

## *Philosophy and Several Kinds of Tumpeng*

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### **Abstract**

Tumpeng is a cone-shaped rice dish with meat and vegetables side dishes surrounding it. It is a kind of traditional celebratory dish that is usually served during special events or celebrations in Indonesia. Nowadays, the philosophy of tumpeng has been forgotten by the millennial generation in the 21st century. Thus, the researcher wants to find out and describe the symbolic meaning behind the tumpeng and classifies the kinds of tumpeng. This study used the theory of semiotic from Charles Sanders Peirce (2007) focusing on three-dimensional or triadic and trichotomy system. This research used qualitative approach with the methods of observation, interview, and document analysis. The result of the study showed that tumpeng has abbreviation as *tumindak lempeng* that means we should be through this life on the straight path, the path of those upon whom God has bestowed favor. The peak of cone-shaped rice represents the only one God, while the side dishes surrounding the base of the cone represents the creations of God like human being, animals, plants, etc. Therefore, we should worship to the Almighty so that we can be protected from all sorts of calamity and misfortune that can happen on this earth by serving tumpeng as form of supplication to God. Then, the researcher reveals 56 names of tumpeng that spread on Java Island in Indonesia country and the function of tumpeng can be different depend on shape, color, and side-dishes surround it.

Keywords: Tumpeng, Indonesian Traditional Dish, Ceremonial Meal

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## Introduction

Nowadays the development of science and technology have been shifting cultural values that firmly rooted since the era of the ancestors. Most of people particularly in Indonesia have forgotten the great value of the existing customs in their area and begin to lose the meaning of the symbolic of the culture. Whereas, from the symbolic meanings behind it, we will be able to learn moral values, religion, and culture. The loss of a culture will continue to occur if there is no full awareness of the elements of the society and the government to preserve one of the assets of the country's wealth in the inheritance land. The culture will still exist if the way of life develops in the society, owned by a group of people, and inherited from generation to generation (Sarinah, 2016:11).

One of cultures that has been forgotten by the millennial generation of 21th century in Indonesia is tumpeng. Commonly, tumpeng is known by the society in Indonesia with the shape of a cone and made from rice and given with yellow color derived from turmeric. In fact there are many kinds of shapes of tumpeng in the different colors. However the majority is the cone-shaped because it is as a symbol of the divinity of the only one God. According to KBBI, tumpeng /n/ is rice served in a cone-shaped (to celebrate and so on). The traditional foods are usually served during gratitude ceremony, ritual, or as an offering to the sacred days.

Tumpeng has symbolic meanings about wisdom messages that will be useful for the rest of mankind. In accordance with the opinion of the Pierce explained that each symbol that is in this world has meaning so that it can be interpreted (Istiyani, 2013:9). Pierce said that a sign there is a triadic relationship that is encompassed of the Representamen (R), Objects (O) and interpretation (I). Due to the object of this research is tumpeng, which is as a sign or representamen (R) then it refers to other things (O) and last it can be interpreted (I). Thus, according to the researchers, the theory of semiotics of Pierce is suitable to be used as the theory of this research.

According to Pierce, a sign involves a cognitive process in the human mind and the process that can occur if there are representamen, reference, and interpretant. So that a sign has three interrelated dimensions: Representamen (R), objects (O) and interpretation (I). That relationship may be based on connectedness (index), likeness (icon), or the convention (the symbol), or a combination of all of them. For example, the relation R-O (smoke-fire), sign recipient will be doing the interpretation (I): by seeing the smoke (R), it will be associated with fire (O) and it can be interpreted that the burning was the shops building (I). This process is called semiosis. Therefore, there is always a triadic relationship that consists of representamen, objects and interpretan. Triadic relationships can be described in three dimensions of sign as follows:

### The Semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce

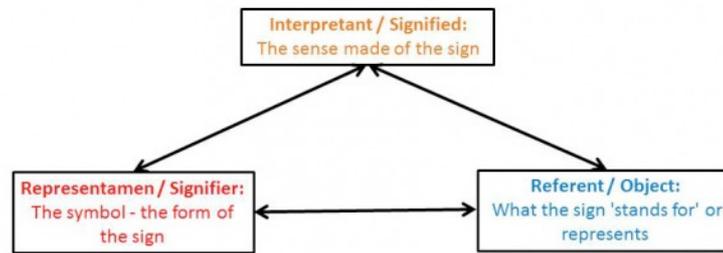


Figure 1  
(Source: Lanir, 2012)

