



## THE JAVANESE POTEHI PUPPETEER IN SURABAYA

Ong Mia Farao Karsono\*, Yusi Anggraeni Wijaya

Chinese Literature Department of Petra Christian University Surabaya

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### ABSTRACT

The existence of Javanese who works as a potehi puppeteer at the Kampung Dukuh Surabaya temple, this paper explores there a sons of the puppeteer in playing the Potehi puppet and the Javanese puppeteers' view point to the cultural traditions which originates from China. In order to explore the data, then it is used the participant observation and semi-structured interviews to two Potehi puppeteers of Javanese at Kampung Dukuh Surabaya temple. The findings indicate that the reason they work as puppeteers much influenced by the proximity factor of their homes with the Kampung Dukuh Temple and it is performed every day even though there is no audience. This is due to Potehi puppet shows which are not only demonstrate for humans as well as for Kongco-god in the temple. The process of learning to be a Potehi puppeteer takes one to three years, and the key to be a skillful puppeteer is by hearing a lot, seeing Potehi puppet shows, and practicing a lot. They feel proud as a Javanese who can play Potehi puppet, since not everyone can play the Potehi Puppet. On the other hand, there is a little problem to be a puppeteer, since it only has low income.

**KEY WORDS:** The puppeteer, Potehi puppet, Javanese ethnic.

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### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has a variety of ethnics with different cultures derived from each of the ethnics. Besides, Chinese ethnic also contributes a lot of cultures to Indonesia. The Chinese ethnics the minority ethnic in Indonesia which comes from China. For some reason, a group of Chinese people in China move and settle for a long time in Indonesia, then they adapt and mingle with Indonesian people and produce Chinese ethnic ("Chinese-Indonesia").

A group of people who comes from China does not only move their properties and family, but also they bring cultures, customs, and traditions. Further more, Potehi puppet is one of the art cultures which come from China. Potehi puppet that also known as Titi, is one of cultures which was carried by Chinese ethnics into Indonesia around the 16th century until mid of 19th century. The origin of the Potehi puppet is from *Fujian*, China (Hu, Jason C. 1993: 194).

According to Kong (1999:213), Potehi puppet also called as "Science of palms", which is derived from the drama of wooden puppet stage in *Fujian*. The word "Potehi" comes from the Minnan dialect. Based on the Indonesian dictionary, "Potehi" is a kind of wooden dolls which formed a small fabric pouch, the head is associated with a cloth, and the outside is given clothes. Indeed, a small fabric pouch is used for the puppeteer's hand to move the puppet. There is another opinion says the beginning of the puppet was in the early Han dynasty, and developed during the Tang dynasty. Potehi puppet is highly favored and very popular in *Fujian* and Taiwan, the song lyric of its island uses the *Fujian* dialect and accompanied by the folk music of *Quanzhou*. As the name implies, *budaixi* (potehi) in which the "bu" means the fabric/cloth, "dai" means the pouch and "xi" which means the show. Usually, the Potehi puppet is played on the small stage in which dominated by the red color with a length of 1.5 to 2 meters and its width about 20 to 30 centimeters. If people see from the outside, they only can see the Potehi puppet on the altar of the stage. Nonetheless, the puppeteers will play it behind the stage (Ardiana, 2003:6).

During the reign of President Sukarno in 1945-1966, the Indonesian people, especially in the Java Island are very welcome and like the Potehi puppets. Since its reign has changed to the sovereignty of Suharto's: New Order regime in 1967-1998, the enthusiasts of Potehi puppet was diminished (Widhiandono.2006:15). In Surabaya, the Hok Tien temple is

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\*Corresponding Author: Ong Mia Farao Karsono, Chinese Literature Department of Petra Christian University Surabaya  
Email: [miafarao@gmail.com](mailto:miafarao@gmail.com)

the only place where the Potehi puppet is, and its place also known as Kampung Dukuh temple. It has been routine for playing Potehi puppet in this temple. Although there is no audience, Potehi puppet shows still runs on the schedule. The show is, held only once a day, i.e. at 09.00, or 13.00, with a two hours duration.

In addition, sometimes the puppeteers perform Potehi puppet shows outside the temple. Here, they use the Chinese language, with a mixture of Indonesian and Javanese language (Widhiandono, Doan. 2006:11).

