

## Sign Reading of the Meaning of Shape and Color in the Lion Dance

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### ABSTRACT

One of the foreign artistic and cultural heritages that has become part of Indonesian culture, namely the lunar New Year celebration where there is a tradition of Barongsai dance performances. Barongsai is an animal found in Chinese mythology that resembles a lion and has two forms, the Northern Lion and the Southern Lion. Each form has a different meaning based on its visual elements. This research on the lion dance raises the issue of how to read the visual elements in the lion dance, both in terms of the shape and color of the lion dance. The purpose of this research is to identify the meaning content in the visual elements of the lion dance, namely through shape and color so that the meaning of the lion dance can be known. Qualitative methods are used in this research and in color analysis using the Chairunnisak and Choirul color sign study method in analyzing color meaning. Observation, interviews, and literature were used to obtain data. The results of the analysis of the meaning of shape and color in Barongsai, found the same meaning, namely stability, courage, excellence, strength, leadership, wisdom, justice, knowledge, enthusiasm, longevity, women, charm, welfare, luck, cheerfulness, happiness, health, black and white colors also have the meaning of death. the results of the study are expected to be useful for other researchers in researching Barongsai in the future.

Keywords: Barongsai; Culture; Imlek; Visual; Color; Lunar year

### INTRODUCTION

In the life of a society that is changing with the times, tradition is something that is rarely found, and is only found in certain ceremonies, such as the Munggahan tradition, which is a tradition carried out before the month of Ramadan, in today's life not all West Javanese people carry out this tradition, so it is possible that in the future the munggahan tradition will disappear. The concept of tradition literally translates from Latin as "something handed over", meaning the same as inheritance. Tradition is a means of livelihood and the symbols, stories and memories that give a person identity and status (Graburn and Nelson, 2000). Tradition is part of a living culture inherited from the past and active in the formation of the present (Murgiyanto 2004, in Zayana, 2007).

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Due to its diversity of ethnicities, religions and customs, Indonesia is known as a pluralistic country. This diversity is enshrined in the Indonesian motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means different but still one. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is an important unifying expression that Indonesian society as a whole cannot be easily divided (Lumampauw et al., 2021). Barongsai art is one of the assets of ethnic Chinese tradition and culture which is performed on Chinese New Year, Chinese New Year is a new year holiday found in Indonesia. The Chinese New Year or spring festival has a long history and has even reached Indonesia "Chinese New Year" comes from the Hokkien word "阴历: Yīnlì", meaning lunar or monthly calendar "Cynthia" also comes from the Hokkien word, "新正: Xīnzǐng", meaning the first month of the new year (National Geographic Indonesia, 2019). When Chinese New Year arrives, Chinese Indonesians perform various activities such as putting up Chinese New Year decorations such as lanterns, having dinner with family, congratulating the new year, and sharing gifts (Habibillah, 2019). Lion dance performances also further convey the excitement of Chinese New Year (Halim, 2020).

The art of lion dance has been known to the Indonesian people since the 1500s, when traders from China arrived in the country. During the New Order era in Indonesia, the government banned lion dance and other Chinese customs (Oentoro, 2018). The discriminatory distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous Indonesians was officially abolished by President Abdurrahman Wahid (known as 'Gus Dur,' Indonesian President 1999-2001) in 2000 through government decree number 6/2000. This process was further strengthened by the passing of the Anti-Racial Discrimination Law No. 12/2006 on Citizenship. President Megawati Soekarnoputri (President of the Republic of Indonesia 2001-2004) declared Chinese New Year a national holiday in 2002. The declaration of Chinese New Year as a national holiday followed the decision of the previous president, Gus Dur, to make Chinese New Year an 'optional holiday' in 2001 (Hidayat, 2012).

