience who are attending the public celebration-usually called *Sakura* festival, an annual event which falls on Eid Al Fitr. The government of West Lampung regency as well as the government of Lampung province make it into a local tourism event. Therefore, it becomes an icon of the life of Liwa people.

How is the taxonomy of *Sakura* performing arts as a life portrait of Liwa people? The observation applies Performance Studies approach by Richard Schechner, viewing a performance from diverse elements of performance such as forms of characters, appearances, meanings of

ritual, game, and entertainment (Schechner, 2002:2). It uses an approach of performing arts function to investigate the life portrait of Liwa people in *Sakura* performance. The secondary functions of performing arts are: (1) as a means of strengthening people's solidarity, (2) as a means of generating sense of national solidarity, (3) as a medium of mass communication, (4) as a medium of religious propaganda, (5) as a medium of political propaganda, (6) as a medium of government's programs propaganda (Soedarsono, 2001:170-172).

As previously described, the art of *Sakura* basically had functions and meaning closely related to the lives of its supporters in the past. For West Lampung people with *saibatin* customs, it is a means of connecting people. This is assumed as a principal explanation of performing arts functions. Therefore, the data were well selected to make sure that they are empirical (Mustika, 2007:138).

The objective of this writing is to reveal, review, and provide information that Liwa people have performing arts with a face mask as a means of performance. The local people call it *Sakura*. The data collection applies two methods, field and literature studies. The field study conducts observation and interview. The observation on the product of *Sakura* includes types of *Sakura* and taxonomy or classification of *Sakura*. The observation uses video recordings and photography. The main informants are those having good knowledge on the existence of *Sakura* performance, such as local custom leaders, the doers or players of *Sakura* itself, and the experts from four villages: Kenali, Kegeringan, Canggus, and Kuta Besi villages. In addition, other informants include academicians, arts agencies (government of West Lampung regency), and the local people. The procedures for obtaining data from the informants are: (1) obtaining a permit to collect data, (2) getting further information on the data and local custom leaders' names, dance studio owners, *Sakura* players, Public Relation Division, inspectors of the government of West Lampung regency, (3) paying a visit to the

informant's houses and having an interview with them (Herusantoto, 2003:3). The interview uses open ended questions to obtain as many data as possible.

The field study records the entire data collection activities systematically. The activity of recording can be classified into descriptive and reflective recordings. Descriptive notes are presented on a number of dimensions: (1) physical appearance, (2) reconstructed dialogues that make the interactive situation become natural, (3) physical environment, (4) a special study presented, (5) detailed description of the activities, (6) researcher's behaviour, thoughts, and feelings. The data collection through observation and interview methods uses some instruments such as stationary, a camera, and an audio recorder.

Literature study obtains written sources about *Sakura* from books, magazines, newspapers, and others. It is supported with oral data obtained from the informants related to types, taxonomy, functions, meanings, and forms of *Sakura* performance.

The data analysis to answer the research problems combines the results from literature study and interview on *Sakura* taxonomy as a life portrait of Liwa people. It analyzes the shapes or facial characters of *Sakura* through *physiognomy* by carefully observing individual characteristics in the form of facial lines such as eyes, eyebrows, mouth, cheeks, nose, which are associated with its characters (Corson, 1975:13).

## THE TAXONOMY OF SAKURA

*Sakura* can be defined as a traditional game using various characters. It consists of two types, *Sakura Kamak* and *Sakura Helau*. The naming of the *Sakura* is not determined by the application of *Sakura's* expressions viewed from their appearances, rather it is strongly influenced by their costume, dance movement styles, and *Sakura* performer's behavior. *Sakura*, viewed from its appearance, has been made with a lot of varieties of styles and fashions which is in line with the

performers' science and knowledge. Hauser states that arts have something to do with knowledge and the whole intellectual structure is the imitation of the original (Heuser, 1982:7). For example, *Sakura* creates the looks of a pregnant woman, an elderly person, an animal, and others in accordance with the desire of the players.

