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***POTEHI* IN NEW ORDER'S RESTRAINT:
THE LOST OF INHERITOR GENERATION
OF CHINESE *WAYANG* CULTURE**

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Abstract

This article aimed to describe the history of *wayang potehi* development in Indonesia especially during the New Order period that became a dark time for its development. This study used historical research methods including heuristic step or source searching, source critics, data interpretation, and historiography or historical writing. The results showed that *wayang potehi* began to develop in Indonesia as the coming of Chinese immigrants around the 17th century and experienced acculturation with local culture. *Wayang potehi* experienced dark times when emerged the discriminatory rule of the New Order government against all things related to Chinese culture. The restraint to freedom of expression and preservation of *wayang potehi* cut off the chain of inheritor generation.

Keywords: *wayang potehi*, Chinese, new order, cultural inheritors

Introduction

Before the coming of Hindu culture, the natives of archipelago had known *wayang* as a medium to worship the ancestors. *Wayang* was considered the embodiment of ancestral spirits that later adapted into Javanese culture. There were some varieties of *wayang* from *wayang kulit*, *wayang beber*, *wayang suket*, *wayang golek*, *wayang wong*, and many others. Ironically from the long list of *wayang*'s inventory in Indonesia, *wayang potehi* is often excluded.

Wayang potehi is brought by the Chinese migrants to Indonesia. This culture was in the performing art form that showed characters in puppet form. In the show, *wayang potehi* played wise tales from China. Like *wayang* in general, *potehi* was also full of life values. Furthermore as a meeting with the local culture, *wayang potehi* in Indonesia also experienced acculturation process. Nevertheless, this *wayang* still doesn't lose its trademark and became one of the Chinese cultural identities.

The political changes in Indonesia that occurred after the 1965 incident which actually gave significant impact on *wayang potehi*'s existence. On behalf of the latent danger of Chinese communism influence, the new government issued discriminatory rules that further strengthened anti-Chinese sentiments. The New Order attempted to fuse Chinese into tribes that dominated the area where they

lived. The assimilation effort first began by eliminating all their cultural identities or could be cited as cultural genocide.

Through Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967, all forms of Chinese culture and traditions such as Chinese New Year, *wayang potehi* show, *barongsai*, and so on could be celebrated only among families in the house or temple. The shackles over three decades had become a serious threat that led to Chinese culture genocide. No wonder if *wayang potehi* was not included into the *babon wayang*'s book because the data source and generation that supports it was also limited.

Based on the thought above, this research attempts to review the history of *wayang potehi* development in Indonesia until it finally began to lose the inheritors generation due to discriminatory policies of the New Order government. Therefore, this study focuses on (1) the history of *wayang potehi* development in Indonesia, (2) the fate of *wayang potehi* in the New Order era, and (3) the lost of inheritor generation of *wayang potehi* as one of the cultural identity.

Theory

In Javanese, *wayang* means shadow. According to Mulyono (1975, p.11) the root of word *wayang* was "yang" with variations of the word "yung", and "yong". It means unstable, uncertain, unsettled, flying and moving around (note the words: *goyang*, *huyung*, *doyong*). So *wayang* contained the meaning of shadows that moving around, not fixed, and seem faintly. Slowly the word *wayang* not only became name of the shadow show but also had widespread meaning to be puppets and dramas played by human (*wayang wong*).

The art of puppetry is a traditional classical cultural art that is noble, full life's value and noble life, ended by winning goodness and defeating the evil. The art of puppetry generally includes complex performing arts. It contains at least seven elements of art there are drama art, art or painting, sculpture or craft, literary arts, sound art, music art, style or dance art (Haryanto, 1988, p. 2-5). The mixing of these various art's elements allows *wayang* to be so many kinds from *wayang kulit*, *wayang beber*, *wayang golek*, to *wayang wong*.

