

The Performing Art of Barongsai as the Cultural Signifier of Tionghoa Community in Padang City

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Abstract: Barongsai is one of traditional performing arts of Tionghoa community that is most popular and often performed in public. This performing art has characteristic that is often assumed as the cultural signifier of Tionghoa ethnicity and it has lived with Minangkabau people for a long time. The aims of this research are to reveal the art concept of barongsai performance as cultural signifier and to explain why this performing art becomes the signifier of Tionghoa ethnicity in Padang City. Method used in this research is qualitative method with etic and emic approaches. The performing art of Barongsai has the elements of performing arts too. These elements have signs and these signs are explained by using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of Semiology that is in the scope of non-linguistic signs that have arbitrary and conventional characteristics. Sign has two inseparable sides that are signifier and signified. Signifier has material characteristic while signified has abstract one. The performing art of Barongsai is stated as the cultural signifier of Tionghoa ethnicity of Padang City based on signs found in this performing art. The existences of this art are as a tool, the form of self-declaration and the media of social acculturation. Non-Tionghoa ethnicities admit that Barongsai is a signifier that refers to Tionghoa ethnicity with all of its characteristics. In Tionghoa ethnicity, Barongsai acts as the signifier while repelling negative aura, rejecting calamity and incurring fortune act as the signified.

Key words: Barongsai, culture, Tionghoa community, Padang City, non-linguistic

INTRODUCTION

Barongsai is one of traditional performing arts of Tionghoa community that is most popular and often performed in the public of Padang (HBT and Sri Bhakti; Februari in 2003). Seeing the characteristics and spirit of attraction it can be said that Barongsai functions as one of signifiers of Tionghoa community in Padang City (Minangkabau Land). Indication as signifier can be observed when communities outside of Tionghoa community hear the word Barongsai, one thing that comes to their minds is Tionghoa community with all their characteristics of life, whether in the form of physical signs or attitude tendency (free interview with the communities of Padang, Bukittinggi and Padang Panjang cities). Indication as signifier for Tionghoa community was stated by Chiang Lien Hoa and Thio Guan Kuang in interview on 14 February, 2014. They state that from performance side, Barongsai is different from other performances since it displays the description of life passed by human. Therefore, Barongsai gives us many lessons about life. Thio Guan Kung said that "Is there any performance beside Barongsai that has the description of life problem and is in accordance with all conditions in its every performance?" to strengthen his opinion about Barongsai.

Based on social reality found in Padang society, it shows that Barongsai is one of cultural identities of Tionghoa community. Kinasih said that "basically, identity is something that gives the guarantee of self existence by borrowing collective power in order to face future uncertainty. Identity is very crucial and its existence becomes something intrinsic for every individual including Tionghoa community" (2007). In the amendment of 1945 Constitution, chapter XA Article 281 Clause 3 about Human Right. It states that "Cultural identity and traditional community right are respected conformably with the development of era and civilization".

The performing art of Barongsai has been living together with Minangkabau society for a long time because it is predicted that Barongsai entered Padang City at the same time with the arrival of Tionghoa community when the big migration of South China happened (HBT and Sri Bhakti No. 27, June-December, 2012). Koentjaraningrat (1999) states that "the largest Tionghoa immigrant to Indonesia was started from 16th century until the middle of 19th century who came from Hokkien tribe from the South Part of Fukien Province".

Thio Guan Kuang said that the performing art of Barongsai experienced hiatus in the era of new order government that was started in 1967 until 21 April, 1998,

but this hiatus, it did not mean no activity at all (Interview, 14 February, 2014). At that time, Barongsai was performed only for Tionghoa/Pagoda community. But since 2000, Barongsai performance has started to grow rapidly and it has not only played in the cultural celebration day but also informal events such as marriage party, birthday party the opening or inauguration of new shop, mall events, stage events and so on (HBT and Sri Bhakti No. 27, June-December, 2012). Barongsai performance is considered as the tradition of calamity repellent or ill-fated repellent (HBT and Sri Bhakti No. 6, February-May, 2003). Thio Guan Kuang also states that "Condition described in this phenomenon proves that the performing art of Barongsai still exists although it's ever restricted in the government era of President Soeharto" (interview, 14 February, 2014).

Aminuddin (1995) said that signifier is the system of sign that potentially describes ideas with various aesthetic effects. The system of sign in its various variants is another manifestation or actualization of non verbal language code since in daily life it doesn't always use verbal language. Moreover, when what it's discussed is in the level of performing art non verbal language has an important role in conveying the message of performance to the audiences.