The problems of this research are (1) what is the philosophy of tumpeng? (2) What is the symbolic meaning of the shape of tumpeng in Java? (3) what is the symbolic meaning of the components or ingredients of tumpeng? (3) what are the types of tumpeng in Java? This research is expected to give benefit both theoretical as well as practical. Theoretically this research can enrich studies in linguistics, anthropology or ethnology, ethnolinguistic, give contribution to the cultural observers and linguists in understanding the meaning of the symbolic from the tumpeng using the theories of Charles Sanders Peirce (2007). Then practically this is expected to be able to provide new knowledge regarding the characteristics of each type of tumpeng and the function of the tumpeng, preserve the culture of Indonesia to maintain this tradition so that the next generation can inherit the philosophy and the meaning of the tumpeng, and become reference material for the traditional ceremony, wishful event or gratitude ceremony which is usually there are offerings and one of them is tumpeng.

### Conclusion

This research is qualitative research and the data sources are taken from some informants in Karaton Ngayogyakarta, literature from journals, books, e-books, and articles in the internet. Then the method of data collection is using observation and interviews methods with recording and taking note techniques. The data that have been collected then it is analyzed to find out the semiotic meaning behind tumpeng along with side dishes by using theory of Charles Sanders Peirce (2007). Here is the result of the research that consist of three sub-themes, as follows: the philosophy of tumpeng, the symbolic meaning of the shape of tumpeng in Java, the symbolic meaning of the components or ingredients of tumpeng and types of tumpeng in Java.

#### A. The Philosophy of Tumpeng

Tumpeng has abbreviation which is derived from the Javanese '*tumapaking panguripan (tumindak lempeng) tumuju Pangeran*' which means that human must live to and in the way of God. The origins of the form of tumpeng exists in Hindu mythology, in the epic of Mahabharata. Although the majority of Javanese people are Muslim right now, but there are many traditions of the society starting from the roots of Hinduism. Javanese people have the belief that there is a supernatural power

beyond human self that can affect their lives. Therefore, they feel the need to maintain contact with the force to balance with their lives, i.e. by holding gratitude ceremonial.

The tradition of tumpeng accompanied by ritual to pray for salvation and this tradition can also be seen from the cone-shaped of tumpeng that symbolizes the miniature mountain. The Hindu people called the mountain with "Méru", a representation of the cosmos system. The mountain, in the Hindu belief is the beginning of life and it is very respected. In the Mahabharata retold about Mount Mandara, which flows beneath *amerta* or water of life. If someone drinks the water, so he/she will have earned salvation. This was the basis of the use of tumpeng in the gratitude events. It's no wonder if the influence of Hindu is still preserved.

In the authorities of Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom in Indonesia, the concept of 'Méru' it can be seen from the placement of the Palace (the residence of the King) located around the mountain range. For example, the Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Sunda Suradipati in Pakuan Pajajaran (ended its existence in 1579 AD due to invasion of the Islamic Kingdom of Banten) is located around the three mountain ranges, namely mount Salak, Pangrango, and Gedé (in region Bogor right now). If it is associated with a part of the peak of tumpeng, so it symbolizes God as ruler of the cosmos. Various vegetables and side dishes which are laid out in the bottom of tumpeng symbolize about life in this world (plants, animals, and humans). In the Hindu-Javanese belief, nature is composed of natural vegetation, animal nature, and human nature. Here, the natural vegetation is manifested through the materials, such as long beans, *urap*, and water spinach; the animal nature is realized through meat's animals such as chickens, goats, cows, etc. Then, for the human nature is manifested in the form of tumpeng itself.

Then the shape of tumpeng has the meaning about hope for people who is holding a ceremony, their life can be better, climb upward and high as well as the shape of the peak of the tumpeng itself. For example, a newborn child is expected to be smart and successful person in the future; or someone who died can have a better life in the hereafter. There is a java philosophy: "*ora mangan mangan waton kumpul*" (Whether you eat or not eat, it doesn't matter as long as you gather with us). Thus, it is important to gather with the relatives. The explanation of the philosophy is about prioritizing the spirit of togetherness in the household, protecting parents against children, and affection in the family. Wherever the people wander, we have to keep remembering and having good relationship with the family. From the above description, it can be concluded that tumpeng is as "spiritual communication media" of Javanese people to God along with the ancestor spirits.