The *wayang* show is part of the ancestor culture that was believed to have existed before the coming of outside influence. It means *wayang* appeared since prehistoric times when ancestors just knew animism and dynamism (Mulyono, 1975, p.56). While some other experts argue that *wayang* got influence from outside cultures such as India and Chinese (Haryanto, 1988, p. 35). The influence of India or Hinduism appeared in *wayang purwa* story that took *Bharatayudha* and *Ramayana* stories. Although the influence of Chinese wasn't significant, it couldn't be separated from the origin of *wayang* that also exists in China.

Chinese influence could also be studied from Chinese immigrants especially Hokkien. They were famous for bringing a puppet culture called *wayang potehi*. *Wayang potehi* is included in the puppet show. Kuardhani (2012, pp.5-7) explains that China recognized three types of three-dimensional puppet, namely: rod puppet, strings puppet, and glove puppets. So *wayang potehi* is included in the glove puppet show because it is played by entering the hand into the doll's body.

As a form of culture, *wayang* certainly has a cultural support community as well as the cultural inheritor. Cultural inheritance can work well if freedom of expression and efforts to develop the culture are given in wide space. The development of art and culture is needed to be able to accommodate and foster creativity of the artists, to increase the society's art appreciation, to expand the opportunity to enjoy culture art, to preserve the culture, and to raise the spirit and passion of nation building (Guritno, 1988, p. 9).

Method

This research was a literature research with historical method to describe the history of *wayang potehi* development, the fate of *wayang potehi* in the New Order era, and the lost of the inheritor generation of *wayang potehi*. According to Gottschalk (1985: 32), the historical method includes (1) heuristics: the collection of sources, (2) criticism or analysis: assessing the source, (3) interpretation or synthesis: interpreting the source, and (4) historiography: writing.

Data were collected using literature review techniques. The sources used were in the form of books. External criticism was conducted to determine the originality and credibility of the source, while internal criticism was conducted to look at the content and compare source with each other or source triangulation. Historical analysis technique prioritized the interpretation acumen by interpreting source's content to obtain a profound and holistic review. An analytical tool was used theoretical review to examine the cultural social context and the use of multidimensional approach (Kartodirdjo, 1992, p. 2). The last step was done comprehensive history writing by assembling the facts obtained.

Findings and Discussion

The existence of many kinds of *wayang*, including *wayang potehi* as an ancestral cultural heritage showed that the root of *wayang* culture is not only penetrated into the archipelago. Kwee Kek Beng in the *Koloniale Studien* magazine (unknown year published) outlined the word similarity between Chinese *wa-yaah* (Hokkien), *wo-yong* (Cantonese), and *wo-ying* (Mandarin) that means shadow performances (Haryanto, 1988, p. 36). It was same as *wayang* in Javanese. Mulyono (1975, p. 11) explain the root of word *wayang* was "*yang*".

Kong (1999) records that the history of *wayang* shows in ancient China could be traced back to the early period of the Qin Dynasty. Mo Jing's book told about a dark box designed to see images from a light's beam through small hole. In the Emperor Wendi period, the Han Dynasty, supposedly the emperor's concubine often entertained the crown prince by playing a puppet made from leaves in front of the window.

A Dutch scholar, G. Schlegel in his writings *Chineesche Brauche und Spiele in Europe* told the story of Emperor Wudi from Han Dynasty who used shadow as the concubine's image to let go of his longing. At that time the emperor was very sad because his very beloved concubine named Madame Li was dead. The royal physician named Li Shaoweng made a puppet from leather that resembled Madame Li. Madame Li's image was projected with candlelight at the night. From a far the emperor enjoyed it as a longing remedy (Mulyono, 1975, p. 14-15; Kong, 1999, p. 321-322).

According to Kong (1999, p. 322), *wayang* art grew rapidly in China during the Song Dynasty (920-1279). At the time *wayang* were made from goat leather carved into a puppets and colored. Honest figure was given a good face, while the bad were given bad face. *Wayang* show spread to Hunan, Hubei, Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces. Despite the weak evidence that *wayang kulit* in Java was influenced by Chinese, it was not impossible that Chinese migrants helped to develop *wayang* art that had existed in Java for centuries before.