Barongsai is one of cultural forms of Tionghoa society and it is symbolic communication the symbolism of group skill, knowledge, attitude, value and motif. Symbolic meaning is learned and disseminated in society through institution (Alo, 2007). It is done in order to conserve and maintain the order of norms that applies in Tionghoa community particularly in the environment of social interaction.

Moreover based on the background of the researchers as Tionghoa community, the researchers will try as maximal as possible to reveal the concept of performing art of Barongsai so that it can be proved that this art is the cultural signifier of Tionghoa community especially in Padang City and generally in the world. In this research the position of the researchers is the outsider in order to create the authenticity and objectivity of research results.

Based on background stated previously and considering title perspective, there are several problems found and then defined into the following interrogative sentences:

- How does the performing art of Barongsai function as the cultural signifier of Tionghoa community in Padang City?
- How does the performing art of Barongsai function as the signifier of Tionghoa community in Padang City?

Review of related literature is done to review and discuss sources that are relevant to this research and to avoid the duplication of other researcher's works that discuss the same theme. This review has significant meaning in getting concepts, theories and certain theorems used as the guideline of discussion.

Herawati (2010) entitled "Barongsai Performance in Dumai City: a Form of Cultural Adaptation of Tionghoa Community," the discussion of Barongsai is focused on society's condition after reformation, particularly since the release of Republic Indonesia President's decree number 6 year 2000 about the freedom for Tionghoa community. Herawati stated about the fact of Barongsai as the performance of Tionghoa community that is minority community in Dumai city can be adapted and blended with majority community such as Minangkabau, Malay, Batak and Java.

Lora (2005) entitled "The View of Half-breed Community in West Sumatra Toward the Resurrection of Minority Performing Arts in Reformation Era," her discussion stresses on the cultural problem in which there is always barrier line between majority group and minority group that tends to dominate strongly. The scope of her discussion includes the spirit of minority group, Tionghoa in reformation era and the view of Tionghoa half-breed community toward the performing art of Barongsai.

Rini (2006) entitled "The View of Indigenous Society in West Sumatra Toward the Resurrection of Performing Art of Minority Group, Tionghoa in Reformation Era," discussion of this thesis is focused on the return of Barongsai performance into the indigenous society of West Sumatra. This thing proves that there is good relationship between indigenous society and Tionghoa community that then shows the egalitarian attitude of indigenous society toward everything that's artistic and cultural things of Tionghoa community.

Lexy (2002) entitled "Barongsai Performance in the Life of Chinese Community in the Pondok Area of Padang," discussion of this thesis emphasizes on the function of Barongsai performing art for its supporting community such as to repel misfortune and to expedite fortune. Besides that this thesis also discusses about performance place and musical instruments used when Barongsai is performed in front of audiences or spectators.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research method used in this research is qualitative research. According to Bogdan and Taylor, "qualitative research is research that produces descriptive data in the form of people's written or oral words and observable behaviors". This research is directed holistically into background and individual. Furthermore, Kirk and Miller

said that “qualitative research is certain tradition in social science that’s fundamentally depended on Human’s observation in his/her own environment and related to people in their language and term” (Latif, 2006).

Research discussion is focused on effort to find how various societies organize their cultures in their minds and then use those cultures in their life (James, 1997). This statement has connection to the title of this writing namely The Performing Art of Barongsai as Cultural Signifier of Tionghoa community in Padang City because the performing art of Barongsai is a system of meaning owned together, learned, fixed, maintained and defined in the context of interacting. Tionghoa community (James, 1997). Therefore, discussion in this research applies emic approach namely using ideal participants (local informants) to get rid of social limit between researcher and informant so, approach can be done amicably.

This research applies qualitative one in the consideration of Spradly’s opinion (James, 1997) adjusting qualitative research is easier when it faces double facts, qualitative research presents the nature of relationship between researcher and respondents directly and qualitative research is more sensitive and adjustable to many joint influences and toward value patterns that are faced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kampong China is a name for settlement that its dominant inhabitant is Tionghoa community. Administratively, Kampong China is the region of Kampong Pondok in the area of West Padang sub-district. Kampong Pondok is the area of Kampong China in the coast area of Padang City. Places included in the area of Kampong China are along the streets of Pondok, Niaga, Kelenteng (the market of Tanah Kongsu) until the street of Batang Arau in the estuary of Batang Arau River.