## **B. Symbolic Meaning of the Shape of Tumpeng**

Tumpeng has various shape, which is cone-shaped, cone with concave at the peak of tumpeng, cone with cut backs to each other and placed vertically, and the last form is sphere. There are four form of tumpeng and each tumpeng have its own meaning and symbolic. For this analysis, I will be more concern and focus on the shape of the tumpeng. Here, I analyze it with theory semiotics from Pierce (1839-1914) about a three-part triadic model consisting of a representamen, an object, and an interpretant.

## 1. Cone-Shaped



Figure 2: Tumpeng Alus  
(Source: Serba-Serbi Tumpeng, 2011)

The shape of the tumpeng which is cone-shaped and the peak of the tumpeng is pointed. The picture above is the representamen [R] with the reference of iconic sign. Then the tumpeng is made from rice which is the daily food in Indonesia and becomes the staple food in the country. The tumpeng is served for thanksgiving, offerings in traditional ceremony, or celebration of birthdays. According to Hindu-Buddhist beliefs, this object [O] resembles to mountain which is mount Mahameru. The people regard the mount as sanctuaries and sacred. Another assumption explains that the cone-shaped is the relation between God and human. Then, it also can symbolize human levels of difficulty in achieving perfection, the higher the level of perfection, the few people who can afford and meets the requirements. In Islamic teachings, it has the meaning of monotheism, the Oneness God. From the peak of tumpeng it points up towards the God. Thus, the relationship between the representamen and object is by serving cone-shaped tumpeng, we expect the blessing of God to achieve what we wish for [I].

## 2. Cone with Cut Backs to Each Other and Placed Vertically



Figure 3: Tumpeng Pungkur  
(Source: Serba-Serbi Tumpeng, 2011)

This tumpeng actually shapes conical, but it is cut on the middle of tumpeng vertically so that it is separated to be two parts. Then it is placed each other backs. It is called *pungkur* because the back half of the tumpeng is adjacent and in javanese called it as *ungkur-ungkur* [R]. This tumpeng is also made rice and it is served as one element of the offerings in the funeral corpse (as cited in Marsono, 1999, p. 2). Those two slices symbolize a woman or a man who is still single [O]. Then the interpretant from the representamen and object is the tumpeng which shapes cone with cut backs to each other and placed vertically is served for a funeral corpse of unmarried person [I].

### 3. Cone with Concave at the Peak of Tumpeng



Figure 4: Tumpeng Duplak  
(Source: Serba-Serbi Tumpeng, 2011)

The shape of the tumpeng is cone but not taper on the peak of it. There is concave at the peak of tumpeng [R]. This tumpeng is made from white rice and shaped cone. When it has been shaped cone, a boiled egg with the shell is put on the peak of tumpeng to make a concave. The concave is to receive favors of our wishes to God and this kind of tumpeng is one element of the offerings at purifying the inheritance in Kraton Yogyakarta [O] (as cited in Marsono, 1999, p. 2). Thus, the interpretant is cone tumpeng concave at the peak of tumpeng is served for purifying the inheritance in Kraton Yogyakarta so that all requests be granted by Oneness God of the Almighty [I].



There are several colors of tumpeng that spreads in Java Island, Indonesia. They are white, yellow, blue, green, red and black. Each color contains symbolic meaning of life and it represents in several tumpeng. Here is the explanation about the color of tumpeng based on the theory Pierce about semiotic.

#### 1. White

Commonly tumpeng is made from white rice, sometimes it is flavored with coconut milk and a bit of salt and the other just cooking it with no flavor. Whether it is flavored with coconut milk or not, the color of rice is white and it is formed with a solid shaped [R]. The color of white represents purify and glorify [O]. The tumpeng is intended to people who celebrate the sacral event or gratitude ceremony can get apology from God so that their hearts are clean from sin [I].

#### 2. Yellow

The rice of tumpeng is yellow and it is colored with turmeric [R]. The color of the tumpeng describes about the richness and sublime of moral [O]. It is served for thanksgiving of joyful events, such as birthday party, wedding day, fiance day, and so on. In addition, tumpeng kuning is as one element of the offerings at purifying the inheritance in Kraton Yogyakarta (as cited in Marsono, 1999, p. 2). By serving this kind of tumpeng, the people hopes God bestow his blessing to the mankind [I].