Another case with *wayang potehi* that originally came from China. This traditional puppet show art originated in Fujian, the main origin of Indonesia's Chinese immigrants. *Potehi* is derived from word *poo* (cloth), *tay* (pocket), and *hie* (puppets). Kong (1999, p.319) explains *potehi* is a rather small wooden puppet. The head is connected to cloth pocket, and the outer clothing worn *wayang* characters' clothes. *Dalang*'s hand put in the pocket to control the doll's motion, especially on the head and both hands.

It was said that *wayang potehi* originated from the story of five death penalty prisoners during the Tang Dynasty (617-918). According to Wardani and Widiyastuti (2013, pp.70-71), while waiting for execution, they passed the time by playing a piece of rectangular cloth that one end was tied to resemble head shape. This puppet's movement was accompanied by music from existing cutlery. The emperor knew it and freed them to develop that new art. Sometimes people said that *wayang potehi* adopted Peking opera art in small form. The dolls were made up uniquely with various symbolic meanings according to their character.

As time goes by, the entertainment function of *wayang potehi* also developed into ritual function. *Wayang potehi* shows was often regarded as an appropriate means of conveying gratitude, praise, and prayer to the gods and ancestors. It was believed to bring blessings and abundant sustenance. Associated to the ritual function, *wayang potehi* was usually played in front of the temple by first praying. Now *wayang potehi* show can be performed anywhere in its function as a entertainment means.

Wayang potehi includes into three dimensional puppets. Variants of three-dimensional puppet in Indonesia is quite a lot. Mastuti (2014, p.40) said it was among others *wayang golek* from West Java, *wayang unyil* from Betawi, *wayang dangkluk* from Bali, *wayang si gale-gale* from Tapanuli, *wayang kaet/gaet* from Riau, *wayang cicak* in Tanjung Pinang, *wayang baco-puraga* In Makassar, and *wayang gantung/marionette* in West Kalimantan. Some of them also have Chinese influence, so on some sides they are similar to *wayang potehi*.

Wayang cicak, for example, was introduced by Chinese community in Tanjung Pinang. *Wayang baco-puraga* was also played like *wayang potehi* with the life story and daily relation of Makassar Tionghoa community. *Wayang gantung* alias *chiao theu* that was developed in Singkawang, West Kalimantan even used *Hakka* language as an instruction language. Furthermore, *wayang potehi* was generally more developed in Java. Specifically in Yogyakarta also found *wayang kulit Cina-Jawa* (wacinwa) or Chinese-Javanese *wayang kulit* by Gan Thwan Sing (Kuardhani, 2012, pp.13-20).

Mastuti (2014, p.48) quoting Brandon (1967) in Clara van Groenendaal (1993), stated that *wayang potehi* came to Java around the beginning of the 20th

century. Allegedly *wayang potehi* was brought by the Hokkien tribe through Semarang and Surabaya in the 1880s. Wardani and Widiyastuti (2013, p.71) mentioned earlier around 1735 along with the wave of Chinese immigrants to Java. Kuardhani (2012, p.30) has a similar assumption that in the 17th century, *wayang potehi* show was already popular in Batavia.

At first, *wayang potehi* was often held in temple with Chinese Hokkien dialect as the instruction language. This traditional spectacle used Indonesian and also Javanese language. However, in the *suluk*'s part Chinese language (especially Hokkien) was still used to give cue guiding code to the music's rhythm that accompanied *wayang potehi*. There were 3 types of *suluk* namely (1) *Laay...*, to give the code that the music rhythm should be slow, (2) *Ban Po Tjiauw Gi...*, the music rhythm should be rather fast, and (3) *Ji Ma Tjiauw Gi...*, the music rhythm must be fast (Wardani and Widiyastuti, 2013, p.72).