The most interesting thing for researchers is the Potehi puppet which originates from China, is played by Non-Chinese puppeteers, especially the Javanese people and not from the Chinese ethnic. These Javanese puppeteers can play skilful and using the Chinese language, but sometimes they use the Indonesian language and Java as a variation. Although the puppeteers are not Chinese, Potehi puppet performance still shows the distinctiveness of Chinese cultural. It can be seen clearly in the musical retinue and the dominance of red color which is believed as a good color and favored by the Chinese community.

Since the era of reformation in 1998 has been giving a freedom for all Chinese people to have and do their traditions and customs, as well as develop the culture of Chinese community, especially for the existence of Potehi puppet. There is a phenomenon to still retain Potehi puppet and they are non-Chinese people precisely, so this paper inquires the reasons behind the non-Chinese people (Javanese) people to be a Potehi puppeteer, their viewpoints and difficulties they encounter as a Javanese Potehi Puppeteers.

The benefits of doing research on "Potehi puppeteer of Javanese in Surabaya", are that readers are able to know the origin of how the non-Chinese ethnic puppeteers can be Potehi puppeteers, they know how they learn to be a Potehi puppeteer, and find out their perspective on Potehi puppets. Besides, it also allows the reader to know the description of the Potehi puppet in Indonesia especially in Surabaya.

## METHODS

Using qualitative descriptive methods, which researchers conduct the participant observation and interviews directly to two Javanese puppeteers in the temple of Kampung Dukuh. The method of interview is semi-structured interview. The instrument of research is the researcher itself, this is a typical of qualitative research that the role of researcher determines the scenario overall (Moleong, 2007:163). Here, it needs the observations to participate which were defined according to Bogdan (in Moleong, 2007:164), as the research in which characterized as the study of social interaction that takes a long time between the researcher and the subject, the data in the form of recordings and field notes are systematically collected and ready to be analyzed. Data source is a source of primary data in which directly provides data to data collectors (Sugiyono, 2007:308). The location of research is carried out in Kampung Duku Temple.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The General Definition of Potehi Puppet in Indonesia**

The Potehi puppet is one kind of puppet show which incorporates many elements of art such as carving, music, art embroidery, painting and hand puppets art (Cihai Biaji Wei Yuanhui, 2002:143). The head of Potehi puppet is made of wood. Its wood is carved and sculpted to resemble a human head in three-dimensional shaped. To be more attractive, the head is then colored with paint. The head of Potehi puppet is concatenated with a fabric pouch, and it is stage-clothed outside it (Kong, 1999:213). The clothes of Potehi puppet are made from fabrics in which resemble with Chinese people clothes in the era of old empires which have a lot of embroidery.



**Figure 1.1** The attires of Potehi puppet



**Figure 1.2** The Potehi puppets

In general, every each the performance of Potehi puppet, it involves two puppeteers. One of them will have the role as the main puppeteer, and the other is his assistant. The main puppeteer is a very important role in the course of Potehi puppet for mance. He controls all of the performances of the puppet, reading stories, and sings a song. A puppeteer can play two puppets at once. But if there is a show like a 'themonkey king', which needs more than 2 puppets, and then the person who will play the other puppet should be the assistant. In addition, the puppeteer' assistant also is tasked to help the puppeteers in taking care of the costumes and the utilities on the stage (Wu, 1997:3).

The Potehi puppeteers do the performance on the small stage which is dominated the red colour and the size of 1.5 to 2 meters and width of about 20 to 30 cm. From the outside of the stage people only can see the Potehi puppets, where as the puppeteer play them behind the stage. A skillfull Potehi puppeteer is able to play puppets as high as 30 cm expertly. The kungfu scenes can be played well and impressive. On the top of that, the way of the puppet walks and moves is very natural, as if the puppet alive (Ardiana, 2003: 6).

In addition, the puppet performances are supported by the musicians whom numbers about five to seven people. They play a Chinesemusic typical, assuredly with musical instruments from China. Musical instruments used are including *dongkauw* (a kind of small drum beaten with a stick), *Siauwppwa* (a sort of small tambourine), *Siauwku* (a sort of big tambourine), *toapwa*, *twalo*, *alhu* (a stringed instrument similar to fiddle), *chinghu*, *gim* (a type of guitar) and trumpets (Widhiandono, 2006:15). If those things are played in the temple, and the characteristic of its play is ritual, then they will use the old legends, like *baxianguhai* song 八仙过海 (Eight Immortals). Outside the temple it is usually an entertainment show, and various songs are played, such as *Rek ayo rek* (Come on guys), *Bojo loro* (Two wives), and other popular songs at that time (Ardiana, 2003:4).