#### 3. Blue

The color of tumpeng is blue which is taken from the leaf of butterfly pea flower [R]. The blue tumpeng is a symbol for asking apology [O]. If anyone is sending this kind of tumpeng, the people have already known that his or her goal is to apologize for the mistake he or she have ever made (Erwin, Lilly T., Gardjito, Murdijati, 2010) [I]. In addition, this tumpeng is also served as one element of the offerings in purifying the inheritance on the second day in Kraton Yogyakarta (as cited in Marsono, 1999, p. 2).

#### 4. *Mancawarna* (Five colors)

There is tumpeng that is made up of 5 small colorful tumpeng and it is called as tumpeng mancawarna. All of the tumpeng is served on a plate. The tumpeng consisting of 5 colors i.e white, red, yellow, black, and green [R]. It represents the concept of five days in Java namely *legi*, *pahing*, *pon*, *wage*, and *kliwon*. It also can symbolize five pillars of Islam or five principles (pancasila) of Indonesia (O). The tumpeng is part of the offerings of the exile that are placed in various places such as kitchens, honeymoon suite, the intersection and so on. Besides this representative also serves as one of the elements of the offerings in the manufacture and installation of ting/lights/lanterns/bamboo lanterns, putting it in homes, and in environment of Kraton Yogyakarta (as cited in Marsono, 1999, p. 2). Thus, by serving this kind of tumpeng, the people hope that all of misfortune will get away from us [I].

### **E. Types of Tumpeng in Java**

According to Harjono, 1999 (in Marsono, 1999:1), tumpeng in Java is classified into 32 types, namely: tumpeng alus, among-among, asrep-asrepan, gurih, inthuk inthuk,

janangan, jene, kencana, kendhit, kuning, langgeng, mancawarna, megana, pitu, pungkur, rajeg dom, rapa, rasulan, robyong, ropoh, suci, tulak, wajar/lawaran, and urubing damar. However, I have found fifty-three the name of tumpeng that has been spreaded around Java island and the others name of tumpeng are alus, among-among, asrep-asrepan, blawong, biru, damar, damar murub, duplak, golong, gudangan, gundul, gurih, inthuk-inthuk, kencana, kendhit, kuning, langggeng, mancawarna, megono, pitu, pungkur, rajeg dom, rasulan, robyong, ropoh, tulak, urubing damar, punar, pustoko, manik, grontol, agung, cagak, batur, candi murup, ketan oran, janganan, jene, rapa, suci, wajar / lawaran, jure, pasar, sangga buwana, cagak gunung, utup-utup, woran, sewu, sega lega, besengek, candi sewu, klambi mas, sangga langit, arga dumilah, yuswa, and saka guru.

Each names of tumpeng have their own meanings, functions and characteristics. Tumpeng is classified become two groups based on the functions of the tumpeng. The first group is tumpeng that can be eaten and the other one is tumpeng that is as *uba rampe/sesajen* (as offering or as the requirement of ritual event, so it cannot be eaten). The tumpeng that is served for birthday party, wedding day, fiance day, gratitude event usually can be eaten. Meanwhile, the tumpeng that is put in certain places such as in kitchens, honeymoon suite, the intersection, and so on. The shape, color, and side-dishes are determined based on the event that is held. Since it has symbolic meaning behind each ingredient, thus in making tumpeng we should pay attention shape, color, and side-dishes of tumpeng.

Therefore, tumpeng has deep meaning of life if we understand the philosophy and the symbols behinds it. The tumpeng itself has abbreviation as *tumindak lempeng* that means we should be through this life on the straight path, the path of those upon whom God has bestowed favor. The peak of cone-shaped rice represents the only one God, while the side dishes surrounding the base of the cone represents the creations of God like human being, animals, plants, etc. Therefore, we should worship to the Almighty so that we can be protected from all sorts of calamity and misfortune that can happen on this earth by serving tumpeng as form of supplication to God. Then, the researcher reveals 56 names of tumpeng that spread on Java island in Indonesia country and the function of tumpeng can be different depend on shape, color, and side-dishes surround it.

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