In principle, *wayang potehi* show indeed has a certain gamut sequence. Mastuti (2014, pp.81-82) explains the show begins with the opening music, all instruments was played (*lauw tay*). Furthermore, *sehu* alias *dalang* opens the show with four gods of *wayang potehi* (*Hok Lok Sioe Tjwan*), namely *Bie Tjo* (god of longevity), *Gong Kiem Liong* (the richest god), *Tjho Kok Kioe* (god of rank), and *Tjhai Tjoe* (smart kids). By offerings and *hio*, *sehu* recites a prayer for the one who implements votive. The opening character then appears with a monologue followed by dialogue (*jejer* or story telling), war scenes, and ending.

Before the New Order period, *wayang potehi* show was very close to the society especially in Java. Kuardhani (2012, pp.91-92) noted interesting information that once in the night market of *Sekaten* Yogyakarta, a small theater was established exclusively for *wayang potehi* show. In 1963, Semarang, it was also easy to find the stage of *wayang potehi* placed on a cow cart. This stage's design was unique because it didn't need to unload pairs if they want to move the stage.

In addition, *wayang potehi* shows were found in the celebrations of Chinese day or vow ceremonies and celebrations held by the Chinese community. Wardani and Widiyastuti (2013, p.75) describes the function of *wayang potehi* wasn't limited to religious issues, but also marriage, *ruwatan*, *supitan*, and others. Time staging is adjusted to the celebration time, it could be a few days or a few hours only.

After the 1965 Incident's outbreak, Chinese community was affected. Allegations that were still affiliated to the communism of People's Republic of policy was applied to merge Chinese with local community. Especially about the Chinese culture, the government issued Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 concerning the prohibition of Chinese worship, customs and culture in public but should only be done internally in families or individuals.

Certainly this prohibition had a significant impact on *wayang potehi* development. Wardani and Widiyastuti (2013, p.72) interviewed a *sehu* named Thio Tiong Gie. According to this senior *dalang* since the issuance of Presidential Instruction during the New Order period, he had performed only one *wayang potehi* show in public. At that time he was pressed because there was a boy who insisted didn't want to be circumcised if there was no *wayang potehi* show. Since

the prohibition emerged, *wayang potehi* was only performed at the temple at certain celebrations only.

Reduction of the show in public made *wayang potehi* show changed the show's format. *Wayang potehi* performed serially, usually lasted for two hours in the afternoon (at 15:00 to 17:00) and two hours at night (19:00 to 21:00) with different plays on each session (Kuardhani, 2012, pp.35-36). One story on each series completed in about one to three months. The determinant of the show's duration depended on the amount of funds collected from the donors who had a vow. In contrast to *wayang kulit* for example, people who invited them had to pay the entire show for one story at once for six to seven hours (all night).

This difficult situation also influenced on *wayang potehi's pakem*. *Suluk* that must be pronounced in Hokkien became rote, especially for *dalang* who was no longer mastering Hokkien language. Moreover many *sehu* weren't from among the Chinese then. In the meantime, the Chinese tended to be apathetic and reluctant to preserve *wayang potehi*. Besides, economically the *sehu* profession was less promising, New Order political pressure also became a frightening threat. Not infrequently the *suluk* experienced a shift from the original words and no longer accordance with the standard.

The existence of *wayang potehi* that had been for centuries in Java naturally brought it into acculturation nuances. The encounter of cultural products and human supporters that differ from each others produced harmonious collaboration. Nevertheless, *wayang potehi* wasn't allowed to develop during the New Order period. The rulers gave the stigma 'the other' or '*liyan*' to *wayang potehi*. Even though many supporters (*dalang*, musicians, audiences) are Javanese, but *wayang potehi* was still considered a "property" of the Chinese and not part of Indonesian culture.