**Figure 1.3** Some of the Musical Instruments in Potehi Puppet Show

The performance of Potehi puppet consists of 5 parts. The first part is the opening music that is played for half an hour. This section is called *lo tay*. The second part is *kekwan* which is a kind of ritual that depict scenes of praying in the temple or monastery. The third part is the main story in which consists of several rounds and scenes. The fourth part is the closing scene featuring a pair of puppets, man and woman in a red dress, a symbol of joy, happiness, which gives honor to the audience or to the gods. The last part is the closing music played as a sign of the show has ended (Ardiana, 2003:4).

As a musical instrument used to accompany the course of Potehi puppet performance, a story played is also from China. For Potehi puppet performances, a story s played is also from China. For performances inside monastery, usually the story presented is a legend that comes from the *Song* Dynasty, *Tang* Dynasty and *Ming* Dynasty. As for performances outside the monastery, the story can be varying from Monkey King story until *Sam Pek Ying Ta/The Butterfly Lovers*. These stories are written in a book (It is called *pakem* or basic rules in Indonesian leather puppets) (Kisawa, 2006: 4-5).

Formerly, like in Taiwan and Singapore, in the Potehi puppet performance, The puppeteer used the Chinese language or also Hokkien (*Fujian* dialect), but nowadays, in order to accustom with the surrounding environment, the Potehi puppet in Indonesia uses a mixture of Indonesian, Javanese and Chinese languages.

**The Function of Potehi Puppet**

The Traditional art performances have some particular functions and usabilities. Similarly, the Potehi puppet has some functionas follows.

a. Ritualactivities

The Buddhists believe that the Potehi puppetis not just an entertainment.

For them, Potehi puppetis part of the process of religious rituals. It is Believed that the Potehi puppet is a means of connecting to the only God. Potehi puppet is used as complaints and expressions to the God, such as business failure complaints, pain of life complaints, expressions of joy in life, expressions of business success, and expressions of grateful because of healing.It is not a big problem, whether there is audience or not, because this show is intended for the only God (Ardiana, 2003:7).

b. Entertainment Facilities

As a means of entertainment, Potehi puppet presents amongst the people to be enjoyed its beauty. The beauty of art that combines sculpture, art music, embroidery on Potehi puppet clothing, interesting story, as well as the agility of the puppeteers' hand gestures that make the motion of Potehi puppet beautiful, seems become an entertainment for devotees. In addition, to bring the situation more livelily, the puppeteers often slip some elements of humor (Ardiana, 2003: 8).

c. Educational Facilities

A good story usually contains many elements of moral education. Similarly to Potehi puppet's story has some elements of education, whether religious education, or moral of the state and nation. A skillfull puppeteer even slips many important doctrines based on religious, such as Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and so on. (Ardiana, 2003: 8).

d. Means of Social Criticism

As a means of social criticism, Potehi puppet is the right tool for criticizing the bad elements of individuals, communities, leaders, or even high officials. Criticisms, suggestions and innuendos made by the puppeteers are well packaged so they won't make the target of criticism becoming angry (Ardiana, 2003:9).

**The Reasons of Javanese people becoming the Potehi Puppeteers**

The reason of Javanese people becomes the Potehi puppeteer is because the proximity of their homes with the Kampung Dukuh temple in Surabaya which always hold the puppet shows. The first puppeteer (P1) as the senior puppeteer, he always went to the temple for watching the Potehi puppet whenever the show is held. Initially, the Chinese puppeteers would ask him (P1) to go and buy ciggarets. Over time, therefore, he was often watching the Potehi puppet, the members Chinese musician asked him (P1) for help to play a musical accompaniment at the Potehi puppet shows. Finally, he (P1) was appointed as an assistant of Potehi puppeteer. After one year later, he (P1) became the real puppeteer. He was still young at that time and played puppets as a hobby nothing more. In point of fact, he also went to the law college in Surabaya at the same time. Further development because of the multitude requests to do a Potehi puppet performance out of the town, he (P1) decided not to continue his study and focused only as a puppeteer potehi.