Based on the data found in the field whether they come from interview or field observation, or government books, it can be concluded that area commonly known as Kampong China is the village of Kampong Pondok, the village of Belakang Tangsi and the village of Berok Nipah. In this location until now it is still found many people who support the performing art of Barongsai.

The performing art of Barongsai in Mandarin Language is called Wushi. Etymologically in Indonesia language, Barongsai is formed by two words from different languages namely Barong from Javanese language means mask and say from Mandarin language of Hokian variant means lion Djunaedi in (Irwan *et al.*, 2008). Terminologically, the performing art of

Barongsai is one of performing arts/traditional cultures of Tionghoa community that is most popular and most often performed in front of public (HBT and Sri Bhakti No. 6, February-May, 2003). The first note about Barongsai can be traced back to the era of Chin Dynasty around 300 BC (HBT and Sri Bhakti No. 27, June-December, 2012).

Go Shiang Yen (interview, 12th January, 2015) told that Barongsai started to be known and popular in the era of South-North (Nan Bai) Dynasty in the year of 420-589. At that time, the troops of King Song Wen Di were overwhelmed by the attack of elephant-riding troops of King Fan Yang from Lin Yi country. Then, a warlord named Zhong Que made a replica of lion doll to drive off the troops of King Fan. This effort was successful and the troops of Kin fan can be defeated.

Barongsai consists of two kinds or two genres namely North Barongsai (Hock San) and South Barongsai (Fut San). These two genres of Barongsai are existed in Padang City. The Barongsai performance team of HBT and Lin Clan has the genre of North Barongsai (Hock San) while Barongsai performance teams that have the genre of South Barongsai (Fut San) are HTT, Satya Dharma and Choa-Kwa Clan.

The characteristics of North Barongsai (Hock San) are: having curly mane and four legs, the appearance looks more natural and resembles lion, the movement tends to be more agile and full of dynamics, having flat and warped mouth like duck’s beak and rounded horn.

The characteristics of South Barongsai (Fut San) are: having scale in the legs that have various numbers between two and four, having pointed horn that resembles the animal of Kilin, hard and capering head movement that is concomitant with the beat of gong and drum, the movement seems fierce and aggressive and having warped mouth like duck.

According to Gho Siang Yen (interview, 8th January, 2015) now a days, the performing art of Barongsai has two kinds of game namely the game of Barongsai performing art of tradition/flooring and the game of Barongsai performing art of pillar/peg.

The game of Barongsai performing art of tradition/flooring: It’s the common kind of game of Barongsai performing art that is often watched and viewed by public. This Barongsai is often performed on the events of cultural holiday such as the New Year’s Eve, the celebration of Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh. Nowadays, tradition Barongsai is included in the carnival event or allegoric parade of 17th August (Independence Day of Indonesia) invited to marriage party, birthday party, new shop or mall opening and inauguration, stage events and so on. This kind of Barongsai performing art

is called flooring Barongsai because its attraction does not use peg/pillar, it's just played on the flat floor/arena or on the stage. Iswanto (Interview on 3rd January, 2015) said that "Flooring Barongsai can be performed in the form of parade because basically, this Barongsai has the form of parade performing art".

The game of Barongsai performing art of pillar/pegP:

Pillar Barongsai is more popular nowadays and is competed in world level competition. It's started from Malaysia that is the pioneer of the birth of Pillar Barongsai. Koko Iswanto said that "Malaysia is the country where modern Barongsai starts to develop (interview on 3rd January, 2015)". He also stated that. "The coaches of Barongsai performing art in Padang are brought from this country whenever it's competition time. The first coaches who were brought in the time of establishing the team of Barongsai performing art in Padang City came from Medan because in this city, there are many existing teams of Barongsai performing art for the region of Sumatra "(interview on 3rd January, 2015)".

The height of pillar or peg used in pillar Barongsai performing art starts from one meter until three meter (interview, 14th February, 2014). Ko Atin said that "Pillar Barongsai demands discipline, agility, compactness and carefulness because if pillar/peg Barongsai players ignore these things, the effects are fatal for these Barongsai players. Fractures are light injury level happened to these players (interview, 10th September, 2014).

These both of genres have the basic movement of sawhorse. Yap Hong Tek as the leader of Barongsai performing art team of HTT of Padang City said that "they apply two kinds of sawhorses namely square sawhorse and triangle sawhorse (interview, 27th December 2014). Yap Hong Tek's statement about these two kinds of sawhorses is justified by Koko Gho Ceng Li, the coach and founder of Barongsai performing art team of HBT of Padang City (interview, 14th February, 2014).