### *Sakura Kamak*

*Sakura Kamak* is the oldest type of performance existing in West Lampung regency and even in Lampung province. There are two types of *Sakura* namely, *Sakura Kamak* dan *Sakura Helau*. In the past *Sakura Kamak* was performed as a ceremony of worshipping ancestral spirits. It shows ugly-looking faces in ragged, leaves-made dress.

*Sakura* means a face cover and *Kamak* means ugly, dirty, or old. The characteristics of *Sakura Kamak* can be seen from its facial shape and its dress which is poor, dirty, ragged, even muddy. The costume worn consists of a T-shirt and black, ragged, dusty or muddy pants to make an impression that the performer is dashing and itching. The T-shirt and black pants are usually worn for farming or hunting activities, and they are intentionally worn in *Sakura* festival. It is considered to create an impression of being dashing, strong, and brave. Then, the whole body of the performer is covered and decorated with rubbish, dry leaves, leafy twigs, and grasses. Fibres from the sago tree is also used as a hat or head cover to hide the performer's face.

The characteristics of *Sakura Kamak* can be seen from various points of view; from the habit of hunting animals in the forest, farming, trading, selling, etc. The costume worn is adjusted to the character being played. For example, a T-shirt and black pants describe simplicity of a farmer (Deradjat, et al, 1992:64). *Sakura Kamak* character gives a great sense of pride and is the most loved by the performer since this character may have the freedom to dress himself and to do various styles of motion. A *Sakura Kamak* performer does not need to follow standard motion styles and costumes. Any performer wearing a

dirty, ragged, rubbish-covered cloth and acts in a free way is called a *Sakura Kamak*. The audience will immediately acknowledge his bravery and strength.

There are several distinctive characteristics of *Sakura Kamak*, they are: (1) played by a married, or elderly person with strong body and able to perform fast and nimble movements, (2) the center of attention of the audience, because it is the most awaited in *Sakura* festival, and (3) performing *nyakak buah* (a game of climbing a betel nut tree, which is the core event during the *Sakura* festival).

### **Sakura Helau**

The performer of *Sakura Helau* has a good-looking face in good clothing. It is an outgrowth of *Sakura Kamak* with many types including *Sakura Puduk Api*, *Sakura Kebayan*, *Sakura Tuha*, *Sakura Ngandung*, *Sakura Nyakak Buah*, and *Sakura Seribu Wajah*.

*Helau* means clean and nice. The term *Sakura Helau* reflects the costumes worn. This type of *Sakura* plays a human character wearing complete and neat clothes. The followings are several types of *Sakura Helau*.

#### ***Sakura Puduk Api***

*Sakura Puduk Api* is a depiction of a baby. It is expected that the performer can mimic the behavior of a baby, either crying, laughing, or being sad. Similarly, the performer also has to wear baby clothes. The message conveyed in this *Sakura Puduk Api* is to remind parents to always look after and love their child because the child will one day replace their role of being parents.

#### ***Sakura Kabayan***

*Sakura Kabayan* is a depiction of a bride. The performer of *Sakura Kabayan* is a man dressing like a woman. He should dress like a bride. The message obtained from the performance is to remind a woman to keep on being polite at the time of becoming a bride and it is expected that she is able to leave her bad habits when she is still single. In addition, there are still things that need to be paid attention by a woman when she is already married to a man. She is not only

expected to have a responsibility to her children and husband, but she also should be able to embrace the extended family of her husband since Lampungnese customary marriage adheres to male lineage. This is considered the most severe for a woman who is already married that is to take responsibility for the extended family. However, the role and responsibility of a husband in Lampungnese custom are more difficult than a wife. To cope with this kind of problem, a sense of togetherness in taking care of a marriage life is highly required.

#### ***Sakura Tuha***

Someone who plays *Sakura Tuha* is expected to dress like an elderly person and be able to act like an elderly person. It describes a character of someone who is very old. The choice of this character depends on the *Sakura* performer. He may have a wise, flirty, fussy, arrogant, and lazy character. This *Sakura* performance does not only make the audience impressed and amazed with his behavior of being wise, but some of the audience may also feel amused. It is a reflection of *Sakura Tuha* character that is expected to become a mental picture of the social life of people of Liwa.