From interviewing of the second puppeteer (P2), it can also be known that his reason becomes a Potehi puppeteer because of his environmental circumstances in around Kampung Dukuh temple. Since in elementary school, he was often watched Potehi puppet. At that time, the electronic media was not so good and has not developed yet, and there was only one TV show named TV RI. Therefore, Potehi puppet is one of the exciting entertainments to watch. His (P2) main reason that interested in watching a Potehi puppet lies on its plot. When he (P2) was in the second grade of elementary school, the seniors were often invited him to play a musical accompaniment for Potehi puppet show. Eventually he was promoted as a puppeteer's assistant to accompany the puppeteer (P1) in performing Potehi puppet on the stage and now he becomes a Potehi puppeteer. Recently, in 2011, Potehi-puppet show still performs on the stage, when there are ritual events. Although there is no audience, the Potehi puppeteers still do the performances at temple.

According to them, the time of learning how to play the Potehi puppets depends on each individual. Based on the interviews, it is known that the first puppeteer (P1) takes about a year to be an expert, whilst the second puppeteer (P2) takes three years. A puppeteer can be regarded as an expert and skilful puppeteer, when there are any comments and recognitions from the audiences. The second puppeteer (P2) said that the process of learning to become a Potehi puppeteer depends on people's talent.

In terms of language used in performing the Potehi puppet on the stage, there are some modifications, but still do not leave the original language which is Hokkien (*Fujian* dialect). In every single character of puppets that will appear are always introduced through *Fujian* dialect called "*sulanpek*". Thus, a puppeteer must know its meaning in the vernacular dialect of *Fujian*. Mastering the *Fujian* is the most difficult factor for Potehi puppeteers, since the *Fujian* language is not their native language. The ways they learn are by reading the story and memorizing the conversations. Also, they should often hear and see the senior puppeteers playing Potehi puppet.

Besides, the language acquisition, other difficulties faced by puppeteer potehi is mastering the musical instruments. According to the first puppeteer (P1), this difficult is caused of the tool that is used is a traditional Chinese musical instruments. Even, the senior puppeteers never studies about music formally, so they cannot read musical note. The first puppeteer (P1) learns autodidact the Potehi puppet musical instruments by practicing alone and listening to the senior players when they perform on the stage.

The other difficulty is dubbing the character which is unique. In a Potehi puppet show, there are so many characters with different sound of characteristics. The task of the

puppeteers is they should master all of the voice of characters for the Potehi puppet show to become interesting. The first puppeteer (P1) said when he gets hold the Potehi puppet, he immediately imagines himself as the character of its puppet, so his voice would spontaneously turn into that character of figures. Otherwise, according to the second puppeteer (P2), the changing of the characters' voice depends on the puppeteer itself in making voice become more various.

The performance of Potehi puppet in Kampung Dukuh Surabaya temple is performed every day, though there are no spectators. This is because of the purpose of performances is to satisfy Kongco (God - the owner) of the temple. Therefore, since there are daily performance, so they (P1 and P2) never hold a rehearsal before a performance. Meanwhile, members of the music players is required to exercise first, and when the puppeteer feel it is satisfying, he will allow them to accompany the Potehi puppet shows.

#### **The Javanese people's point of view to the Potehi puppet**

According to both of them (P1 and P2), to be a puppeteer is a pride. According to the second Potehi puppeteer (P2), the Potehi puppet is a foreign art culture, not everyone can play the Potehi puppet. This is due requires a long learning process, so the Potehi puppeteers should be proud of themselves. Similarly, according to the first puppeteer (P1), he has performed the Potehi puppet in many places in Indonesia, so he can enjoy overnight at luxury hotels across the country. He also believes that working as a Potehi puppeteer is not too heavy, he just needs to play and then he get paid. The wages of being a Potehi puppeteer is various; he will get more paid if performing outside the city. According to them, the salary is not big enough, but still can maintain their lives.

Not every one can be a Potehi puppeteer. The task of a Potehi puppeteer is not just narrating and perform the story, but he also must be able to appreciate and understand the course and soul of the story, so the narrative delivered would be good and meaningful. Likewise, the Chinese culture that is brought must be truly understood. The process of understanding can take for long times, even years. The puppeteer does not only bring the story, but also he must be able to play a musical instrument for the Potehi puppet on the stage, and be able to make a Potehi puppet.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Indeed, Indonesian people can learn and acknowledged themselves with the foreign culture. Culture should not be destroyed but must be preserved. Environmental influences play an important role in the inheritance of a culture. Some factors, including numerous attending and listening will ease the process of learning the skill of a puppeteer. Mastering the foreign culture is a pride for a Javanese puppeteer. The fact that Potehi puppet show as a Chinese cultural performances can still survive, is that it is performed daily not for human audiences, but rather for the Konco God of the temple.

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