According to Thio Guan Kuang, "the performing art of Barongsai in Indonesia experienced the highest popularity in the era of Tionghoa assemblage of Hwe Koan. Every Hwe Koan assemblage in various regions has a team of Barongsai performing art (interview, 14th February, 2014)". And Ko Atin stated that Padangpanjang also had the team of Barongsai performing art at that time (interview, 10th September, 2014). Barongsai development was stopped in 1965 after the movement of Indonesia Communist Party on 30th September, 1965. All kinds of cultural form of Tionghoa community in Indonesia were eliminated because of political situation at that time. The performing art of Barongsai was vanished and not allowed to be performed in front of the public (HBT and Sri Bhakti No. 27, June-December, 2012). This happened in the leadership era of President Soeharto from 1966-1998 or

around 32 years. It's a long time for the performing art of Barongsai to be tied down but it didn't make this performing art to be forgotten, said Thio Guan Kuang while remembering the past time (Interview, 14th February, 2014).

In the era of President Soeharto, the performing art of Barongsai was only performed in cultural holiday of Kong Fu Chu religion. At that time, it was only Tionghoa community who watched this performance and the players were only young people of Tionghoa community. Barongsai rehearsals were done secretly inside the Pagoda (interview with Ko Atin, 10th September, 2014).

After the change of Indonesia political situation in 1998, the era is known as Reformation era that is under the leadership of President Abdurrahman Wahid alias Gusdur in 1999. Thio Guan Kuang "(interview, 14th February, 2014)" said that Gusdur, in his leadership era, released President's Decree No. 6 Year 2000 and cancelled President's Decree No. 14 Year 1967 that's no longer accommodated Indonesia's recent situation. Based on President's Decree released by President Abdurrahman Wahid, Barongsai performing art and other Tionghoa cultures of Tionghoa community are resurrected in all over Indonesia included Padang City. Based on researcher's survey to location, nowadays, there are five Barongsai teams in Padang city namely HBT, HTT, Satya Dharma, Choa or Kwa Clan and Lim Clan.

Moreover, Barongsai performing art is not only played by Tionghoa young people but also played by non-Tionghoa young people (observation done in research location). Yap Hongtek as the leader of Barongsai team of HTT in Padang City said that "the ratio of Tionghoa Barongsai player and non-Tionghoa Barongsai player is 3:7 in which 30% players come from Tionghoa young people and 70% players are non-Tionghoa (Minangkabau) young people (interview, 27th December, 2014)". A team of Barongsai consists of 15 until 70 people. According to the ratio stated previously and reality found in field related to Barongsai players, it can be concluded that there is acculturation process happened between Tionghoa community and Minangkabau community/local community.

According to Ronal Syarief (Mr. Wong), the chairman of Barongsai Kang Ha Hong assemblage of Jakarta said that "the history of Barongsai performing art was originated from a legend about creepy and hideous creature called Nien that means a year". Nien was a very huge creature and able to eat anything seen and found to destroy anything and to spread fright and horror to everyone and every society. Nien often appeared in the New Year's Eve and as the result of this, the people in mainland China were often gloomy and sad in every upcoming Chinese New Year. Whereas Chinese New Year is the important moment for Tionghoa community because



Fig. 1: North Barongsai (Hock San) (The Document of Fredrik Tirtosuryo Esoputra, 12 June, 2012)



Fig. 3: The Performance of Traditional/Flooring Barongsai of Padangn HBT Team in The Area of Pasar Usang, Padangpanjang (The Document of Fredrik Tirtosuryo Esoputra, 12 June, 2012)



Fig. 2: South Barongsai (Fut San) (The Document of Fredrik Tirtosuryo Esoputra, 31 December, 2013)



Fig. 4: Pillar/Peg Barongsai in The Event of Cap Go Meh (The Document of Fredrik Tirtosuryo Esoputra, 14 February, 2014)

it's a celebration for entering spring season (Chun Jie), a media for Tionghoa people to get together with their families and a means for renewing their souls (Fig. 1-4).

In the upcoming arrival of Nien, Tionghoa community jangled and sounded drums and other sound instruments to warn people about the arrival of Nien. Once upon a time, there was an old man who challenged Nien to come out of its hideout and eat all wild animals in the highlands. After eating all wild animals, Nien then planned to eat the old man who challenged it. The old man and village people made and played lion replicas accompanied by music. Consequently, Nien that had enormous body and dragon head surrendered because it was scared of these lion replica. The old man caught Nien and took it away.