Chinese New Year and Lion Dance celebrations are basically two interconnected signs in Chinese culture, so Chinese New Year celebrations are identical to lion dance performances and vice versa. Along with the times, these two things sometimes become unrelated to each other, lion dance performances are no longer synonymous with Chinese New Year celebrations (Oentoro, 2018). Based on history, Barongsai is a traditional Chinese dance performed wearing a lion-shaped sarong, the art of Barongsai became famous during the South-North dynasty (Nan Bei) from 420 to 589 AD. The attack of King Fan Yang's elephant army from Lin Yi country at that time overwhelmed King Song Wen Di's army. To repel King Fan's troops, a warlord named Zhong Que made an imitation of a lion puppet. The effort was successful, and the lion dance has become a legend (Handrian, 2015). The meeting between Chinese and indigenous cultures has resulted in each region in Indonesia having its own characteristics in enlivening the Cap Go Meh celebration, this is reinforced by the opinion of one of the Chinese cultural experts in West Kalimantan, Lie Sau Fat, who stated that the beliefs and cultural traditions of the Cap Go Meh celebration itself continue to develop according to

the situation and conditions of each country (Halim, 2020). The arts of Barongsai, Samsi, or Liong, are types of arts commonly used in a series of traditional ceremonies for the Chinese community, such as Chinese New Year, Chinese New Year, Cap Go Meh or others. Lion dance is still performed today with the aim of driving away evil spirits and bad aura and is considered to bring good luck. Apart from the Cap Go Meh celebration, the lion dance is performed at every major event, from temple openings to restaurant openings. Thus, the elements contained in art that are used as ritual needs will not be separated from the meanings or symbols associated with the art event (Wahyudiarto, 2009).

Barongsai has a very interesting shape and color, people, especially teenagers and children, like the art of Barongsai. When viewed, starting from costumes, accompanying music, to the details of the movements. Barongsai is synonymous with lion-like movements and shapes, bright costume colors, and lively musical accompaniment, this is what the community likes. In Indonesia, there are two types of lion dance, namely the Northern and Southern Lions. The Northern Lion is commonly referred to as Peking Sai, while the Southern Lion is referred to as Barongsai (Indah, 2022). Lion dance performances tend to be more agile and dynamic. There are many ways to play the lion dance, but the basic pattern is the same. The eight basic elements of lion dance are: Shuijiao (sleeping), Dakai (opening), Wan (playing), Sousuo (searching), Zhandou (fighting), Chi (eating), Gai (closing), Shuijiao (sleeping) Irwan (2019). This dance can be extended or performed because the custom of the Barongsai is accompanied by good music, including drums, gongs and cymbals, and the ceremony is often accompanied by the sound of fireworks. One of the main movements of the Lion Dance is the lion eating an envelope of money called "Lei See". At the top of the envelope is usually a watercress "chaitin", which symbolizes a gift to the lion (Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2010). Barongsai art contains several symbolic elements, each of which has its own philosophical meaning. The dancers' movements contain meaning, which is conveyed to the audience. This can be seen from how the dancers play the Barongsai face with various human-like expressions. The initial movement begins with a greeting given to the audience. Then proceed with the storyline of the dance accompanied by music (Islam and Hidayat, 2022). The embodiment of lion dance clothing has a series of messages to be conveyed to the general public or Chinese community through symbols in Chinese cultural traditions. The symbols in Barongsai reflect a culture that contains values and meanings. Barongsai has a very deep meaning for the Chinese people, as evidenced by the very detailed clothing design resembling a real lion. Each color on the lion dance has a meaning, and the colors used cannot be arbitrary, such as colors that are often used, black, white, red, yellow, and green, each part has its own symbols and meanings, such as ampau, vegetables, and others (Chairunnisak, Supadmi, and Lindawati, 2017).

Research on the lion dance raises the issue of how to read the visual elements in the lion dance, both in terms of shape and color. Based on this, the elements in the lion dance, namely shape and color, need to be studied to find out the deep meaning of these elements, which are based

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on Chinese beliefs. The purpose of this research is to identify the meaning content in the visual elements of the Barongsai, namely through shape and color so that the meaning of the lion dance can be known.