#### ***Sakura Ngandung***

Someone who plays *Sakura Ngandung* is expected to dress like a pregnant woman. The performer does not hesitate to wear a skirt and put a pillow on his stomach so that he looks and behaves like a pregnant woman. He walks very slowly and sideways just like a pregnant woman does, while his hand strokes his stomach and occasionally points to men. It means that the pregnancy may result from a legal marriage or not, so the audience, especially woman audience, laughs a lot when they watch the style and behavior performed by the *Sakura Ngandung* performer. It has a deep meaning to women who watch the performance; it depends on their own points of view (Deradjat et al, 1992:69).

Lampungnese people, in general, simply call the terms either *Sakura Kamak* or *Sakura Helau* as *Sakura*. Therefore, it is more general and easy to keep in mind to simply mention *Sakura* to refer to



those *Sakuras*. In addition, by simply mentioning *Sakura* to refer to both types of *Sakuras*, these two types of performing arts do not seem separate from each other since this art of *Sakura* has various shapes of appearances and characters in accordance with the eagerness of the performers.

### THE CHARACTERIZATION OF SAKURA FACES

*Sakura* is a performance that has several appearances depending on the order, time, and place of performance. In addition, *Sakura* has the most important parts in each show as supporters that are closely related each other. As stated by Richard Corson in his book *Stage Makeup* that the practice of linking physical appearance with character and personality is defined by dictionary as Physiognomy. The basic understanding of physiognomy can help actors to design their facial characters (Corson, 1975:13). However, the most fundamental thing in *Sakura* performance is its shapes of its irregular facial lines. From physiognomic point of view, each character can also be observed through lines of eyes, eyebrows, and nose shape (Corson, 1975:19).

The characterization of *Sakura*, in general, depends on the eagerness of the performer. No specific rule or obligation is imposed to the *Sakura* performer. Furthermore, R.M. Soedarsono, classifies types of mask into three broad categories, namely (1) mythological creatures, (2) faces of style, and (3) realistic faces. *Topeng* (mask) which represents a mythological creature, such as a giant, is considered something mythical and used as a source of protection by people who conserve ancient cultural forms. The staging of this kind of *topeng* can be found in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Irian Jaya, and Bali. *Topeng*, in Bali, is considered sacred which includes *Barong Ket*, *Barong Macan*, *Barong Bangkal*, *Barong Lembu*, and *Barong Landung*.

The characterization of *topeng* can be classified into four, namely Giant, Monkey, Mankind, and *Punakawan* (clown) faces that amuse the audience. *Topeng* character, which is made from wood, is also based on colors.

Aggressive evil characters are painted dark red or reddish brown, while good characters, such as Rama, Sita, and Laksmana, are painted bluish green, yellow, and white (Soedarsono, 1998:42-43). However, according to John Emigh in his book *Masked Performance: the Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*, that not all *topengs* depict creatures of another world. *Topeng* also serves to demonstrate the essence of human characteristics in history, legend, and modern society (Emigh, 1996:105).

*Sakura's* expression is a disclosure of visual characters in facial shapes, colors, and dress characteristics. The identity characterization of *Sakura* in West Lampung differs from the identity characterization of masked performing arts on Java Island. It is freer to express physical characteristics in *Sakura*. This tendency can be seen from the diversity of facial shapes and coloring of *Sakura* by different performers.

There are several *Sakura's* characters preserved in Lampung State Museum made by Pirdaus. They were the results of a search by the Museum officials in 1972 and 1991. The search was conducted in Liwa, West Lampung, especially in Kenali, Canggalu, Kegeringan, Sukabumi, and Kuta Besi villages. Most of the *Sakura's* characters made by Pirdaus were found in Sukabumi village, and a *Sakura* called *Sakura Satria* was found in Kenali village. *Sakura's* characters made by Pirdaus describe the lives of *buay tumi* people imagined as brave, strong, and black people. In addition, the identification of the identity characterization of the *Sakura* performers was associated with the characters which were once played in *Sakura* parade. The identification of the characters was based on the motion styles of those who played a human character in his socio-cultural environment. *Sakura* made by Pirdaus was taken by the Lampung State Museum since it is considered appropriate and represents the characters of *Sakura Kamak's* facial shapes of *buay tumi* (Mustika, 2011:188).