Discussing about the cultural signifier of Tionghoa community in the performing art of Barongsai includes in

the discussion of Semiology. Ferdinand (1993) said that "semiology is a science that discuss about the life of signs in society". Semiology is often used in various disciplines of science including the study of performing art, functioned to understand how meaning is created and communicated through sign system that builds art event (Anonymous, 2012). The performing art of Barongsai is in the scope of sign not language and is considered as arbitrary and conventional phenomenon. In the performing art of Barongsai, there are many signs formed of traditional beliefs as the manifestation of cultural civilization level of Tionghoa community. It's similar to what Saussure stated in his book "non-linguistic signs

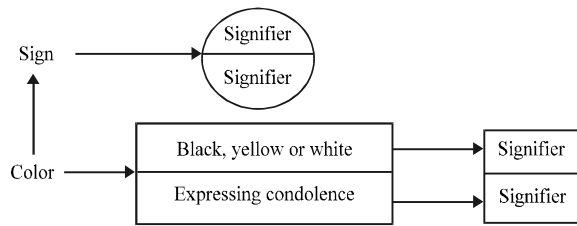


Fig. 5: Signifier and signified of colors

can also be viewed as arbitrary and conventional phenomena such as ceremony, mode, belief and so on (1993)”. The word arbitrary means that in defining an object as sign, it has random characteristic such as West Sumatra people use black flag to express condolence while Javanese people use yellow flag to express condolence. In this case, West Sumatra people cannot force Javanese people to use black flag in expressing their condolences and vice versa. The use of object as sign is continued collectively from generation to generation and then indirectly, it becomes convention and later on is known as the word conventional. Hence, Tionghoa people use white color to express condolence.

Ferdinand (1993) stated that sign has inseparable two faces/sides namely signifier and signified. Signifier has material characteristic while signified has abstract characteristic that is mental picture, idea, or concept. The relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary or changeable. It can be seen through the use of various colors in expressing condolence in which the concept of sign is applied to black, yellow and white flags. It can be concluded that color is the sign while black, yellow and white are the signifier and expressing condolence is the signified. For further explanation, this concept is drawn into the following scheme (Fig. 5).

According to Gho Siang Yen (interview, 12th January, 2015), “the cultural signifier and signified of Tionghoa community found in the performing art of Barongsai are grouped into: Barongsai, players, movement, music and arena.

Barongsai: Barongsai consists of lion mask and costume that then form a lion. Barongsai functions as signifier and lion functions as signified. When lion functions as signifier, it shows bravery, agility and leadership as its signified. Lion is signed as the king of jungle. Lion, as believed by Tionghoa community is one of wild animals that can bring fortune or good luck. Because of the faith on lion good aura, Tionghoa community uses lion replica as the embodiment of Barongsai and often uses a couple of lion statue to decorate gates, house yards and offices. These phenomena can be seen on the gate of HTT funeral home and the yard of Pagoda in Padang City.

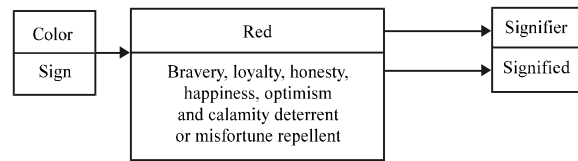


Fig. 6: Signifier and signified of red color

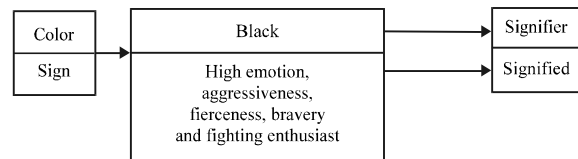


Fig. 7: Signifier and signified of black color

For Tionghoa community, the dominant colors of Barongsai are the signifier while the signified of these colors depends on the dominant color found on the Barongsai. There are five colors of Barongsai considered as the signifier in the culture of Tionghoa community. The colors are.

Red color on red Barongsai is the signifier that points on the signifieds of bravery, loyalty, honesty, happiness, optimism and calamity deterrent or misfortune repellent (Fig. 6).

Yap Hong Tek explained that “when red Barongsai is played or performed, it will spread the meaning contained on this red color to the place, the organizer and audience of Barongsai performance (interview, 27th December, 2014)”.