## METHOD

This research uses Qualitative methods, Hasanah (2017) states, qualitative is used to understand the background with different functions between objective, interactive interpretative, and grounded interpretative. In qualitative data, the data collected are in the form of words and images not numbers (Sanjaya, Suyanto, Sukoco, 2016). Data were obtained through literature and observation. The shape and color of the lion dance are identified and analyzed for meaning, then concluded to find out the meaning. Forms were analyzed for their meaning from the literature, namely Deda Ibrahim. Colors were analyzed using Chairunnisak, M., Supadmi, T., & Lindawati, L's theory on the elements of life and Choirul Arif, M.'s theory on the mythology of the Sam Kok kingdom. This qualitative study seeks to understand the meaning of visual elements in the Barongsai, starting from each shape and color found in the lion dance.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Barongsai is a traditional art form that originated in China. Barongsai is a combination of the words barong and sai. Barong is the Indonesian word for lion, and sai is the Chinese Hokkien dialect word for lion. Barongsai is performed by two people dressed as lions. Barongsai is a dance that uses guises and equipment as a wild animal played by two people, one person in the front head as the front legs, then one person in the tail acts as the back of the lion (Wahyudiarto, 2009). At least two lions are featured in every lion dance performance. The lion is a symbol of courage, stability, and excellence in traditional Chinese beliefs. The lion dance is a traditional dance performed in a costume resembling a lion. Lion dance is said to be performed to ward off evil spirits. The Chinese people took the initiative to design the lion dance costume. The Chinese in ancient times chose lions to scare away wild animals because the lion is the king of the forest, and all animals fear him. As a result, when wild animals disturbed farmland, people scared them with lion dance, causing the wild animals to run away. The community then made lion dance costumes, which gradually evolved to its current size and weight of 4-5 kg (see Figure 1 and 2).

It can be seen from the pictures that the lion dance is divided into two types, the Northern Lion, which has a curly mane and four legs, and the Southern Lion, which has neither. The Northern Lion looks more natural and lion-like than the Southern Lion which has scales and the number of legs varies between two and four. The Southern Lion's head is adorned with horns, sometimes making it look like a "Kilin" animal (Chairunnisak, Supadmi, and Lindawati, 2017). The lion is a symbol of courage, stability and excellence in traditional

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Chinese beliefs, the northern lion is traditionally played with two adult lions. They both wear ribbons on their heads. The male lion is represented by a red ribbon, while the female is represented by a green ribbon. Meanwhile, Southern Lions are usually dressed in white, yellow, and black. The colors chosen are not chosen randomly; they have deep philosophical meanings (Indah, 2022). Previous research that has been done on the lion dance is a basic research on the color and meaning of the lion dance itself, research on color analysis on the visual elements of the lion dance itself is still very limited, so a study of color markings on the lion dance is needed.



Figure 1 South lion Barongsai

Source: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2185021/lopsided-fortunes-chinas-ancient-lion-dance-thriving-south> Accessed on June 2, 2023



Figure 2 North Lion Peking Sai

Source: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/confucius-institute/news/> Accessed on June 2, 2023





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### Meaning of Shape in Lion Dance

The Barongsai costume is a combination of several animals. Each part of the Barongsai body consists of five different animal or creature elements each with its own philosophical meaning, namely:

#### a. Back Hump (tortoise)

According to Ibrahim (2023), from Chinese belief, the hump on the Barongsai's back symbolizes longevity.



Figure 3 Lion dance back hump

Source: <https://merahputih.com/post/read/mengulas-lebih-jauh-sejarah-barongsai-singa-ataunaga> Accessed on June 2, 2023

#### b. Horn (bird crest)

According to Ibrahim (2023), the horns on the lion dance have the meaning of life and regeneration, and symbolize women.



Figure 4 Lion dance horn

Source: <https://www.detik.com/sumut/budaya/d-6523669/selalu-ada-saat-imlek-barongsaisebenarnya-hewan-apa> Accessed on June 2, 2023

### c. Spine (Snake)

According to Ibrahim (2023), the lion dance spine means enchantment and well-being.