Character classification of the *Sakura* made by Pirdaus was documented by the Lampung State Museum; the length and width of the *Sakura*

were measured, the color and *Sakura* shape were identified. It was also published through catalogs for the benefit of the museum visitors. The member of *Sakura* includes:

#### ***Sakura Anak***

*Sakura Anak* was made by Pirdaus in Sukabumi Babalau village, Liwa, West Lampung. Its shape was analyzed and measured by Lampung State Museum as a collection for ease of explanation to visitors. It is quite small, 19 cm in length and 14.5 cm in width. The eyes are wide-open with a flat nose. Its mouth is a little closed and forward, its facial expression looks sulky like he is about to cry. The face of this *Sakura Anak* looks plain and black (Katalog Topeng Lampung, 2009:4).

#### **Picture 1**

##### ***Sakura Anak* used on *Sakura* parade**

(Documentation: Lampung State Museum, 2009).



#### ***Sakura Tuha***

*Sakura Tuha* was made by Pirdaus in Sukabumi Babalau village, Liwa, Lampung Barat. It has also been identified and used as a collection by Lampung State Museum. It is 32 cm in length and 18.18 cm in width and used on *Sakura* parade. Its facial expression represents an elderly person's face. Its sparse hair is neatly combed backwards. Its nose is medium square with glazed sleepy-looking eyes. Its lips are open showing its upper teeth, black lower teeth, and three false upper teeth. Its lower lip is thick. Its facial wrinkles represent that this character is very old, it can be seen from the lines on both cheeks. Its face is oval-shaped and black (Katalog Topeng Lampung, 2009:5).

#### **Picture 2**

##### ***Sakura Tuha* used on *Sakura* parade**

(Documentation: Lampung State Museum, 2009).



#### ***Sakura Ksatria* (knight)**

*Sakura Ksatria* was found in Kenali village, Liwa, West Lampung, it is kept in Kenali Customary Hall. It has also been identified and used as a collection in Lampung State Museum. The name of *Ksatria* (knight) itself is adapted from its facial shape. It is 32 cm in length and 24 cm in width. It is oval-shaped with a slightly pointed chin. Its eyes are concave and round. Its nose is a little long, and its mouth is open. Sculptured arches can be seen on both cheeks of this *Sakura* which represent that this *Sakura* is strong and brave (Katalog Topeng Lampung, 2009:6).

#### **Picture 3**

##### ***Sakura Ksatria* used on *Sakura* parade**

(Documentation: Lampung State Museum, 2009).



#### ***Sakura Cacat* (disabled)**

*Sakura Cacat* was made by Pirdaus in Sukabumi Babalau village, Liwa, West Lampung. It has been analyzed and used as a collection by Lampung State Museum for ease of explanation to visitors. It has a square-shaped face, big round protruding eyes, a flat nose, and an open mouth with a cleft lip. In addition, its right cheek is more

protruding compared to that of its left cheek, which is quite flat. At a glance, the size of its face looks unbalanced between its shape of eyes, cheeks, and lips (Katalog Topeng Lampung, 2009:7).

H. Noosten and Von Koenigswald state that in the making of a *topeng* (mask), an artist is inspired by the real world, such as human diseases. This leads the artist to make a *topeng* with irregular shapes or resembling the sick. For example a *topeng* with only one eye, a big nose, a wide mouth, long teeth, and big cheeks. Examples of these so-called strange *topengs* are Balinese and Javanese *topengs* which are widely used in a performance, which include *Buto Terong*, *Pentul*, and *Togog topengs*. *Buto Terong topeng* has a very big nose like an eggplant and a very big mouth hole with four fangs. *Pentul* has a characteristic of a blunt cylindrical nose. *Togog* has a snout which resembles a monkey, a thick upper lip, and a small nose (Koenigswald, 1937:311-314).