Black color on black Barongsai is the signifier that points on the signifieds of high emotion, aggressiveness, fierceness, bravery and fighting enthusiast. Formerly, black Barongsai’s used in war zone and it’s told in the tale of King Song Wen’s fight against King Fan’s troops in the era of Nan Bai dynasty (Fig. 7).

Yellow color on yellow-gold Barongsai is the signifier that points on the signifieds of emotional maturity and wisdom. White color on white Barongsai is the signifier and its signified is condolence. Green color on green Barongsai is the signifier and the signifieds are gallantry and safety.

Players

Barongsai player: Barongsai player is the signifier while the signified is the soul of Barongsai or giving life to Barongsai.

Bilekhud-Daitofu player: Bilekhud-Daitofu is the signifier that its signified is guide/animal trainer for a lion (Barongsai). Sketchily, it can be described that the signifier is Bilekhud-Daitofu and the signified is the connector of audience and Barongsai.

Music player: Music player is the signifier and its signified is the atmosphere maker of Barongsai performance or the accompanist of Barongsai movements.

Movement:

- Singli movement is the signifier while its signified is the respect given by Barongsai toward audience through three times of bowing movement. This movement is done in the beginning and ending of Barongsai performance
- Ciato movement is the signifier while the signified is the condition of happy lion (Barongsai)
- Mitien movement is the signifier and the signified of standing lion. Standing lion (Barongsai) is the signifier while the signified is rely on own ability
- Titien movement is the signifier and its signified is lion that walks carefully
- Mancising and kweksising movements are the signifier and signified of Barongsai on cleaning duty. Barongsai on cleaning duty is the signifier while the signified is cleaning and throwing negative aura
- Teampu movement is the signifier and the signified is the showing of hesitancy or the existence of dangerous object or height
- Cungan and Siecan movements are the signifier while the signified is Barongsai that eats or takes angpao.

Music: Music accompanies every Barongsai movement. The use of music as media to describe Barongsai expression is the signifier while the motivator or supporter of Barongsai is the signified.

Arena: Arena is the signifier and its signified is the realm of mortals. Based on Ferdinand de Saussure's explanation about signifier and signified as the two sides of sign, it can be concluded that Barongsai performance is the signifier and the signified is life phenomena that must be passed and anticipated by human.

In the previous statement, Gho Siang Yen said that "holistically and based on mythology, the performing art of Barongsai believed by Tionghoa community in Padang is able to: driving of negative aura, repelling misfortune or calamity, bringing fortune or good luck". These factors are the reason why Barongsai performing art is able to withstand although in the era of new orde, it's once not allowed to be performed and in front of public and society. Therefore, it's clear that Barongsai performing art cannot be vanished from the cultural life of Tionghoa community especially in social life whether internally or

externally as told by Thio Hauw Tek (interview, 8th January, 2015). The strategic meaning of Barongsai performing art is the means of social interaction between Tionghoa community and non-Tionghoa communities as the media of acculturation. The meaning of Barongsai for non-Tionghoa players as stated by Yudhi Andrevita who's the representative of Minangkabau-born Barongsai players is "they are able to practice wushu to expand friendship and to add pocket money while exercising whenever Barongsai performing art is invited". For non-Tionghoa communities such as Minangkabau and Nias, they view Barongsai performing art as an entertaining and dazzling attraction/performance. (Interview, 14th February, 2014).

Based on research result found in research field and analysis of written materials and interview, Barongsai performing art is the cultural signifier of Tionghoa community in Padang City. The signifiers found in Barongsai performing art are the form of Barongsai that looks like a lion, the colors on Barongsai and the color of music performed as the accompanist of Barongsai. By seeing the form and color of Barongsai and listening to the music of Barongsai, it's easier for non-Tionghoa communities to determine that Barongsai performing art is the unique art of Tionghoa community. Therefore, Barongsai gives unique form, color and music that refer to Tionghoa community.

The existence of Barongsai is the integral part of the need of symbolization for Tionghoa community in Padang City. Barongsai is not only the tool of self-declaration but also the form of self-declaration. The effect of this existence is that Barongsai performing art is always performed in every ritual cultural activity of Tionghoa community.

CONCLUSION

The previous explanation strengthens the idea that Barongsai is the cultural signifier of Tionghoa community and their self-declaration as Tionghoa community that lives and exists in the Republic of Indonesia, a nation of unity and live a life together with indigenous people of Indonesia.

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