Figure 5 Lion dance spine

Source: <https://www.liputan6.com/regional/read/5176273/bukan-singa-di-china-ini-6-faktamenarik-barongsai-dalam-perayaan-imlek-di-indonesia> Accessed on June 2, 2023

### d. Forehead and beard (Dragon)

According to Ibrahim (2023), the forehead and beard of the lion dance represent men, which means strength and leadership.



Figure 6 Lion dance forehead and beard

source: <https://thereizcondo.com/news/tradisi-menyambut-tahun-baru-imlek/> Accessed on June 2, 2023

### e. Ears & Tail (Mystical creature)

According to Ibrahim (2023), the ears and tail of the Lion Dance symbolize wisdom and good fortune.

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Figure 7 Lion Dance ears and tail

Source: <https://www.naratif.id/ficer/barongsai-perekat-toleransi-di-serambi-mekkah/>

Accessed on June 2, 2023






### The Meaning of Colors in the Lion Dance

According to Furuji (2010), red is a popular color in Chinese culture that symbolizes luck, wealth, and loyalty. Therefore, red is often displayed during certain festivals. Yellow symbolizes purity, power, nobility and dignity. In ancient China, yellow symbolized the earth and the five elements, and yellow was considered the main color of Chinese culture. White symbolizes simplicity and low social status. However, white also has positive meanings such as purity, justice, goodness, and light (Tanuwijaya, 2023). The Barongsai costume itself consists of five colors, namely red, yellow, black, green, and white. Each of these colors is a symbol related to the legend, and represents the elements of life and the cardinal directions (Islam and Hidayat, 2022). The difference in the color of the lion dance has its own meaning depending on the color used in each lion dance. The theory used to explore the meaning is based on the theory of Chairunnisak, M., Supadmi, T., & Lindawati, L regarding the elements of life and the theory of Choirul Arif, M. regarding the mythology of the Sam Kok kingdom. Color meaning analysis can be seen in Table 1.



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**Table 1 Analysis of Color Meaning in Barongsai, based on the method of Chairunnisaak Color Sign Study, et al (2017) and Choirul Arif (2015)**

Basic Lion Dance Color		Life elements (Chairunnisaak, et al 2017)		Mythology of Sam Kok Kingdom (Choirul Arif, 2015)	
		Symbol	Meaning	Symbol	Meaning
Yellow		Tanah (Center)	Beauty, Joy, and Luck	<i>Huang Zhong</i>	Justice and Knowledge
Red		Fire (South)	Luck, Courage, and Joy	<i>Kwang Kong</i>	Happiness and Wealth
Green		Kayu (East)	Prosperity, Harmon y and Health	<i>Zhao Yun</i>	Spirit High Hero
Black		Water (North)	Death and Courage	<i>Zhang Fei</i>	Rude, Grumpy, and Fierce
White		Metal (West)	Death and Courage	<i>Ma Chao</i>	-

## CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis of the Barongsai form obtained data, namely, Barongsai is a description of the shape of a lion, Barongsai is an animal found in Chinese mythology that

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resembles a lion and has two forms, the Northern Lion and the Southern Lion. Its body contains five animal elements, namely turtles, birds, snakes, dragons and mystical creatures, each of which has a meaning of courage, stability and excellence, longevity, women, charm and well-being, strength and leadership and wisdom and luck.

The results of the color analysis of Barongsai obtained data, namely, yellow means beauty, joy, luck justice and knowledge, red means courage, cheerfulness, happiness and wealth, green means prosperity, health, enthusiasm and heroes, black means death, rough, angry and fierce. white means death and courage.

The results of the analysis of the meaning of shape and color in Barongsai, found the same meaning, namely stability, courage, excellence, strength, leadership, wisdom, justice, knowledge, stability, enthusiasm, longevity, women, charm, welfare, luck, cheerfulness, happiness, wealth, prosperity, health, with the exception of other colors, black and white also have the meaning of death.

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