**Picture 4**

***Sakura Cacat* used on *Sakura* parade**

(Documentation: Lampung State Museum, 2009)



***Sakura Raksasa* (giant)**

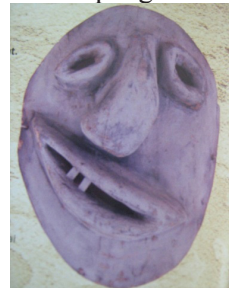
*Sakura Raksasa* was found in Skala Berak, in Cangu village more precisely. It is kept in Customary Hall, Cangu village. No one knows exactly when and who made it. It has also been identified and used as a collection of Lampung State Museum. It has a very large face, 37 cm in length and 27 cm in width. Its eyes are round with glaring eye holes. It also has a big trunk-shaped nose bending to the right. Its lips are thick and wide-open with two false teeth. Its mouth is upward towards right position. Its facial expression is frightening and black (Katalog

Topeng Lampung, 2009:8).

**Picture 5**

***Sakura Raksasa* used on *Sakura* parade**

(Documentation: Lampung State Museum, 2009)



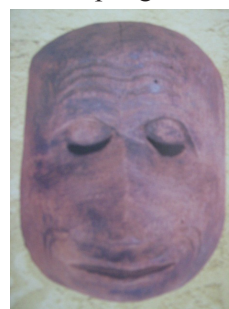
***Sakura Binatang* (animal)**

*Sakura Binatang* was made by Pirdaus in Sukabumi Babalau village, Liwa, West Lampung. It has also been identified and used as a collection of Lampung State Museum. It is 18.5 cm in length and 13 cm in width. It is often called as *Sakura Beruk* by Babalau people. Its face looks like a monkey. It has a furrowed forehead, its eyes resemble a crescent moon. Its nose is flat, small, and snub-nosed. Its mouth is tapering and slightly wide. Its cheeks are rather round and creased (Katalog Topeng Lampung, 2009:9).

**Picture 6**

***Sakura Binatang* or *Beruk* used on *Sakura* parade**

(Documentation: Lampung State Museum, 2009)



Of some *Sakura's* appearances staged nowadays, the *Sakura's* characters like those stored in Lampung State Museum are rarely used. The participants in Liwa, West Lampung, today can determine shapes of *Sakura*, dress, and also attractions played more freely.

The appearances of *Sakura* which are now more attractive are adapted from either urban life style or television. Young men playing

*Sakura* always make a surprise in each *Sakura* performance in that they apply urban cultural influences as an expression of something new. Herdani argues that cultural changes that take place in rural society can be separated from urban cultural influences that infiltrate to the rural area. The entry of electricity, television, newspaper, telephone, and other technologies are the front doors of city cultural infiltration into villages. Thus, they have, indirectly, resulted in changes towards performing arts especially *Bajidoran* arts, public mindset, life style, and they have also made an impact on the sustainability of rural livelihoods (1999:176).

## CONCLUSION

A region has a great local wisdom when a cultural product of the region can be conserved and developed in accordance with its history. The cultural product of *Sakura* is a history which has proved that Lampung, especially West Lampung, has had a civilization that has produced a culture. The culture reflects that thoughts and knowledge had developed at that time. *Sakura* is the embodiment of characters manifested in the form of West Lampung *Sakura* art. The characteristics can be customized and named according to the shape and form of the *Sakura* itself. For example, types of *Sakura*, *Sakura Helau* and *Sakura Kamak*, which are included in the classification, have their own more specific descriptions according to the characters and shapes that are made. The taxonomy of *Sakura* can provide a life portrait of Liwa people who are friendly, polite, and uphold fraternity and mutual aid in social life. This portrait reflects that Liwa where the people have a *saibatin* custom is sensitive to development, yet still conserves the tradition. It should be realized that *topeng* arts exist not only in Java and Bali, but also in Lampung which is called *Sakura*.

It is wise if the cultural property of *Sakura* can be developed according to the development of science and knowledge tailored to today's situation. This is a form of conservation and development of culture. People are not only

expected to be cultural connoisseurs but also required to be actors or promoters of the culture towards a more creative direction and reflect individuals who have good knowledge.

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