As time goes by, *wayang potehi* shows was no longer referred to Peking opera arts. The *dalang* gained much new insight from Javanese *wayang* like *wayang kulit* or *wayang golek*. Because *wayang potehi* was mostly found in East Java and Central Java, the acculturation with Javanese culture was so thick. The use of language, dialect, musical instruments, and the interlude songs adopted the local culture. Of course it didn't rule out the collaboration possibility with local culture other than Java. Moreover there were several forms of arts similar to *wayang potehi* scattered in various areas, such as *wayang cicak*, *wayang gantung*, *wayang baco puraga*, and so on (Mastuti, 2014, p.40).

The use of local languages and dialects, for example Javanese, was often used in joke part. However, unlike the *wayang kulit* performances, during the *goro-goro* scene the *dalang* was dare to slip a satire joke about political issues of government. At that time *sehu* didn't dare to touch on political issues. Let alone satirize the government, getting a permission to play *wayang potehi* show in the temple wasn't an easy matter (Wardani and Widiyastuti, 2013, p.78).

Besides language and dialect, acculturation occurred on the use of musical instruments. Kuardhani (2012, pp.36-39) mentions there were Chinese musical instruments in *wayang potehi* show namely *rebab (erhu)*, lute, trumpet, flute (*bien siauww*), *tambur*, *gembreng besar (toa loo)*, and perforated wood box (*piak ko*). Furthermore, Javanese musical instruments that were part of gamelan were also

often used, such as *bonang*, *saron*, *kendang*, and *gong*. Interlude songs were often used Javanese songs, but with Chinese music rhythm.

Cultural dialogue in *wayang potehi* show could also be created through the taken plays. Generally the theme of story told about heroism, history, empire, until the lives of the gods. Some of themes that were often staged still refer to Chinese stories such as the legend of *Samkok* (three kingdoms), *Poei Sie Giok*, *Sie Djien Kui Ceng Tang*, *Sie Djien Kui Ceng See*, *Soen Go Kong* (Monkey King) alias *See Yu* (Journey to the West), and some others. Compared to *wayang kulit*, *wayang potehi* was still minimal creations story (*lakon carangan* or composition).

Mastuti (2014, pp.50-51) mentions there were two main factors that hampered the *wayang potehi* development. There were 1965 Incident and Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967. This situation resulted in the need of permission from the local security to perform every *wayang potehi* show, especially in big cities. The only different one was found in Gudo, a village in East Java, the political sentiment was relatively small and didn't affect *wayang potehi* development. Even now Gudo become the main base of *wayang potehi* and the *sehu*. In general, however, the New Order became a dark time for the development and preservation of *wayang potehi*.

For more than three decades, Chinese culture had faced genocide efforts. As a result, at least one generation of Chinese suffered an uncertainty of cultural identity. The reforms had brought Chinese culture to appear unabashedly in public. In 2000, President Abdurrahman Wahid alias Gus Dur revoked Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 regarding the prohibition against Chinese culture through Presidential Decree No. 6 of 2000. Since this phenomenon, the Chinese culture including *wayang potehi* began to develop.

The euphoria of Chinese cultural freedom didn't significantly increase the number of *wayang potehi* enthusiasts. More than three decades of the restraint had made *wayang potehi* poor of inheritors, let alone successor cadres as *dalangs* and musicians. Mastuti (2014, pp.140-141) recorded the cultural preserver of *wayang potehi* in Indonesia was only about 54 people consisting of 14 *dalang* and the remaining was *dalang's* assistants and musicians. Interestingly many of them were Javanese who previously had no ties to Chinese traditions and *wayang potehi*.

According to Mastuti (2014, p.104), these Javanese-born *sehu* mostly came from cities in East Java, such as Surabaya, Sidoarjo, and Tulungagung. Initially they followed the Chinese *dalang* by becoming a *wayang potehi* musician. Eventually they were believed to be the *dalang's* assistant. Furthermore they began to learn puppetry from senior *dalang*, especially Chinese *sehu*. Their skills were increasing by self-taught and learning from experience when replacing the *dalang* who was unable to attend.

The lack of interest of young Chinese to *wayang potehi* was strongly influenced by economic and political factors. *Wayang potehi's dalang* profession didn't give a fixed income. The fact was exacerbated by political factors during the New Order that had succeeded in *wayang potehi's* torpor. Whereas the existence of an art was very dependent on the supporter community. Preservation of *wayang potehi* mainly depended heavily on the inheritors, communities

including *dalang*, musicians, *potehi* doll craftsmen, spectators, to the observer and *maecenas*.

Certainly in addition to supporter societies, cultural inheritance will only occur when there was a freedom of expression. Natural reforms have blown the wind of freedom for Chinese culture. Then emerged the resinicization effort that means a revival on interest of Chinese cultural roots (Chang, 2012). However, the breakup of one-generation chain has resulted in the reification of chinese culture become not-easy thing. Self-awareness as a Chinese may still exist, but young generation's interest to revive their culture is not sticky.

These reification efforts will increasingly have trouble when Chinese culture was still seen as a product that should be introduced and accepted for granted. This fact can't be denied by the strong view of self-essentialism. Kleden (1986) considers that culture needs to be seen as a process rather than a product. So it isn't only judged from essentialism perspective because it will only create the culture's preservers and connoisseurs. However, wayang potehi now almost run out of community of supporters.

By understanding culture as an ongoing process, the younger generation must be brought to know the cultural heritage according to the current context. *Wayang potehi* as a local culture must maintain an open, fluid, and dynamic identities in its struggle amid national and global culture. Moreover, due to the rules' political pressures in the past and as the times progressed, the support society also had undergone an inevitable change of identity.

As one of the cultural heritages, *wayang potehi* is expected to be preserved in accordance with the context of time. The dynamism and flexibility to survive in current currents are a manifestation of its cultural superiority. Some things to consider in the effort to reconnect the cultural chain of *wayang potehi* heritage include (1) *wayang potehi* isn't final and rigid cultural product, but it is dynamic and fluid (2) *wayang potehi* must be acceptable to many people including younger generation, (3) *wayang potehi* is a means of developing creative power.

Another important thing which must be recognized is that *wayang potehi* is also part of the national culture. *Wayang potehi* should be placed similar to other wayang arts. In the Puppet Museum's guide book published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1984, *wayang potehi* wasn't mentioned. The only thing that might be close to this was the Canton Chinese puppet show (Depdikbud, 1984, p.78). It confirmed how *wayang potehi* was systematically alienated from the national cultural treasures during the New Order period.

The thing that is no less important is the Chinese culture development through education. During this time, potehi's *dalang* candidates learned wayang by self-taught or *nyantrik* with senior *dalang*. As a result there is no institutionalized effort to preserve *wayang potehi*. Formally the skills of potehi puppetry may also be studied in art institutes, for example in the puppetry department. Hopely it can promote wayang potehi to the next generation of culture inheritors who are really involved and *melu handarbeni* (feel belonging). Thus *wayang potehi* doesn't stop as a cultural product but cultural process that is lived from generation to generation.

Conclusion

A *Wayang performance* was known in China with the terms *wa-yaah* (Hokkien), *wo-yong* (Cantonese), and *wo-ying* (Mandarin). One of the Chinese *wayang* performances that developed in Indonesia is *wayang potehi*. *Wayang potehi* is a *wayang golek* adopting Peking opera arts. *Wayang potehi* developed in Indonesia around the 17th century along with the coming of China's immigrants and then experienced acculturation with the local culture. It means that *wayang potehi* has become one of the ancestral cultural heritages of *Nusantara*.

If previously the *wayang potehi* was very close to society, entering the New Order period the situation changed. *Wayang potehi* experienced dark times with the discriminatory rule that prohibited freedom of expression for Chinese culture. There was a systematic attempt to isolate *wayang potehi* from the national cultural heritage and its supporting community. Entering the Reformation period, Chinese culture gained a freedom of expression. So, the development and preservation of *wayang potehi* is expected to be a cultural process that is continuously lived by the inheritors' generation.

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